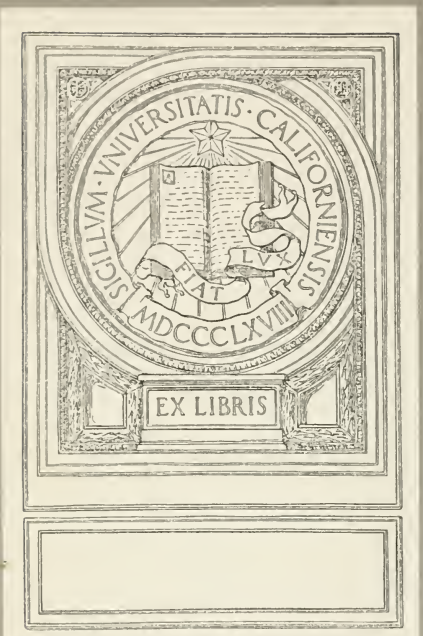
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MISS PARDOE'S

COMPLETE WORKS.

COMPRISING

THE CONFESSIONS OF A PRETTY WOMAN.
THE JEALOUS WIFE.
THE RIVAL BEAUTIES.
THE WIFE'S TRIALS.
THE ROMANCE OF THE HAREM.

BY

MISS JULIA PARDOE.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

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PREFACE.

THE only explanation required by the following pages is, perhaps, a brief account of the manner in which they came into my possession. Driven, for change of air, into a distant county, after a long and severe illness, I accepted the hospitality of a friend living in one of those beautiful villages which are to be found in no other country than our own. The castellated cottage of my hostess, half-smothered in creeping roses, white jasmine, and passion-flowers, stood midway upon a gentle slope which formed the southward boundary of the village-green; the gray old church, overtopped by three venerable yews, and surrounded by its humble gravestones, joined the shrubberies on the east; snug cottages, with each its fenced-in garden, and its group of fruit-trees, were scattered along the base of a low range of hills, clothed with beeches; and, at an easy walk from the hamlet, rose a stately mansion, with an extensive park, stocked with deer, and rich in timber. This noble property was inhabited by a widow lady, whose extraordinary matron-beauty startled me when I saw her, for the first time, at the village-church; and induced inquiries on my part, to which the replies only served to increase my curiosity. I was told that she was immensely rich, profusely and unweariedly charitable, but that a dark shadow hung over her former life, by which, even now, her mood and manner were occasionally influenced.

Her circle was limited, for she would not tolerate mere acquaintance; and some of the families of the neighborhood shrank from decided friendship with an individual who might compromise them, although her hair had become gray, and that her lofty figure was somewhat bowed beneath the pressure of time.

From her own hand I received this written record of the past, only a week or two before her death; and I give it (with her permission) to the world, in all confidence that such a transcript of the *real* struggles of a woman's mind, and of the *actual* trials of a woman's life, will present more lasting and wholesome interest than the romantic creations of fiction, or the poetical miseries of a merely fertile fancy.

March, 1846.

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CONFESSIONS OF A PRETTY WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

I DO not know why I am about to write my own memoirs. It is said that a blind man should not judge of colors, but I am by no means inclined to submit to the truth of the sentiment. Why should not a *ci-devant* beauty, reduced to a *tour de tête* and metallic teeth, be able to lay bare the intricate recesses of a pretty woman's heart, because that woman may chance to have been herself? Perhaps it is merely to prove the invalidity of the proverb that I have conceived the project of recording my own confessions; and it is very possible that I may, in this, be about as wise as the boy who thrust his hand into a wasp's nest, to secure the honey before any one else could appropriate the prize; but I have at least the consolation of feeling that I can only be canvassed and condemned in effigy, for I have far too much respect for the tranquillity of my old age to appear on the title-page of a book; and the success of my afternoon nap, or my evening rubber, will consequently run no risk of being periled by the comments and criticism of the public; or the guesses and gossipry of my own immediate circle, who will at once find a reply to their suspicions when they look me in the face.

Heroes, monarchs, and statesmen (I place the heroes in advance advisedly) have bards and historians to sing and say all their great deeds; therefore, it is truly an excess of self-immolation when they meddle with the work, and rub in the shadows of the picture as a pastime; and an equal folly when they take pen in hand, for the purpose of broadening the lights. In the first case, all the world laugh at them as fools, for having betrayed their own poor and petty weaknesses; while in the second it is still worse, inasmuch as no one believes one syllable of the self-laudatory labor, which to all, save the workman, appears to be a mere web of egotism and fatuity. This, however, is far from being the case with that potent and influential portion of the creation entitled pretty women. Where lives the man who could undertake the biography of one of these? He can talk of well-fought battles, intriguing cabinets, court-gossip, or party measures; but what knows he about flirtations, or palpitations, or heart-economy! How can he undertake to raise one veil after another, each as mysterious as that of Vesta, so as to lay bare the myriad mysteries of a woman's spirit?

Pooh! pooh! Man, all self-sufficient as he esteems himself, would deserve the fate of the detected school-boy, did he ever attempt so impossible a feat.

I can give another reason, also, for thus volunteering a record of the past in its relation to myself. The world has run wild, of late years, upon biographies and auto-biographies. Every class of society has contributed its quota to satisfy the curiosity of "a discerning public;" and each succeeding triplicate of volumes has been received with welcome. From the quaint sketching of dear old Pepys, and the sonorous periods of stately Clarendon, to the "dramatic twaddle" of Miss Burney, and the professional sallies and struggles of defunct players, nothing appears to have come amiss; and this is just as it should be.

"The proper study of mankind is man;"

and it acquires an additional zest when we have reason to apprehend (as must frequently be the case) that we were never intended to have the opportunity of doing it at all. How many "sayings and doings," meant for the seclusion of home; how many opinions and sentiments, uttered only for the privacy of the family circle; how many letters, scratched off *a tutto volo da penna*, have been put to press, injurious to the memory of the dead, and painful to the feelings of the living!

For my own part, whenever I meet with an advertised announcement of the forthcoming "biography" or "memoirs" of some deceased celebrity, whether noble, political, literary, fashionable, or dramatic, I am invariably lost in astonishment at the reckless courage of the individual who left such a task of delicacy and difficulty to be performed by others; when, at the expense of a little labor, he could have accomplished it himself, adducing his own motives, and assigning his own reasons, for a thousand actions which must inevitably suffer from misconstruction.

If then such false readings may and must be the result of the interference of a second person in the written lives of statesmen, poets, and players, what had *I* to expect, if I left my motives, reasons, actions, and impulses, to be decided upon by others? Truly, a pretty woman resolved (as I am) to be frank, and truthful, and honest, has more than sufficient cause to apprehend a host of evil judgments, not only from one sex, but from both; and can, therefore, ill afford to leave herself without that best of all advocacy—her own. An acknowledged beauty, like the turquoise-flowering flax, is marked, even from the first years of her blooming girlhood, for future appreciation: the germ is the index of the maturity; but she must be

well immersed in the stagnant waters of envy and maliciousness, and well beaten by the cudgels of jealousy and misconstruction, before she is deemed fitted for the uses of the world; and the parallel holds good to the last; for neither the beauty nor the flax is estimated at its real value, until all that charmed the eye has been destroyed, and that nothing is left but the good tough fibre which may render their available qualities serviceable to others.

Let no one imagine, however, that I deem it expedient to offer an apology for these my confessions. Far from it. I consider that I am doing the world a service by their transcription. My own sex may learn better to analyze their feelings and actions by the perusal, and the other to be less ready to misjudge both.

Of this I am well assured, that men, in the aggregate, can form no just or correct idea of the trials and struggles of a woman's life. It is an admitted conventionalism, that the world was made for man, and home for woman. Be it so, on the broad basis upon which it should be understood. Let the stronger and the bolder portion of creation strive and wrestle with the ocean-waves of public life: they are the best fitted to its duties; but let them not imagine that there can be no "death from drowning" in the mere placid-seeming river. The violence of the cataract corrodes but slightly the face of the rock over which it pours its impetuous volume; but the slow and monotonous dropping of the domestic drain wears a deep hollow in the surface of the stone upon which it falls.

Now and then we hear of a suicide in what is called "genteel life;" and it is always *a man* who has had recourse to the razor or the pistol —the moral coward's remedy for worldly disappointment. No woman, save among the more degraded of the sex (except, indeed, in very rare instances, where she commits self-destruction in conjunction with a lover or a husband, and cannot, consequently, be correctly esteemed a free agent, but rather as acting under a tangible and controlling influence), ever contemplates such a method of release from trial; and thus the obituary of the year teems with cases of female consumption and heart-complaint. Ay, truly! 'tis no misnomer—heart-complaint! —where the thread is most worn, there it breaks; and the "weaker vessel" carries her sorrows with her to the grave, and hides them there.

But the word *grave* has startled me! I have no intention to moralize. My life contains its own moral. I will leave men to their self-satisfied view of the economy of human nature. It is, at best, a very harmless egotism: for they are no sooner in care or in necessity, than they, one and all, recant their error—at least, until they no longer require counsel or consolation; and this fact may well make women smile at their delusion, and forgive it.

Thus much by way of preface.

My father was a wealthy merchant. Of a highly respectable but impoverished family, he had received for all portion an admirable commercial education, and a recommendatory letter to one of the first establishments in London.

Unlike such missives in general, which are commonly "bought off" by a family dinner, or "thrown off" with an apology, the document in question procured for him a high stool in the office of the Messieurs Osbaldiston, and a daily seat at their table, while his own good and useful qualities did the rest.

There was, I believe, some distant relationship between the principals and their young clerk, which doubtless cemented the connection; but, be that as it may, thus much is certain, that my father had not been more than five years in their counting-house, when he was intrusted with a mission of great importance to the West-Indies; of which he acquitted himself so skilfully, that the brothers, on his return, felt that they could offer to him no recompense more adequate than a share in their gigantic establishment. They were no longer young men: began to prefer port wine to burgundy, and a comfortable nap in an easy chair after dinner, to a renewal of business; and thus they found it pleasant and profitable to transfer the overplus of their occupation to their young, and active, and intelligent partner.

My father made three voyages to the islands before the death of the younger Mr. Osbaldiston; and became an experienced man of business at an age when most merchants are merely in their novitiate. Advancing years, and the loss of his only brother and near relative, and moreover his junior, began to produce their effect upon the head of the firm; who, ere long, abandoned all the interests of the house to my father, and contented himself with signing his name to transfer-deeds and bank-checks, lounging away his mornings in the warehouses, and giving himself up to the care of his cook and valet for the remainder of the day.

Nor had the old gentleman ever reason to repent his confidence; for when he was, in his turn, gathered to his fathers, he died calmly, in the comfortable conviction that all his dependents could live respectably thereafter on their several legacies, without seeking a new and strange servitude; and that my father was not only the proprietor of a magnificent business, but that his name was "good" for some £80,000 at his banker's.

Happy testator! and still happier legatee! My father was only two-and-thirty years of age when he was thus cast upon the world; but, unlike many other young men, he did not relax an effort in the pleasant occupation of money-making. Let it not be supposed, however, that his perseverance arose from a sordid love of gold. Far from it. He had his projects. Riches were to be the means, and not the end, of his ambition. He admitted no partner into the house. He was sufficient to himself; and he would not delay the accomplishment of his hope, by dividing and subdividing his receipts.

At the termination of a couple of years he ventured upon a gigantic speculation. Many of his friends shrugged their shoulders, and exclaimed upon his rashness, in an unctuous and tranquil tone, which satisfied their hearers that it would be no particular heart-break to themselves even if he should happen to have, as they expressed it, "kicked down all that he was worth;" but, luckily, they were not put to the trial, for he was still the favorite of fortune; and, after the suspense of a few months, he awoke one morning worth £500,000.

I think I have already shown that my father

was a wise man; nor did his mother-wit forsake him on this occasion. He was no gambler at heart, so he abandoned all speculation for the future; and while his anxious friends were awaiting from day to day the intelligence that he had again tempted the smiles of his slippery patroness, they were startled and surprised (in some cases it was even hinted not pleasantly), by learning that he had disposed of his house in the city for an enormous sum, and was on the point of starting for a tour on the Continent.

Circumstances alter habits, says the Spaniard; and it was certainly an apothegm perfectly applicable to my father's case; for he no sooner snook the dust of commerce from his feet, than he flung away with it all the habits of his past life. Not to play the purse-proud *fainéant*, however, did he do this. He had higher aims than that of lounging through existence. He knew that he had been a capital man of business. He was reminded of the fact by every hat that was lifted to him as he passed along the city streets; his purpose was now to become an accomplished gentleman; not a profound scholar, nor a scientific *virtuoso;* he well knew that it was too late to indulge in such lofty dreams as those; nor was he quite sure that erudite acquirements would at all further the plan and project upon which he had built up his own particular *Château en Espagne*. His aim was simply to become a man of the world; what, in the days of Addison and Steele, would have been called "a pretty fellow;" and what we, in our times, understand by "a man about town;" only shorn of his vices, and delivered from his duns.

Abroad he went then. Conveniently but not ostentatiously attended, he traversed France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy; visited cathedrals, galleries, mountains, and waterfalls; operas, grottoes, and Houses of Assembly; learned to distinguish one popular singer from another, and to call the *premieres danseuses* of the three great capitals by their correct names; purchased a few undoubted (*copies of*) rare pictures, some fine Roman medals (manufactured and verdigreased at Milan), and several equally well authenticated busts and statues; which were all carefully packed, and transmitted to an English warehouse, to await his return home; after which he had nothing more to do than to amuse himself, and be careful not to suffer any opportunity of accomplishing his cherished purpose to escape him.

He was not, however, destined to succeed while on his tour. He had made many eligible acquaintance, but he was a shrewd man; and he did not require to be told that the fashionables and hyper-fashionables with whom he had partaken of champagne dinners, and whom he had accommodated with seats in his opera-box on an equal footing on the Continent, might perchance look more coldly upon him in England, when they discovered that, in their own set, he was utterly unknown. Nevertheless, he did not despair. *Gross geld, grosser glaube*, and he knew it; so he was content to bide his time.

Among the many pressing invitations which he received, to renew at home the friendship so pleasantly commenced abroad, was one so frequently and so earnestly repeated, that my father could not doubt its sincerity; and he accordingly promised to accept it. That he was flattered by the pertinacity of the inviter, there can be no doubt; for he was not only a man of ripe age and matured judgment, but, moreover, a Scottish peer.

That the Earl of Glenfillan was not wealthy, was sufficiently evident from the facility with which he availed himself of the different domestic luxuries of his new friend: and the remarkable tardiness which he exhibited in making any return not purely verbal. This, however, was perfectly immaterial to my father, who required nothing at his hands; and who was by far too proud a man to have suffered their positions to be reversed. And so Lord Glenfillan rode my father's horses, ate my father's dinners, traveled in my father's carriage, and borrowed my father's money, to his heart's content; while he received in return the I O Us of his noble friend, and the reiterated invitations to which I have already alluded.

"Did Mr. Tilden fish and shoot?"

My father at that time did neither, but he intended to do both; so, as a matter of course, he replied in the affirmative. There was magnificent fishing and shooting at Glenfillan! Four thousand acres of moorland, and a lake like an inland sea, visible from the windows of the castle. Mr. Tilden was an admirable billiard-player. His lordship was rejoiced at it, for they had the best table in Scotland at Glenfillan—rather out of repair, he was afraid, for his gout had obliged him to abandon the game, and the ladies of his family did not understand it; but he would have it set to rights against he had the honor of receiving Mr. Tilden, who, perhaps, would be able to induce "Flora and Madelaine" to make an attempt at learning.

Of course my father was delighted at the prospect of teaching two hoydening girls to play billiards on a rickety old table; and he felt half-tempted to offer the earl a new one of his own selecting; which, without doubt, he might have done safely, as Lord Glenfillan was not prone to take offence at such trifling matters; but he forbore, for he was strongly imbued with a strange sort of delicacy, which always prompted him to make his wealth as little conspicuous as possible, and never to presume upon it by taking liberties with others.

The close of their continental communion took place at Calais, whither my father had conveyed his lordly friend from Marseilles in his own carriage; and, as a matter of course, the earl had been his guest throughout the journey. This arrangement was agreeable to both parties; for, as the courier who had accompanied my father from England, transacted all business upon the road, so neither of the *milords* in the calèche and four, which opened the traveling procession, were broken in upon by dull details of the day's expenses. In short, they got on together admirably. The earl shared my father's carriage; his solitary manservant was *de tiers* with my father's valet and his *chéf;* all the luggage jolted along amicably in the same *voiture d'occasion*, guarded by the sleepy grooms; and nothing could be more amicable or more pleasant than the whole arrangement.

Once or twice his lordship of Glenfillan exceeded a little at table upon the road; but that was the fault of my father's hospitality, and the hyper-zeal of his attendants; and the noble earl had a gout-mixture in the carriage-pocket near his hand, which, diluted in a little pale brandy, generally succeeded in procuring him an hour's sleep; so that, upon the whole, he might have been worse off on the rugged highways of *a belle France*; and he admitted the fact with a graceful frankness which could not but convince my father of the sincerity of his assertion.

By the by, Lord Glenfillan, as I should have explained, had visited the French capital for the purpose of consulting a celebrated gout-doctor of that day; from whose skill he had been led to expect that he should obtain both speedy and permanent relief. But it is certain that if his counselors had themselves really derived any benefit from the Gallic Galen in a similar extremity, they had been of a different order of men from the earl, who backed up all the remedies of his medical adviser, with dinners served at *Les Frères Provençaux*, and burgundy from Justin.

This state of things, or rather this system of curative ethics, could not, of course, last long, without convincing his most gustative lordship that he was rather becoming worse than better.

That it was *reculer pour mieux sauter*, he was not altogether clear; and in this dilemma, with very real and natural reluctance to tear himself from the flesh-pots of Egypt, and a still more invincible objection to be conveyed home in a leaden receptacle, six feet by two, he seized with avidity the hope held out to him of better success with an Italian empiric established at Marseilles; and forthwith departed for the fair city of the south.

Alas for the gout-tormented earl! To an individual of his tendencies, this was fairly a case of *cader dalla padella nella brace*; for at Marseilles, in addition to the sublime *cuisine* of Paris, he found all the luxuries of the East; all the fruits of the earth; and all the fish of the sea. My Lord Glenfillan had such a fit of the gout at his hotel in the *Rue de Rome*, eight days after his arrival in the paradise of gastronomers, that he afforded a noble opportunity for the display of skill possessed by Il Signor Ferdinando della Placida—the very name of the man would have seemed to me to be either an insult or an epigram—and began to have serious thoughts of making his will.

It was at this period that my father returned from Malta; and, having heard that he was under the same roof with a sick countryman, very inefficiently attended, and in the hands of an ignorant pretender, who was *de mortié* with the cook in winding up what had been an affair of many years' standing, in a very complete and concise manner; he sent in his card to his noble neighbor, and begged permission to wait upon him.

The gouty lord desired no better, for he had already heard from his valet of the arrival of a *milord*, the *fracas* of whose return to his old apartments had reached even to the sick chamber; had received a detailed account of the nature and number of his attendants, equipages, horses, and packages; and was, moreover, tired of his own society, and glad of any incident which promised a momentary amusement.

No better prelude to rapid acquaintanceship could have been suggested by the most practiced social tactician. Lord Glenfillan was drugging, gorging, and frightening himself into his grave, with all possible expedition; and there he sat, with his foot swathed in flannels, a Glengarry cap upon his gray head, a tartan waistcoat covering his ample chest, and a flowered dressing-gown enveloping his tall and bony figure; with an English journal a fortnight old (for in those days Galignani was not, and *L'Echo du Continent* lay hushed in chaos), endeavoring to read, for the twentieth time, the speech of one of his political opponents, most provokingly broken up by "hear! hear!" and "cheers from all parts of the house."

I once heard it declared by a gallant officer, now in his grave, that the greatest misery of human life was to halt with a party of men in a country village, and to remain throughout the day in its solitary inn, with, for all companionship, an old Army List, in which your own particular regiment was torn out. I am tempted, however, to believe that I should have preferred even that dilemma to the earl's. Be it as it may, he averred that this unlucky paper was his only resource between his paroxysms of pain, which, as he was a rabid politician, it had probably assisted to multiply.

No wonder that my father soon ceased to be considered as a stranger, and that his daily advent in the sick room was hailed with delight by the querulous invalid. Ere long, Lord Glenfillan had extorted a promise from his friend not to abandon him during his illness; and soon afterwards it was agreed that they should make the homeward journey together; and this was how it came to pass that the earl and my father arrived at Calais in company.

CHAPTER II.

It has just struck me that I ought to give some idea of the personal appearance of my father. I remember him well, for I loved him very dearly; and my memory supplies me with the picture of a tall, finely made, and aristocratic-looking man, with large gray eyes, a handsome but somewhat too prominent nose, hair which had once been almost black, magnificent teeth, and a smile so beautiful that at times I still see it in my dreams. His extreme nicety and neatness might have passed into a proverb; but he was no whit a prig; and he had so thoroughly divested himself of all the formalities and technicalities of his early pursuits, and fallen back so easily and so naturally upon the proud old blood which filled his veins, that I feel convinced, had he ever been raised to the peerage, no one could have considered him misplaced.

I have a miniature lying beside me now, however, which has preserved a far more flattering portrait of my father than even *my* loving memory. It was taken the year of his marriage, as a bridal-gift to my mother; and, judging from the ivory counterfeit, he must at that period have been supremely handsome.

Moreover, most courteous reader, he was *my* father!

After a few months spent in London, which were fully occupied by the arrangement of his monetary affairs, the purchase of an eligible residence, and daily practice at a shooting-gallery to fit him for his coming campaign in Scotland, my father began seriously to meditate a descent on Glenfillan. The earl had, at times, been grandiloquent on the subject of his paternal estate; and his visitor consequently left town with very magnificent ideas of the locality which he was about temporarily to inhabit.

There was no steam at this time, so that the journey was rather a long one; but my father was glad of the opportunity of seeing Edinburgh, and would not allow himself to consider it tedious.

He spent a week in Auld Reekie, and then started for the Highlands. He saw all the "lions" (as per guide-book) before his departure; but I am afraid that he was deficient in historical sentiment, if not in morals; for he took no interest in Holyrood, simply because he had not made up his mind whether Mary were a martyr or a culprit, and rather inclined to the latter opinion. Now, if my father carried one particular prejudice to excess, it was against coquetry and coquets; therefore it requires no explanation that the very idea of conjugal infidelity was to him hateful beyond the power of words.

He was the very aftertype of Cæsar.

This, *par parenthèse*.

When he advanced beyond Edinburgh, the scene changed. Glenfillan lay, like a lion's lair, in the very centre of the Highlands, and the roads were anything but macadamizæd. All around him was wild and grand, but the air was hungry; and as he had left all his establishment in town, save his body-servant and a couple of grooms, he fared, as he traveled, somewhat roughly. He had no taste for mountain-dew; not a soul to speak to except his man, who began to wax slightly sulky, as he left, according to his own opinion, all civilization and comfort behind him; and, altogether, his progress was as dreary as it was slow.

At length, however, they reached a hamlet with an unpronounceable name, where they found half a dozen of the earl's retainers, who had already been waiting there several days, with as many wild-looking, wiry, ungroomed mountain ponies, to serve as guides to the castle, and to help the Sassenach gentlemen over sundry "bad bits" which they had to traverse on their way. Only one among them could make himself understood, and they were all as savage-looking as a party of bandits; but nevertheless they were a relief to the monotony of his journey, and to the eye of an artist would have been in admirable "keeping" with the scene. They were, moreover, active, strong, and willing; and proved eminently useful to the unaccustomed and helpless travelers.

From the crest of a mountain which it had taken them three dreary hours to ascend, and which my father had partly mounted on foot, his guide at length pointed out a small gray object which he exultingly announced as Glenfillan Castle. He was answered by a shudder. Nothing could be more desolate than the aspect of the "promised land" from the spot chosen to make it known.

The travelers were standing, as I have said, on the brow of a high mountain, covered entirely with heather, and utterly destitute of trees, before them and beneath them, at the distance of several miles, lay a deep valley, backed by another rugged and cloud-capped height; and in this hollow stood the castle; while, about a furlong off, commenced a bleak, cold, unsheltered sheet of water, which was lost in the distance as it wound round the base of the giant mountain that shut in the view.

There was an expression compounded of contempt and mortification on the countenance of the highlander, as he met the look of disappointment and disgust which my father could not repress; but he gave no signs of annoyance beyond leaving his side, and talking in a quick and indignant tone to his companions.

The descent of the mountain proved to the full as tedious as its rise; and thus, fortunately for himself, my father had both time and opportunity to amend his first judgment, and to give due admiration to the several really noble features of the scene. The sun, "that great landscape painter," threw in opportunely a few touches which greatly relieved the vastness of the picture; and as the light vapors swept along the sky, casting their flying shadows upon the hills, and succeeding each other like pleasant thoughts in a weary mind, he began to see positive beauty where half an hour before all had seemed black and barren. As they advanced, too, the old gray castle loomed out majestically from the green heather, and grew into size and importance. My father could distinguish a round tower of respectable altitude, and a length of wall which might be a battlement or a terrace, but which, in either case, gave a dignified and solid air to the whole edifice. Trees there were none, even about the building, at least none that he could discern on his approach; but, nevertheless, he felt more reconciled than he had done on the mountain-top, and became at last even interested in the aspect of his temporary home.

They had no sooner reached the outskirts of the glen than one of the guides, springing to the back of his pony, rode off at a pace of which my father had never believed the animal to be capable, in order to announce the arrival of the expected guest to his noble master; and in about an hour the well-appointed English chariot passed the gate of Glenfillan Castle, and my father found its lordly owner waiting to receive him on the threshold of his own stately hall.

The day was far advanced; and after a warm but brief welcome, the visitor was ushered to his dressing-room to refresh himself after his journey, and to prepare for dinner. The ladies were already busied with their toilets; and my father consequently retired without having been presented to any member of the family. He was conducted to his apartments by a fine-looking, gray-headed, solemn butler, who seemed almost coeval with the building, and who appeared to consider himself the greatest personage on earth, except his lord.

The dressing-bell was already ringing out sonorously from the belfry-tower, and the sound harmonized agreeably with my father's sensa-

tions. He was gratified by the reception of the earl, somewhat impressed by the ancient stateliness of all around him, and disposed to see everything *en beau*. His apartment was spacious and somewhat gloomy. The bed and window were alike hung with dark-green damask; and the walls were of richly carved oak, into which were panneled a series of what were evidently family portraits, the size of life, all grim and ghastly with age. The bed itself was of that capacious description which would lead one to infer that one's forefathers and foremothers must have been of unconscionably broad dimensions; the window, deeply pierced into the massive wall, was of a totally different character, for it was narrow to an inconvenient degree; but, *en revanche*, it reached from the ceiling nearly to the floor, while its arch was filled with stained glass to the depth of half a dozen of the diamond-fashioned panes, which reduced the already small quantity of light admitted into the chamber to something still less. There was, moreover, an aspect of decay and rustiness about everything, which betrayed that the Taplow and Holland of the day had not laid their refined and renovating spell upon the place, but that it was mouldering away quietly and comfortably, without interference of any kind. Although it was yet early in the summer, the air of that mountain-valley was still keen enough to render the huge fire which was burning upon the hearth the most attractive object in the room; and, as my father's valet somewhat sulkily remarked, "it was a relief, in such a hobgoblin-looking place, that nobody could understand who hadn't seen it."

The gold-furnished dressing-case had scarcely given up all its costly contents for the decoration of the toilet-table, when the second bell rang, and my father prepared to obey the summons; but a difficulty arose as to the means of reaching the dining-room without a guide; there was no bell in the room; while my father felt, *en preux chevalier*, that he would rather risk any inconvenience than detain the ladies from the dining-room, and create an unfavorable impression within the very hour of his arrival. He opened the door of his apartment abruptly; rushed out into the gallery; and nearly fell into the arms of the same solemn old gentleman who had marshaled him from the presence of the earl, and who was patiently waiting to conduct him back.

And now I come to an eventful moment in my father's life, and one to which I owe my own existence. The double doors of a spacious drawing-room, comfortably draperied with tapestry, were thrown back by two liveried attendants; and as my father entered, the earl abandoned his position upon the hearth-rug, where he had been comfortably facing the ladies, and backing to the fire, in that peculiarly graceful style which has been popular among the male sex in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from time immemorial; and advanced to meet him with a mixture of stately urbanity and hospitable frankness.

He was presented in turn to Miss Margery Macspleuchan, a tall, stiff, bony, high-checked, sharp-nosed spinster of some fifty, "or, by'r lady, threescore" years, attired in a very stout and rather rusty dress of black tabinet, with a pointlace apron and ruffles; the ostensible *dame châtelaine*, and sister-in-law of the earl; to the Lady Flora Glenfillan, his lordship's elder daughter, a sepia fac-simile of her maiden aunt; and ultimately, to the Lady Madelaine "of that ilk," his youngest child, the offspring of a second marriage, and one of the loveliest maidens who ever furnished forth the day-dream of a poet.

The Lady Flora was all smiles and welcome; she spoke with a strong accent, and laughed until she displayed an awful vacuum, where teeth were not. She was, as I have said, a modified duplicate of her aunt, who had been the sister of her mother. She was not quite so stiff, nor so tall, nor so bony; her cheeks were not quite so prominent; and her nose was a little more moderate in its sharpness; all, or most of which circumstances, were probably to be accounted for by the fact that she had not long passed her thirtieth year; neither was her sable silk quite so rusty, nor her point quite so yellow; but in all about her there was goodly promise that the likeness would increase from day to day.

Lord Glenfillan had, in his first matrimonial venture, made a prodigious *mésalliance*, having marrieddthe daughter of a petty laird, no one could ever rationally decide wherefore. But Jessie Macspleuchan was a shrewd body; she required no spectacles to detect the prominent weakness of the great man; and she accordingly reverenced with so awful a reverence, and worshiped with so humble a worship, the dignity of his peerage, that the plain, homely, prim nobody soon grew to be the most sensible woman of the earl's acquaintance. Her nose was no longer sharp; her voice had ceased to be shrill; her dull gray eyes were turned with so much meek wonder upon his coronet, that he felt assured, in his own mind, that even matrimony itself would never induce any undue familiarity or pretensions of equality on the part of Miss Macspleuchan.

So, to the astonishment of every one save the lady herself, she became, after due deliberation on the gentleman's side, Countess of Glenfillan; and then she taught the proud peer a lesson which he never afterwards unlearned. She had not "served seven years" for her coronet, crushing every natural impulse, and quelling every rebel disposition, to be "shelved" by her own husband, and made a nonentity in her own house. Contention, as the word is usually understood, could not occur between them, for Lord Glenfillan was too innately a gentleman so to degrade himself; added to which, he soon learnt to feel that he was no verbal match for his lady; but for years it was a war of wits, and a war of will, that most effectually prevented all stagnation in the establishment. At length, however, the earl, whose armor began to chafe him from constant wear and who had no wish to die in his harness, prudently laid down his arms, and my Lady Glenfillan had it all her own way.

This state of things lasted for six years, during which period she became the mother of a daughter—the Lady Flora, to whom my reader has been already introduced—and whom she only lived to see enter her second year.

The noble widower was not disconsolate; and, whether it were from respect for his de-

parted wife that he was anxious to demonstrate his confidence in her family, or, on the contrary, that he desired to remove from before his eyes everything which could remind him of the deceased lady, he never declared; but it is certain that he forthwith proposed to his honored father-in-law, the laird, that his daughter Margery should take charge of the infant until she became of an age to require more accomplished guidance. Miss Macspleuchan desired nothing better; and declared herself quite ready to remove to the castle, and to receive her dear little niece from the hands of her noble parent, "directly after the great wash;" but this concession by no means formed part of the earl's arrangement.

He had been Macspleuchaned long enough, and their season was over. He did not wish his will and pleasure to be put into competition with soap and blue; and he, therefore, gave Miss Margery civilly to understand, that the conventionalities of life would not permit a man of his age to offer a home beneath his roof even to the sister of his wife. That the Lady Flora Glenfillan would be no burden upon her mother's family, he deemed it almost needless to add; and he felt convinced that, when Miss Macspleuchan had taken time to reflect upon the subject, she would find that her obliging proposal was utterly out of the question.

Now, all this was not said, but written—written upon a very ample sheet of paper, and sealed with the earl's coat-of-arms; to produce which effectively, it required almost sealing-wax enough to fill a tea-saucer. This signet never failed to produce its effect. It was the *fee-faw-fum* which announced to refractory tenants that their rents *must* be paid; and to presuming petty lairds that his lordship, the earl, understood nothing about liberty and equality. It may, consequently, be imagined that its apparition at the hill-farm rendered further discussion useless. In short, it performed a miracle, for it shut Miss Margery's mouth.

The Lady Flora was accordingly transferred from the castle to the laird's house, and from the cold caresses of her noble father to the hearty hugs of her less exalted relations; and in due time initiated into all the mysteries of meal-porridge, baked sheep's heads, and haggis.

A happy man was Lord Glenfillan; a very happy man! He felt vastly as Sinbad must have done, when he shook the old gentleman from his shoulders, whose organ of adhesiveness he had so long mentally voted a nuisance. Right glad was he, when his eye chanced to rest upon the hatchment which he had caused to droop, like a heavy eyelid, over the upper section of one of the drawing-room windows, as a last token of respect to the deceased—much on the same principle that a man who has completed an unpleasant letter appends an enormous flourish to his signature, in the exuberant joy of his heart that he has come to an end of it—right glad was he, I say, that her departed ladyship had not presented him with an heir to his family honors. A son of Miss Jessie Macspleuchan to inherit the name and rank of the Glenfillans—faugh! And he was still, as he reflected, so young and active, that a season in London, and careful making up, would repair all the ravages of carelessness and seclusion.

This idea haunted him for several years; but no man, not even a Lord Glenfillan, can throw off, without a violent effort, the bonds which time and habit have woven about him. The *parvenue* countess had reduced her husband's confidence in himself, and in his own value, full fifty per cent.; and, although he still talked very big to himself, he shrank involuntarily from the effort of testing the opinions of others.

At length, however, he arrived at the conclusion that it behoved him to marry again with all convenient speed; but he had become a wiser man than he was when "caught" by the Macspleuchan; and consequently *now*, when he was many years older by the calendar of time, and twice as many by the gnawing of mortification and disappointment, he decided that two things were absolutely indispensable in the fortunate woman whom he should select as his second wife—extreme personal beauty, and an undeniable pedigree. A few thousands into the bargain would not, he felt, be amiss; but, in favor of the two former attributes, he resolved not to make a point of the last.

He had remained throughout all these years at Glenfillan, visiting his orphan child scrupulously once in each month, and shuddering as he remarked how much the Macspleuchan nose and bone were beginning to develop themselves; but eventually he put his purpose into execution, and started for England. He had not reckoned without his host. A clever *artiste* succeeded in making him up admirably; and, being really a fine man, and moreover a peer, he was soon the cherished friend of half a score middle-aged widows, fashionable demireps, and matrons with marriageable daughters. My noble grandpapa was not, however, so practicable as he might have been, had he not already learned wisdom. He listened, smiled, and looked about him; and the more he looked, the less chance had the ladies in question of making him their prey.

Many young and beautiful girls did he see in the hotbed of London society—girls in look, and women in mind—who would gladly have bartered their loveliness against his coronet; but half of them were *parvenues*, and the other half nobodies. Many a titled dowager, whose quarterings rendered her eligible for a German court circle, and whose diamonds were far brighter than her eyes, did not scruple to let him understand that she was not inexorable; but my Lord Glenfillan was anxious for an heir. The very eligibles, the young, the beautiful, and the high-born—the creatures of his dreams—considered him too old, or too poor, or hated widowers, or could not contemplate the horror of being mothers-in-law; and thus, *entre chien et loup*, he made no progress.

The London season was drawing to a close

> "Fashion, you know, prescribes the minute
> When to be out of it, and in it:
> She waves her hand, and woe betide
> The lingering few, unless they hide,
> Or swear they're passing through, to go
> To Norfolk, in an hour or so;
> And mean, next month, to show their faces
> If possible, in twenty places."

The earl was just contemplating a journey to "the moors," and sighing as he remembered that the solitude of Glenfillan must remain unbroken for another year; when he was accidentally

introduced to the honorable Dennis O'Finistree, who was on his way through town, with his fair sister Madelaine, whom he had escorted from Naples; and who, after a brief sojourn in London, was to be his companion to their paternal home in the wilds of Connaught.

Every one, who is any one, *must* know all about the O'Finistrees, so it were a mere waste of words for me to expatiate here upon the antiquity of their family, or to explain in what manner their patrimonial estate had dwindled into one-tenth of its original splendor, and "their noble" had, actually as well as figuratively, "come to ninepence." They were also, as they always declared, lineally descended from the kings of Connaught, (who, *soit dit en passant*, if all be true which is laid to their charge in this way, must have been wonderfully prolific!) an assertion which few persons felt disposed to question, for the O'Finistrees were all celebrated shots.

The honorable Dennis took a great fancy to my grandfather. He was a high-spirited, dashing, fine-looking young fellow, and a perfect man of the world. After a time, he proposed to introduce his new friend to his sister, who was residing *perdue* at an hotel near Portman Square. The earl thought of his star; and, without asking any questions, accepted the civility. He did right. Madelaine O'Finistree was a genuine Irish beauty, with dark hair and eyelashes, and eyes of a deep rich blue, which, when she laughed, looked positively black. She was tall, and well-proportioned; had something of a foreign deportment, tempered, however, by extreme gracefulness, and a spice of haughtiness which went straight to the heart of my grandfather.

Of course, the gay, thoughtless Dennis had never contemplated any serious results from the acquaintance of his sister and Lord Glenfillan. He could not have heard from his associates that the Scotch peer had rejoiced in the name of "the wife-hunter" throughout the season; and it could not, consequently, have been in the hope of "bringing down his bird" that he had detained Madelaine in London, when their finances had "dwindled to the shortest span," and that every guinea was to them thrice-refined gold. Nevertheless, everything fell out well. The earl returned home, "seven fathom deep" in love with the fair Hibernian. He felt that his hour was come. She was so utterly unlike Jessie Macspleuchan. She was so graceful, so beautiful. Her proud brow looked as though (how novel-like is the phrase upon which I have stumbled!) nature had designed to cincture it with a coronet. In short, Lord Glenfillan was a lost man, from half-past four o'clock p. m. on that 29th of June.

He was found again, however, a few months afterwards. The hatchment of the defunct lady had, years before, been consigned to the attic; the earl had almost forgotten her thrall; and he was flying along the highroad between London and Edinburgh in a traveling chariot and four, with the new Countess of Glenfillan by his side.

A year subsequently, my grandfather was once more a widower. His beautiful and high-born wife gave birth to a daughter, and in so doing, resigned her own life; but it was a year of happiness which cast its spell over the after existence of the bereaved husband. The first wish of his heart—the first object of his ambition, had indeed been disappointed. He had no son to inherit his name and honors; but the memory of his young and gentle wife was, nevertheless, too dear to be obliterated by a newer tie.

His only consolation was derived from the fact, that she had left to him an infant image of herself, a second Madelaine, in whom, as she grew to womanhood, he might trace a renewal of her mother's beauty, and to whom he might thereafter devote his best affections for that mother's sake. Nay, so unaffected was the self-abnegation of the widowed father, that he gratefully accepted the proposal of an aunt of Mr. O'Finistrec's, the widow of an old English baronet, who divided her time between Wentworken Hall and her house in Cavendish Square, to take the motherless infant into her own care; and so well did Lady Sinclair, who was herself childless, fulfil her voluntary duties, that at each successive visit to England, the earl found his daughter more beautiful, more graceful, and more accomplished than at their previous meeting.

At rare intervals, Lady Sinclair accompanied her niece to Glenfillan Castle, where they were met by Lady Flora and Miss Margery, who, on such occasions, contrived to display her housewifely capabilities to great advantage in the eyes of the earl; while she found so much and such serious occupation in the buttery and still-room, that she was rarely visible elsewhere. In short, Miss Margery was a genuine Macspleuchan, and as sharp as a needle; and she looked upon these opportunities as "the very skimming of her life's milk," as she herself graphically expressed it to a particular friend. It was now or never with her, and she played her cards well; for when, on the death of Lady Sinclair, which happened just as Madelaine had completed her eighteenth year, Lord Glenfillan found it necessary to establish both his daughters beneath his own roof, he could not deny that she was the most correct and eligible person whom he could select, to relieve them from the drudgery of housekeeping, and to throw a matronly air over the establishment.

Fortunately also, as Lord Glenfillan considered, Macspleuchan of Macspleuchan had paid the debt of nature, though he had left several less imperative debts unpaid; and there being no son to perpetuate the name and vulgarity of his father, the earl felt less repugnance to offering a home to the solitary Miss Margery.

Such, therefore, was the organization of Lord Glenfillan's household when my father became his guest. The lovely Lady Madelaine had already been an inmate of the castle for a tedious year, during several months of which period she had been condemned to the sole companionship of her sister and her aunt; the earl's gout expedition having taken him from home, before she had long been domesticated beneath his roof.

And now, how am I to describe the said Lady Madelaine? I have said that she was just nineteen, that loveliest of all ages for a woman; when, in addition to her own individual attractions, she possesses also what a French writer

has wittily defined as *la beauté du diable*, that sweet and evanescent freshness, which, after the age of twenty, is gone forever.

Like her mother, she was tall, and fair, and graceful, with regular and well-cut features; eyes like amethysts; and a mouth of that rare and peculiar description, which, when it *is* met with, appears to convey more expression than all the rest of the face combined. Her smile was the very sunshine of the heart; and her scorn was so naturally seated upon the arched and ruby lip, that it would have been insolent in any one of less rank than a peer's daughter. Perhaps, indeed, this latter expression was the more habitual one to that fair mouth; for, unfortunately, the exclusive education and habits of Lady Madelaine had prepared her to find much to despise in her natural home; nor did her French *suivante* suffer any of the deficiencies of either persons or things at Glenfillan to pass unobserved. The "Aunt Margery" of the elder sister never ceased to be the "Miss Macspleuchan" of the younger—an alien alike to her heart and to her blood. She never forgot that Lady Flora, although the first-born of an earl, was nevertheless the child of a *roturière*; and, as Félicie delicately expressed it, merely "*sa sœur par méprise*." The family-coach was a never-ceasing theme for contempt; and the family expedients something almost too absurd to provoke a laugh.

From such of these as arose from certain deficiencies in the Glenfillan treasury, the haughty young beauty was happily exempt, Lady Sinclair having considerately wound up all her account of kindness and affection, by bequeathing several hundreds-a-year to her beloved niece; and, perhaps, to this circumstance might be attributed much of the deference with which she was regarded by her female relatives.

But, although pride was the predominant feature of Lady Madelaine's character, it must not be supposed that she was destitute of other and more endearing qualities. Her generosity was unbounded. Her purse was a common property whenever it could be rendered available; and her nature was enthusiastic and unsuspicious.

Thus, it was only to her very particular friends that Miss Margery ventured to pour out her vial of wrath against the "stuck-up English-bred quean who dared to look down upon her niece Flora, her own niece by blood, and own daughter to the right honorable the Earl of Glenfillan; and herself, own sister as she was to the right honorable the countess," in some of those quiet hours of gossipry and local scandal, which she contrived to secure in her morning room; and which helped to support her through the tedium of a life, which, however enviable she had esteemed it so long as it appeared to be unattainable, she had since learnt to consider as an existence of constraint; obliging her, as she graphically expressed it, "always to wear her company face." But, as Miss Margery was not a bad woman at heart, it is only fair to remark, that even after these little conferences, although they always were held "with closed doors" her conscience frequently pricked her, as some act of uncalculating generosity on the part of the "stuck-up English-bred quean" toward herself suddenly flashed upon her mind.

Nor should the haughtiness of my mother—for the beautiful and accomplished Lady Madelaine *was* my mother; and, as I am not writing a melodrame, and have no genius for mystery, I may as well say so at once—nor should her haughtiness be too severely censured, inasmuch as it had been one of the darling endeavors of Lady Sinclair to impress her, from her earliest girlhood, with an exalted idea of her own position in society. Such a lesson is readily learnt, for few things are more susceptible than human vanity. "I will not," had said the cautious aunt, "talk to her, at so early an age, of her own personal attractions. The knowledge of those will come soon enough;" and so the discreet lady only poured the guano over the soil which was to produce "the earl's daughter," and left the comments of her friends and servants to administer the unctuous matter which was to force into bloom the budding vanity of "the little beauty."

Thus she grew up—thanks to the care of her anxious teachers—moderately vain, and uncompromisingly haughty; whilst all her better qualities were the spontaneous growth of her own purer and nobler nature. A solitary season in town, immediately before the death of her aunt, during which she had been "the observed of all observers," had not tended to diminish these failings; and thus, in her nineteenth year, the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan was possessed of a perfectly accurate knowledge of her own pretensions, both personal and social, only to be condemned, without any consolation save the companionship of her French maid and her Marlborough spaniel, to the solitude of a highland castle.

CHAPTER III.

And now some curious reader may wish to be informed what motive the Earl of Glenfillan, who, as the reader must have gathered, was by no means a wealthy man, could have had in pressing a casual acquaintance like my father, and one, moreover, to whom he owed money, to visit him in his home, and to see him surrounded by his *Dii Penates* in the undress costume of a Scottish country gentleman.

Heaven bless the *bonhomie* of the simple-hearted individual who ventures the inquiry! My lord had a penniless daughter, on the wrong side of thirty, still unmarried; and it had naturally suggested itself to his mind that her quality was an admirable counterpoise to my father's wealth; and that the luxurious commoner would be unable to resist the temptation of hearing himself and his wife announced as Mr. and Lady Flora Tilden, in the saloons of his London friends.

But those who calculate without their host require two reckonings. The noble lord did not understand my father. That he had resolved never to marry any woman save one of high rank, was perfectly true; but he was also determined that she should do as much credit to his taste as she would do honor to his name; and it was consequently in vain that poor Lady Flora had received that very mysterious injunction, which is frequently given to young ladies under such circumstances, to "make the most of herself;" and [illegible] Miss Margery an-

nounced, in close conclave, to her favorite gossips, that a Southron, worth his weight in gold, was coming to the castle to marry her pet niece.

I think I mentioned, when I originally introduced the reader to the earl's family circle, that the Lady Flora was all smiles and welcome: she was doing as she was bid; and, after her first glance at the stranger, she found the task by no means difficult. My father bowed and smiled, and his bow was very graceful, and his smile very gracious, but his eyes had already wandered to a sofa, which was occupied by a beautiful girl and a small lapdog. Having said all that she could well say at such a moment, the Lady Flora suffered Lord Glenfillan to lead his guest toward his other daughter; and the fair vision by which he had already been attracted bent her snowy throat in a mute salutation, worthy of an empress. Something like a mocking smile played for an instant about her mouth; but she did not raise her eyes, as she again fell back upon her cushions, and pursued her occupation of clasping a string of coral about the neck of the spaniel.

She was plainly but richly dressed in deep mourning, which she had never thrown off since the death of her aunt: and the dazzling whiteness of her neck and arms was rendered still more conspicuous from the contrast. I shall enter into no further detail. I have already stated that my mother was eminently beautiful; and, having given the grand outline of the picture, I will leave my reader to wash in the tints as he may see fit.

The curtain had now fairly risen upon the drama which was to be enacted at Glenfillan. Like the renowned Marquis of Carabbas, the earl believed that the world and all its contents, sentient and non-sentient, were created for the comfort and convenience of the aristocracy; while no price could be too high for the plebeian to pay, for the privilege of entering its charmed circle; and, with these sentiments, it is not wonderful that he considered the marriage of his elder daughter as certain as though it had been solemnized at St. George's, Hanover Square, "in the presence of a select circle of distinguished friends." It would be a dignified, and lordly (and convenient) way of repaying all his obligations to his worthy guest: and he resolved that he would do the thing freely, and cordially, and as though he scarcely looked upon it as a condescension.

Oh, delicious self-delusion! In what exquisite mummery does poor human nature occasionally indulge!

For a time my father had no suspicion of the generous intentions of the earl. How should he? It was only by the common and necessary courtesies of life that he was recalled to the fact of Lady Flora's existence. His heart had soon followed the thrall of his eyes. He was passionately in love with the scornful Madelaine; she was precisely what novel-writers call "the realization of his dreams;" and, for the first time in his life, my father began to believe that he had found a woman of whom he was not worthy: for that Lord Glenfillan should have had the audacity to couple him even in thought with his elder daughter, was an idea which could never enter his imagination, until it was driven home to the very head by a determined hand.

Nevertheless, it was easy for lookers-on to perceive that the earl quite considered the rich Englishman (to use a phrase of Madame de Sevigné), as *un chou de son jardin*. Nothing could exceed his delightful urbanity. In his self-gratulation at having caught such a gudgeon for his first-born, he performed upon himself exactly the same ceremony to which Mr. Pettigrew subjects his mummies. One stiff fold was cautiously unrolled after another, until at length the complete "form and fashion" of his gracious composition was laid bare, and his whole purpose stood revealed to his astonished guest.

Meanwhile, as I have said, the *dessous des cartes* was palpable enough to all save the preoccupied lover. Every one could at once have laid a finger upon the truth. Lady Madelaine, indeed, was not left to the natural perspicacity of her own nature. She was duly informed by the earl of his lordship's condescending intentions; and, at the moment, she opened wide both her fine eyes and her ruby lips, in intended expostulation; but an instant's reflection decided her to silence. Who shall determine wherefore? I think that I am myself sufficiently cognizant of the impulses and intricacies of a pretty woman's heart to give a shrewd guess—but I forbear.

Miss Margery was radiant with happiness. She had lived long enough in her youth among the involved expedients and manœuvres, to which those housewives devote themselves who act upon the homely old proverb that "a penny saved 's a penny got," to appreciate at its full value the extent of my father's wealth, so far as she was enabled to comprehend it. To be sure, as she remarked more than once to her pet gossip, "her niece Lady Flora Glenfillan had a right to look higher; but 'a fat purse makes lean sorrow;' and if she gained no title by this marriage, she would, at least, not lose her own."

My father had been bidden to the castle for "a few weeks;" and when three of these sectional periods of time had elapsed, desperately as he loved the Lady Madelaine, he felt that as she had "made no sign," despite all his efforts to awaken her from her indifference, it was incumbent upon him to appear occupied with parting intentions, leaving it for awhile to absence and memory to work some miracle in his behalf; but this free flight of the yet unjessed falcon formed no part of the earl's scheme. He could not tell, if he thus launched the noble bird once more into the wide horizon of London society, what quarry he might chance to strike; and, moreover, there were, as I have already hinted, some small pecuniary matters still pending between them, which at that particular moment it was not altogether convenient to himself to investigate; it was, consequently, not surprising that, with such strong reasons on either side to remain together, the importunities of the earl, breathing, as they did, all the disinterestedness of overflowing hospitality, soon convinced my father that the weeks of his residence at Glenfillan might grow into months, without any impropriety on his part; an arrangement which would enable him, in all prob-

ability, to ascertain his fate before he parted from Lady Madelaine.

My father was no petulant and peevish lover. He had wisdom enough to feel that if he were indeed compelled to renounce all hope of winning the noble beauty, the sooner he was made conscious of the fact the better; and that he should be less an object of commiseration to himself on his departure, if knowing the truth, even although it should be an unpleasant one, than living on in a state of uncertainty for months; only, perhaps, to be ultimately disappointed, when time had rendered the one engrossing subject of his thoughts essential to the after-happiness of his life.

The only disinterested member of the family was the little Marlborough spaniel, which, as it lay on the sofa beside its mistress, rolled its bright eyes over the group, with an expression of luxurious and languid indifference.

To the hospitable entreaties of the earl that my father would extend his visit, both Lady Flora and Miss Margery added their own; but the younger lady, toward whom the guest glanced anxiously more than once during the discussion, preserved a profound and apparently unobservant silence. Lord Glenfillan was so earnest that he became heated by his own eloquence. Miss Macspleuchan, when she reflected upon the probable consequences of the "rich Southron's" departure, grew positively agitated. She had so long accustomed herself to look upon his marriage with her favorite niece as a matter of course—for the earl had duly informed her also of his gracious purposes, even before my father's arrival at the castle—that she actually felt herself aggrieved; and she sat fuming and fidgeting, like one laboring in silence under an affront which would gladly have revenged itself in words. But Lady Flora surpassed all the other actors in this exciting scene. At first she had mingled her own entreaties with those of her father; then, suddenly, she sank into silence, keeping her eyes steadily and imploringly fixed upon the yielding guest, who had no sooner murmured the assent for which she was so eagerly listening, than, uttering a faint and smothered exclamation, she covered her face with her hands, and rushed from the room.

By a spontaneous movement the earl seized the hand of his guest, and wrung it earnestly, with a most expressive gravity of countenance. Miss Margery rose hastily, in a state of great alarm, and followed her niece; and, it so chanced that, at the same moment, a servant entered to announce that a gentleman who had called by appointment was awaiting Lord Glenfillan in the library.

For the first time since his residence in the castle, the Lady Madelaine and my father were *tête-à-tête*.

It was a sufficiently perplexing position for the visitor, who could not quite repress his mortification at the studied indifference of his young hostess; nor was the difficulty lessened by the fact that, even when she heard her father summoned from the room, she never raised her eyes from the book upon which she had been engaged throughout the conference. The earl had been enchanted with her dignified reserve, forming, as it did, so admirable a contrast to her sister's emotion; and he had consequently made no effort to obtain her coöperation. Miss Margery considered that, for once, she had acted with proper discretion in not interfering with the prospects of her elder: while Lady Flora herself was so absorbed by her own hopes and fears, that she had utterly forgotten her existence.

Poor Lady Flora, meanwhile, was really an object of pity. She had been pompously instructed by her father to overlook Mr. Tilden's want of rank, when he was first expected, and to accept at once the hand which would assuredly be at her disposal before he left Scotland, and even then she felt no whit inclined to disobey, for her position in her paternal home was by no means hyper-pleasurable. She heard that the Englishman was immensely rich, and unusually handsome; and when the earl admitted that he had reason to believe, from certain words which had dropped from Mr. Tilden himself, that he had been at some period engaged in commerce, he somewhat abruptly reminded her that this fact would by no means render the match a *mésalliance*, as it would have done in the case of Lady Madelaine; her own mother having, previously to her marriage with himself, occupied a station much less exalted than that of an English merchant.

Lady Flora felt no inclination to contend the question. She was satisfied with complaining of the taunt to her sympathizing aunt. She had almost begun to consider her establishment as hopeless; for even among the petty lairds who were occasionally received at the castle, there was a sufficient taste for youth and beauty to fortify them against the *prestige* of her rank; and strangers were rarely indeed guests at Glenfillan.

Like many persons whose means have been inadequate to their pretensions, Lady Flora had an inordinate idea of the power of wealth. She could conceive no earthly evil, save death itself, to which it could not afford a remedy—while even to this exception it lent a sort of glory which almost divested it of its bitterness—the glory of lead, and mahogany, and gold-headed nails: of armorial bearings, and velvet, and feathers. The rich man's last sad and solemn mockery!

In this acquiescent mood of mind, she met my father; and what had at first been mere curiosity and self-gratulation, soon grew into a deeper feeling. Although utterly unable to appreciate, as they deserved, either the elegance of his person, or the refinement of his manner, Lady Flora could nevertheless feel that he was, to every man, save her father, with whom she had hitherto been brought into contact, as "Hyperion to a satyr." Assured that she was to become his wife, she made no attempt to check the admiration with which she regarded him; and, from day to day, the feeling grew and strengthened, until she began, for the first time, to indulge in a violent jealousy of her young and beautiful sister.

Despite the remonstrances of Miss Margery, who affected to talk of Lady Madelaine as a froward child, she could not blind herself to the fact that she was a most formidable rival; and it was only the dreaded beauty herself who succeeded in relieving the mind of Lady Flora from its unaccustomed weight. Her coldness, her

indifference, her apparent abstraction, ultimately satisfied the more vehement and less refined mind of the bride presumptive that she was perfectly uninterested in the English stranger; and she accordingly pursued the even tenor of her way, arranging with her prime minister, Miss Margery, all her intended movements, when she should have become Lady Flora Tilden, the mistress of countless thousands, and the titled member of an untitled family, who would, as a matter of course, appreciate the honor of her alliance. Miss Margery's projects of housewifery were miraculous, and would have astonished Meg Dodds herself; while those of her niece, although their magnificence did not fail to dazzle the conspirators by whom they were mooted, would have made no very serious inroad upon my father's income.

Singular, meanwhile, had been the transition-state of Lady Madelaine's feelings. When first informed of the expected advent of the English stranger, and the intended purpose of the earl, she only curléd her lip, and murmured something which sounded like "*rôturier!*" at which Lord Glenfillan laughed, patted her smooth cheek, and bade her remember that it was not herself whom he was anxious to establish. Her own independence of the arrangement she could easily understand; nor was her noble father's anxiety to provide for her plain, and, as Félicie called her, *antediluvian* sister, at all difficult to comprehend; but the result of the conference was a deep and scornful contempt for the moneyed plebeian, who could thus be disposed of at the will of a titled acquaintance. So utter, indeed, was her disdain, that she never heard his name mentioned without a feeling of annoyance. The unknown guest was her *bête noire;* and she shuddered as she reflected on the absolute necessity of showing civility to such a brother-in-law.

When they at length met, the graceful, and withal haughty demeanor of my father, in some degree, disturbed her calculations; but as she had a most powerful prejudice to overcome, she almost persuaded herself that she disliked him. The high-bred simplicity of his character, his utter want of value for wealth, save as a mean for the attainment of higher objects, she denounced as a pitiful affectation. How was it possible that a man should under-estimate his only advantage?

Three weeks, as I have already stated, had elapsed from the arrival of my father at Glenfillan Castle, to the morning on which he announced his intention of departure. Why did the volume, upon which the Lady Madelaine appeared to be so earnestly engaged, tremble in her clasp? No, sapient reader! you are wrong. She did *not* love my father. And yet his threatened evasion affected her powerfully. Here is the word of the enigma. In the first place, Lady Madelaine was a woman: in the next place, she was a pretty woman: and, in the third place, she was young and vain. She had soon suspected that my father loved her: she had penetration and judgment enough to decide that he was a gentleman, and that he was quite conscious of all that was due to himself as such; to all which convictions was superadded the fact that, since her domestication at Glenfillan, she had never previously seen any one on whom it would not have been *caviare* to expend her brilliant coquetries. There was something *piquante*, too, in the idea of having, without one poor effort, won the heart which was already considered as "property" by another, although that other did chance to be plain and antediluvian; and there was, *par dessus tout*, a spice of mortification in being compelled to believe that the net was too frail to hold the capture.

And thus it chanced, gracious reader, that the volume *did* tremble in the clasp of the Lady Madelaine, when my father announced his intention to depart on the morrow. Lady Flora had, as I have stated, rushed from the room in the attitude of a tragic actress: Miss Margery had followed with more good-will than dignity; his lordship of Glenfillan had been summoned to an interview; and the Lady Madelaine and my father were, for the first time in their lives, *tête-à-tête.*

For a moment there was silence. My father stood where his host had left him, near the table in the centre of the vast apartment; and the lady sat, half-buried amid her cushions, in a lounging-chair near the open window. The position was embarrassing for the gentleman; but he soon rallied, and, approaching the silent beauty, remarked steadily—

"If I could only flatter myself that the Lady Madelaine was not utterly indifferent to my decision...."

He was met by such a look of scornful wonderment that he was at once answered; for it said, as plainly as a look *could* say: "How do you imagine that it can have awakened my interest?" and then the large eyes were once more dropped upon the book, and their long, dark lashes rested like a fringe upon the slightly-suffused cheek. My father bowed profoundly, with a haughtiness worthy of Lady Madelaine herself, and turned to leave the room.

"Do not mistake me, sir;" said the sweet voice to which he loved to listen, before he had traversed the floor; "I am happy that Lord Glenfillan should have been enabled to render his residence sufficiently agreeable to his guest, to make him willing to extend his visit; but I have never considered myself privileged to interfere with any of my father's arrangements."

There must have been something infinitely less cold in the tone than in the words of this address; for it is certain that, instead of leaving the room, according to his original intention, my father reversed his movement, and again approached the lady.

This was her first triumph. She felt that she had not deceived herself—that he could not leave her coldly—that he *did* love her. The conviction brought a bloom to her cheek. Her woman-vanity was satisfied; and she valued his preference the more that she had seen him in the very act of sacrificing his passion to his pride. Accustomed as she had been since her girlhood to admiration, she felt the dreary and monotonous tenor of her life at Glenfillan agreeably relieved by the certainty of a new adorer; and one, too, whom, in her heart of hearts, she was conscious that she could not despise. With these sentiments, nothing could be more natural than that she should be averse to the departure of so eligible an inmate.

Let no rigid moralist decide that this course

of action involved treachery to Lady Flora. My mother was well aware, before the Englishman had passed a week in the castle, that her father's project must fail. He was not one of those manageable and will-less beings, who are mere human thistle-down, sailing, without reluctance, along any wind which may chance to blow; and still less did he resemble the mean-spirited parasites who feel security only in the stability of the object to which they cling. She had long been convinced that even had there existed no Lady Madelaine Glenfillan, there would assuredly never have been a Lady Flora Tilden. *My* father and *her* sister were, as she at once discovered, the very antipodes of each other; they were oil and water—snow and fire—romance and reality—sentiment and matter-of-fact—the two extremities of a straight line, never destined by any possibility to come together; and, such being the case, her conscience was at ease as regarded her duty to her family, while she felt no inclination to forego the opportunity of relieving her own *ennui*.

If I go on amplifying my explanation so largely, however, I shall never terminate the *tête-à-tête* upon which I have ventured to intrude; and I will, therefore, resume it with the second arrival of my father beside the lounging-chair. Pygmalion had at least awakened the statue into life, and he was naturally anxious to ascertain in how far his skill would turn to his own advantage.

"Do you indeed believe, Lady Madelaine," he asked, in the same suppressed voice in which he had first spoken, "that your presence under his lordship's roof can fail to exert a despotic power over all within the sphere of its influence? And am I to be the only unfortunate individual to whom it is forbidden to acknowledge its supremacy? Surely this is somewhat ungenerous!"

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed the lady, with a half-coquettish and all-harmonious laugh, as she extended towards him her small white hand; "you remain here, and we cannot afford, in such a solitude as this, to live together in enmity. At all events, I propose a truce."

"And I accept your terms," said my father, bending his lips upon the hand he held.

"Do you admire Racine?" asked the lady, raising her beautiful eyes to his face for an instant; "with all his monotony of cadence, surely he was a great poet."

"And lived in a great age," was the reply; "great alike in its luxury, its ambition, and its vices. It is, I confess, somewhat difficult to me, as I turn over the pages of his tragic dramas, to figure to myself the author of Andromache deferring the caprices of a court, and the chances of a camp."—(By this time my father had drawn a chair near that of the lady, and established himself comfortably at her side.)—"Nor do I find it more easy to reconcile the pliability of temperament which enabled the man of genius to vie with a group of witless courtiers in flattering a vain and sensual monarch, beyond the bounds of modesty and reason."

"Racine!" exclaimed the Lady Madelaine, interested in spite of herself by the turn which her own question had given to the conversation; "I do not remember to what you allude. Perhaps you will relate the anecdote."

"It is brief and simple," said my father "When Louis XIV. pensioned Racine and Despreaux as the historians of his reign, the war against Germany was still at its height; and a few days after the Marshal de Crequi compelled the Prince of Saxe and Senac to capitulate, the king remarked to them that he regretted their absence from the army upon that occasion, as it would have enabled them to see a little fighting, without much exertion or fatigue; upon which Racine replied, 'Sire, we are two citizens, who have only provided ourselves with a costume suited to peace and study; we had indeed ordered suits more appropriate to the camp, but your majesty takes the places which you attack with such rapidity, that our tailors have not had time to finish them.' Surely this was unworthy of a great genius."

"Paltry and pitiful!" acquiesced the lady, with a contemptuous toss of her little head; "a woman would have spurned so coarse and so fulsome a flattery."

Now I am quite sure that my reader was totally unprepared for such a dialogue as this; and yet, although it progressed in precisely the same manner to its close, and that not one word of gallantry escaped the lips of my father, and not one sentence of encouragement was uttered by those of his companion, both parties were conscious, when the reappearance of the earl broke up the conversation, that each was an object of interest to the other. My father had, by a delicacy of tact natural to him, avoided every opportunity of alarming the pride of the young beauty, and consequently made more progress in her favor than he could have done by a score of idle flatteries. She was indebted to him for an hour of calm and rational enjoyment; and, moreover, she felt she had convinced him that her beauty was not the only quality for which she was worthy to be loved.

CHAPTER IV.

My father's orders were countermanded. His valet somewhat sullenly, and very reluctantly, replaced all the costly toys on the dressing-table, and returned all the linen to the drawers. There was no Lady Madelaine in the servant's hall.

A few days subsequently the earl ceased to address his guest as "Mr. Tilden;" he believed that he had now all the court-cards in his own hand; and it was simply "Tilden," or "my dear fellow." He made no comment upon the fact that both gun and fishing-rod were abandoned, and that my father lounged away all his mornings beside the work-table of the ladies, tuning Lady Madelaine's guitar, or drawing patterns for her sister's worstedwork.

By the by, Lady Flora never looked so completely as though she were fulfilling the end of her creation, as when seen behind her frame, and amid piles of German wool. The laborious idleness of this heating and ponderous employment just suited her capacity. She felt that she was busy, that she appeared industrious; and, moreover, nothing could be more convenient than the fact that when she ventured to take part in a conversation to which she was not competent, and could not readily extricate

herself from the consequences of her own temerity, she found a never-failing resource in the "one, two, three, light green—two, dark green—one, two, three, yellow"—and so on, by which she contrived to wind up her periods.

This was, however, a case of "voluntary labor;" for I do not believe that either Lady Madelaine or my father would have remarked the circumstance, even had she strangled every sentence in the utterance.

Miss Margery was the only blot upon this picture of still life. She was so essentially what the French denominate *remuante*, that she was never quiet in one place for half an hour together. If her niece were born to execute large pieces of worstedwork, which, when they were finished (and very few elaborate undertakings of this nature ever *are* finished), looked almost as well as squares of indifferently-woven carpet; she was as certainly sent into the world to

——"chronicle small beer;"

and, accordingly, her minute avocations were, if not altogether without aim, decidedly without end.

But, alas! this state of things could not last forever. The earl, quite convinced of the wisdom and desirability of his own arrangements, never suffered himself to doubt, for a moment, to which of his daughters Mr. Tilden was devoting himself. Of course, he would not presume to lift his eyes to the Lady Madelaine; and equally of course, the large fortune of the handsome commoner should not be allowed to go out of the family. Nothing, therefore, could have happened better. The Glenfillan star was in the ascendant. Flora would soon be provided for; and he should only have to find a suitable and satisfactory *parti* for his beautiful Madelaine. In this there could be no difficulty. The climax of his reflections was their most rational feature.

All these fair visions, dovetailing so pleasantly together in his mind, like

"A linked chain of sweetness long drawn out,"

naturally rendered him anxious to force forward their realization; and my father was accordingly disturbed one morning—just as he was deeply engaged in looking over, with Lady Madelaine, a portfolio of drawings and prints by which he had illustrated his European tour, and accompanying each landscape or costume with some appropriate anecdote—by a message from the earl, requesting, should Mr. Tilden not be otherwise employed, the pleasure of his company in his lordship's study.

Apropos—What a singular caprice it is on the part of all stupid men to nickname one cosy, snug, sleep-inviting little apartment in their houses by this imposing name; crowding its walls with shelves full of books which they never read, and its tables with paper upon which they never write! I rarely enter one of these calumniated cabinets without thinking of the Bashful Man in the Spectator, who, in helping himself to what he supposed to be a volume of Xenophon, drew down on his unhappy head a ponderous board, leathered and gilt into the fair semblance of a set of classics; and expended upon his best suit the ink of the capacious stand which had been destined to dry up in quiet and undisturbed dignity. He is probably not the only individual who has suffered from a similar mistake.

The request was peculiarly ill-timed, for my father felt that he had never yet been listened to with an attention so marked and flattering. The fair lady had taken so unaffected an interest in the little episodes of his traveling life, and had received with so much genuine pleasure the half-dozen drawings and cameos, which he had ventured to offer to her, that a bright hope sprang up in his heart which he had never before entertained. There was, however, no remedy for the evil. Common politeness compelled his immediate acquiescence in the earl's request; and he closed the portfolio with a little gesture of impatience, easily interpreted by his companion.

"I beseech you, do not run away with it," she said, smilingly; "if you have sufficient confidence in my good taste to believe that it will prove a charming resource for my indolence, while my lord asks your advice on some matter of agricultural interest, or country justice; though I warn you that I may probably lay aside all that strikes my fancy; and condemn you, on your return, to such graphic and legendary illustration as may sorely try your patience."

"I will willingly encounter the risk, hazardous though it be," replied my father as he left the room, with a firm intention to render the period of his absence as short as possible.

His own impression, as, preceded by the grave old butler, he wended his way to the earl's sanctum, was simply that Lord Glenfillan was probably in want of a few additional hundreds, and was about to do him the honor of asking them at his hands; and no idea could possibly have been more agreeable to my father. It would be another link of kindness and goodwill between them; and he was naturally anxious to create these by every means in his power, while this was one of the most ready and easy which he could encounter.

One glance at my lord, as he entered the room, however, sufficed to undeceive him. The earl had by no means the appearance of a man about to ask a loan. There was a self-gratulatory graciousness about him, which for an instant made my father fear that, on the contrary, he was about to rescind that which he had already contracted. But, in this, he was equally at fault.

Lord Glenfillan was in the true study costume: a brocaded silk dressing-gown, yellow morocco slippers, and a velvet skull-cap. He was rubbing his palms together gently and quietly, like a person well-satisfied, who was prepared to be amiable; and when tired of this amusement, he indulged the playfulness of his spirit by twirling the tassels which were attached to the cord that confined his dressing-gown at the waist. He motioned my father to an easy chair with a sweet smile and a graceful wave of the hand; and seated himself opposite to him with much the same air as a monarch assumes when he is about to give audience. He had evidently more trouble in "toning down" his urbanity, than in creating a semblance to the virtue when he had it not. He was, in short, the very embodiment of human sunshine.

He opened the conference with a sapient remark upon the weather. The dense fog which, at daybreak, hung like a dark cloud upon the lake, and made the larches on the opposite hill quite invisible from the windows, had really cleared off in a most extraordinary manner. Indeed, he did not know when he had seen a finer day. It was almost a sin in a young man, like his friend Tilden, to remain mewed up in the house when he might be amid the heather with his gun upon his shoulder. He, however, could not but feel the contrary mode of action as a vast compliment to his family circle; and was delighted to find that there was amusement enough within the castle walls, to satisfy so truant a personage as his present guest.

My father, of course, could only bow, and smile, and declare that he could expect no enjoyment without, even upon the heathery hills, with sport at pleasure, to equal that which he could command within. And then there was a short pause. The guest waited to learn what was to be the subject of the *tête-à tête*; and the host did not altogether know how to broach it.

At length he assumed his most sunny look, and throwing himself back upon his seat, while he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon an experiment which he was trying, and which consisted in joining the fingers of his two hands at the point; and then, closing the palms slowly and carefully together, as though he were anxious to convince himself that they were both perfectly of a size, he said, in an accent of great benignity—

"I am more than pleased, my dear fellow, that it should be so; for, although no longer young myself, I have not yet quite forgotten that men of your age do not abandon the sports of the field, and the manly exercises to which they are accustomed, without a powerful inducement; and, even delicately situated as I am, I cannot resist telling you, Tilden, how much I rejoice that such should be the case."

And the earl, having by this time satisfied himself that his hands were indubitably fellows, extended one of them to his visitor, with a frankness which was quite beautiful.

My father was somewhat startled, but still more gratified. He eagerly grasped the offered hand, and was about to reply, when, with a nod of intelligence, Lord Glenfillan continued:

"I am the last man in the world, as I am sure that you who know me will concede at once, to approve of female demonstration in delicate affairs of this kind: but still, I am aware that women, even of the purest minds and most refined natures, have certain little occult methods of testifying their preference, of which they are themselves almost unconscious, but which must carry conviction to the mind of the person so distinguished; nor do I fear to have deceived myself, in the belief that you have both experienced and reciprocated these evidences in my dear girl."

"My lord," exclaimed my father, earnestly: "this is indeed noble on your part! For I cannot, I will not affect to misinterpret the generous feeling which has prompted you to speak thus openly. I only fear that your friendship for me has led you to exaggerate in my favor the few slight marks of attention with which the lady has honored me."

"Tush! tush!" coughed his lordship, suppressing under this slight convulsion the smile that was rising to his lips; "I will be your security; and, had I valued you less, either as a man or as a friend, than I actually do, I would not have been so imprudent as to domesticate you for weeks together with my daughters. Had I been merely ambitious for them, I might doubtlessly have married them to rank equal, if not superior, to my own; but I am at once a father, and a man of the world. As the first, I desire only their happiness. As the second, I feel that I shall be more honored in a son-in law like yourself, than in many a titled booby, who has but his ancestry to keep his folly and his vice in countenance. Permit me—" (for my father was about to speak)—"I did not request the pleasure of your presence here this morning in order that we might bandy compliments, but simply that man to man we might speak openly and frankly *on equal ground*." (Here the emphasis was ponderous; and the earl coughed again, for he felt that he had surpassed himself.) "If I am not deceived, and that you love my daughter, say so unreservedly; and I, on my side, will venture to assure you that you are not indifferent to her."

"My lord," said my father, in considerable agitation, "I *do* love her, and that with no common affection, but with the whole energy of a heart which had ever hitherto been insensible to the attractions of her sex."

"I rejoice extremely to hear it," replied Lord Glenfillan, "extremely; and rather that, like your own, hers, I can venture to affirm, is also her first love. Such marriages are of rare occurrence in the world at the present day."

And the earl looked intelligent and sententious, and as though he had discovered the nest of the phœnix, and was about to rifle its ashes.

"Will your lordship pardon me," said the visitor, "if, despite the encouragement which your opinion is so well calculated to hold out, I venture to hesitate, ere I yield to the hope of so much happiness; for I cannot conceal from myself the conviction, that the lady has never given me the most remote cause to believe that she entertained any regard for me, save that which she considered to be my due as her noble father's guest."

"And yet, my dear Tilden, I am so well convinced to the contrary," replied the earl, "that we will, if you please, lay aside that consideration this morning, in order to discuss others of more moment. But first" (and once more he extended his hand, with a gesture of affectionate and paternal frankness), "let me tell you that you have made me a happy man—a very happy man. My dear, motherless girls are my greatest treasure on earth; and to feel that, to all human seeming, I have secured the happiness of one of them, is indeed a great comfort. Having premised thus much, however, I consider it due to myself, as a man of honor and a gentleman, to warn you, before the affair is mentioned to my daughter, that I shall be enabled to do little, very little, for her, as regards fortune."

"My dear lord!..."

"Nay, my good sir, do me the favor to hear me out. The failure of a son to succeed to my title and estates, and who would, moreove-

have doubtlessly felt it to be his duty to portion his sisters as became their rank, has trammeled me in a painful degree. The future Earl of Glenfillan is a morose recluse, with a needy family of five boys. There is nothing to be expected from him; and the rather, that there has been feud between us for the last twenty years. In fact, we were never friends, even from our boyhood. He was apt to presume upon our relationship; and I, Mr. Tilden, was, on my side, quite willing to forget it. Enough, however, of the future earl. The fortunes which I can offer with my daughters are, consequently, only the fruits of my personal economy; and I am, therefore, anxious that the little which they do possess should be secured to them."

"Suffer me to be equally concise, my lord," said my father, when there was a pause. "I am ready to settle ten thousand a year upon the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan, to be disposed of as she shall see fit at her demise: and—"

"To settle upon *whom*, sir?" asked the earl, grasping his knees with his hands, and leaning forward in his chair, until his face almost touched that of his companion.

"Upon your lordship's daughter, the Lady Madelaine."

"The Lady Madelaine!" gasped out the bewildered nobleman. "Surely you never imagined, sir, that I was offering to you the hand of the Lady Madelaine!"

"I know not how otherwise to interpret your lordship's words," said my father, with offended dignity; "I cannot suppose that such an interview was intended as a jest."

"Have I not two daughters, sir? Does not a father naturally seek to establish the elder? Is the Lady Flora a cipher! I offered to you, sir, the hand of the Lady Flora."

"In that case, my lord," said the guest, rising from his seat, "our conference is ended. I have the greatest possible respect for Lady Flora Glenfillan; but I must be excused if I decline to become the husband of any woman for whom I could never entertain a warmer feeling. I deeply regret the misunderstanding which has led to so unpleasant a scene; but feel satisfied that both the lady and yourself will exonerate me from blame when you have calmly and in detail passed my conduct in review."

"I have uttered no word of blame, sir," said the earl sullenly, as he also rose: "I confess myself deceived by appearances, by probabilities—perhaps somewhat by the bent of my own wishes."

My father bowed coldly. "Has your lordship any commands for England!"

"Nay, nay, Mr. Tilden, do not be so precipitate," said his host, in a more conciliatory tone. "Because I have confessed that I desired you as a son-in-law, and that you have declined the alliance which I proposed, we need not, in consequence, become strangers—I will not say enemies; for I know my own nature, and have too good an opinion of yours, to believe such an extreme probable."

"You do no more than justice to both of us, my lord," replied my father; "but, my eyes being now opened to the hopelessness of an attachment which I have not scrupled to confess, I will be frank enough to avow, moreover, that, I dare not remain within the influence of the Lady Madelaine's beauty, for the sake of my own peace. I *may* yet be enabled to overcome the passion which I have conceived for her. I will, at all events, struggle to do so; but the longer I expose myself to the charms of an intercourse, which brings me into constant contact with her lovely person and accomplished mind, the less hope can I rationally entertain of regaining the peace that I have lost. I have, as I believe I may have mentioned to your lordship, occasionally contemplated a voyage to the East. I will now execute that intention. I shall leave none behind to regret me, he my fate what it may."

There was a sadness, almost a bitterness, in the tone with which the last words were uttered, which served as a fair apology for the emotion with which the earl grasped the arm of his companion, as he exclaimed hurriedly—

"For my own sake, for the sake of hospitality, my good sir, I cannot suffer you to leave Glenfillan in such a mood of mind. Surely you have roved about enough, and owe something to your country and your friends."

"My friends are few," was the reply; "and to my country I can be of no service whatever. I have now only to learn to live for myself, and the lesson is scarcely worth the pains that it will cost."

"Nay, nay—the world has too many claims upon you to suffer that you should fall into misanthropy," persisted Lord Glenfillan. "Your very wealth multiplies your duties, while it assures you alike power and enjoyment."

"Do not mock me, my lord," said my father, with increased bitterness; "an hour has not yet elapsed since your own words taught me the amount of each which riches could command. After what has passed between us, I feel that I must necessarily be *de trop* under your roof, both to the Ladies Glenfillan and to myself."

"Do not wrong *them*—do not wrong us *all*, my dear Tilden. Be ruled for once. Again I beg of you not to leave us in such a mood of mind. Indeed we cannot spare you at this moment. You have made several engagements with the ladies, for which they depend on you. Promise me that you will not leave us with a suddenness which may excite surprise, and perhaps remark. I ask this as a favor."

"Your lordship's request is undoubtedly too flattering to be opposed," said my father. "I will not leave the castle, at least, for a day or two, since such is really your wish; but suffer me now to retire to my room, for I feel that I am somewhat agitated, and shall be better alone."

"Ten thousand a year!" muttered the earl, as he again sank into his chair, when my father had left the room: "ten thousand a year, to be disposed of at will, on her demise! and—I wonder what was to follow! Could I have suppressed my annoyance, I might have heard all. Fool that I am! I ought to have foreseen that a fellow as proud as Lucifer, and as rich as Croesus, would never marry Flora. I wonder if Madelaine might be induced to bend her proud spirit to the match. Certain it is, that she will never again have such an opportunity. However, *au jour la journée*, I must detain him

here, and trust to time and fortune for the rest."

And having finished his soliloquy, the earl rang his bell, and desired a servant to summon the Lady Madelaine.

CHAPTER V.

In about ten minutes the Lady Madelaine appeared, followed by her Marlborough spaniel, who, with all the confidence of a spoiled favorite, intruded himself into the conference.

There was an expression of tremor and anxiety about the young beauty, very unusual; and, as she took possession of the chair to which the earl motioned her, she raised her eyes to his face with an earnestness which bespoke at once curiosity and alarm.

"You will never believe, Madelaine," commenced Lord Glenfillan, "that I have requested your presence here on such a subject as the refusal of a commoner to form an alliance with my family."

The cheeks and forehead of the lady grew suddenly crimson, and her eyes flashed; but she did not utter a syllable.

"I see how sensibly—how deeply—you feel this affront," pursued her father; "for which you must have been as unprepared as I myself was; but high birth and noble blood are now at a discount in this country—gold is the great principle with all ranks. Yet I cannot avoid thinking that, after the extreme step which I took in mooting the subject, when I was decidedly the condescending party, Mr. Tilden should have been less abrupt in his negative."

"Surely, my dear father—surely, my lord," said the Lady Madelaine, in a tone of offended dignity, "you did not *offer* your daughter's hand to Mr. Tilden!"

"Certainly not—decidedly not," was the sententious answer. "Your delicacy alone makes you jump to such a conclusion. I flatter myself that I conducted the affair in a manner at once dignified and diplomatic; and, for a considerable time, I had every reason to conclude that Mr. Tilden was transported with gratitude and happiness—but—in short—can you not imagine how the *équivoque* arose?—can you not guess in what his rejection of Lady Flora's hand originated?"

His fair daughter had suddenly become singularly interested in disentangling two curls of one of the long and lustrous ears of her little favorite; and she did not immediately reply.

"That Mr. Tilden had become strongly attached to some member of my family, was evident," continued the earl; "and I accordingly never entertained a doubt that my project for the establishment of your sister had fully succeeded. I *could* not suppose that he had become enamored of Miss Margery Macsplenchan,"—here his lordship smiled at the facetiousness of his own conceit—"and I *would* not think that he had raised his eyes and his hopes to yourself,"—and here he fixed a long and scrutinizing look upon the young lady—"there was, consequently, no other method of accounting for what I saw; and I acted upon that very rational conclusion. I was wrong, however, my love—wrong in all my premises, save the first. Mr. Tilden has, indeed, become attached—powerfully attached—to a member of my family; but, I fear, hopelessly."

"You *fear*, my lord!" exclaimed the young lady, suddenly looking up with a flash of her natural haughtiness. At that moment she entirely lost sight of the interesting and refined companion, and saw only the plebeian in her noble father's guest.

"I used the word advisedly, my dear Madelaine. You well know how highly I estimate our proud and ancient blood, as well as your own excelling loveliness and merit; but I have already hinted to you, that for a time our conversation was carried on in mutual misunderstanding. I, very naturally, thought only of your sister; Mr. Tilden, full of his own feelings, thought only of yourself; and thus we discussed the affair without either having named the person of whom he spoke, until, in allusion to the settlement which he proposed to make upon his wife, Mr. Tilden mentioned the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan. You may imagine my astonishment!"

"And is it really possible, my lord," asked the lady, with the pretty scorn of a spoiled beauty, "that, having so long made the acquaintance of this proud commoner, you should have conceived it probable that he would become the husband of Lady Flora?"

"I did, indeed, commit that extravagance," said the earl, somewhat offended by the tone in which the question was put; "nor do I consider it so extreme as it may appear to yourself. Mr. Tilden is no longer a boy; therefore the age of your sister was by no means a fair objection. In other respects, the one precisely possesses what the other needs; for Tilden requires only connection to command every good which this world can offer."

"You would not include the Macspleuchan physiognomy in this list of advantages, I trust, my dear father," laughed the lady; "I thought that you 'had suffered persecution, and learnt mercy!'"

The earl could not resist the contagion of her saucy mirth: he smiled without any symptom of displeasure; and the more cordially that his lovely daughter appeared by no means so much shocked at the presumption of my father as he had anticipated.

"Imagine my delight," he pursued, after a momentary pause, "when I heard, as I supposed, a settlement of ten thousand pounds a year made upon Lady Flora—"

"I can well understand it," said the beauty, quietly.

"Ten thousand a year," repeated his lordship, complacently, "upon a wife whose entire fortune consists of precisely half that amount. Nor, evidently, was this all which Mr. Tilden was about to propose, when, in my astonishment at his mention of your own name, I interrupted him. The offer was certainly most princely."

He paused, not altogether certain how far he might proceed with safety upon this new tack—but he paused in vain; for Lady Madelaine appeared resolved not to come "to the rescue." Why was she thus silent? We can only say, with the German proverb, *Das Herz lügt nicht.*

"What a splendid figure might be made by

a woman of fashion and beauty upon an unencumbered ten thousand a year!" once more declaimed his lordship; "I must again repeat that the offer was princely."

"And intended for myself, if I have understood you rightly, my lord," said Lady Madelaine. "It almost makes me smile, when I remember the marvelous projects of my poor aunt in my favor, that the first suitor who has seriously pretended to my hand should be a commoner, and one, moreover, who has been contaminated by commerce; and that I should say—knowing myself as I do—that I pray you not to precipitate this matter. Of course Mr. Tilden leaves the castle at once."

"Such was his intention," said the earl, who could scarcely conceal his astonishment at the words and bearing of his daughter; "but, in compliance with my request, he has consented to remain for a couple of days longer."

"With any hope of succeeding in his suit?" asked the lady, with a very peculiar expression.

"Without the slightest," replied the earl; "and very reluctantly; but I asked it as a favor, to prevent the possibility of remark among the household."

"You have acted wisely, my dear father, as you ever do," said Lady Madelaine; and she removed the spaniel from her lap, and drew her chair directly opposite to that of the earl, sweeping away as she did so the piles of papers which occupied the table before her; and then she leant her head upon her hand for a time, in an attitude of grave thought. "That I was not quite unprepared for this event," she said at length, after a considerable pause, upon which his bewildered lordship did not attempt to break, "I will at once concede. I could not mistake the manner of Mr. Tilden, guarded as it has been; nor was I blind to the fact that I am not altogether calculated to play respectably the *rôle* of a nonentity with which your lordship had favored me in this domestic drama. Lady Flora has been *de tiers*, and not myself. So much for the state of things at home; and now, I will give you a slight sketch of the reasons which have induced me to tolerate the proposal of Mr. Tilden."

As she ceased speaking, she glanced towards the earl, who replied only by a silent inclination of the head. "I know that I am handsome—all the world have so decided, and all the world must be right. I know that my family, on both sides, is unexceptionable, and in antiquity would do no dishonor to a German court; and I am assuredly not of a temperament to consider such advantages as a matter of indifference. But these are not the only truths which the world has taught me. I am young in years, but old in experience. The tuition of Lady Sinclair was able, and I have learnt somewhat of myself. I have been flattered, *fêted*, and followed; but the mention of my prospects has always hitherto sufficed to cool the passion created by my person. I am haughty and ambitious. Glenfillan is to me exile from all the haunts and habits of my early and brilliant girlhood. You have considerately warned me that I must not hope to revisit London for several years; and I, in my turn, have asked myself what, under existing circumstances, I can hope from another season, when I am crippled in my resources, and have lost my affectionate and skilful chaperone. And now I have, perhaps, my lord, said enough to justify my present apparently capricious conduct with regard to Mr. Tilden."

"I have listened with as much admiration as surprise," exclaimed the earl. "I had fallen into a somewhat similar train of reasoning while awaiting you. But remember, my dear child, that you are still very young, and that you are very beautiful. I will be as frank as yourself, and at once admit that this marriage appears to me to be singularly desirable. Reflect, nevertheless. You have great advantages on your side—youth, beauty, and patrician birth. You are doing great honor to Mr. Tilden, even by this deliberate consideration of his proposal."

"I am not insensible to the fact, my lord; nor, I have reason to believe, will he be so. I do not profess to love Mr. Tilden. The thing is impossible under the circumstances; but I respect his intellect, and admire his person. He is, in short, perfectly presentable; and, when you have ascertained that his fortune is as it has been represented to you by others, I will engage to permit his addresses;—and the rather," added her ladyship, with a little of the sententiousness of her father, "that, as you did me the honor to confide to me, you are at present under some pecuniary engagement to the gentleman."

As she ceased speaking, she rose, and having bent her head gracefully to the earl, glided out of the room.

And thus it came to pass, gentle reader, that at the end of three months, my father became the delighted husband of the lovely, the young, the high-born Lady Madelaine; the brilliancy of whose presentation at court during the ensuing season was the theme of universal comment and envy.

Lady Madelaine Tilden's jewels, Lady Madelaine Tilden's equipages, and town house, her beauty, her rank, and her perfect high-breeding were the "lion" of the day; and when, at the close of the spring, she retired with her husband to a magnificent estate in the west of England, situated within six miles of the county town, and in the very centre of a fastidious and aristocratic neighborhood (a purchase made by my father from a bankrupt duke), she carried away with her the hearts of all the men, and the hatred of half the women. She felt that she had not lived in vain!

And what of Lady Flora?

Little, and yet much. Her sister's parting present was the bequest of Lady Sinclair to herself. Lady Flora was a sort of heiress at Glenfillan, and a match for a laird! She wept over her disappointment, but she did not break her heart; she only sat still closer to her worstedwork, and executed with great rapidity and precision a series of blue parrots, geranium-colored ladies, and knights in armor, with pea-green gauntlets, and swords somewhat taller than themselves.

Miss Margery was furious. Even the annuity did not console her; and she became so garrulous and vehement in her displeasure, that the earl found it necessary to dispatch from his study to her apartment a very concise and lordly letter, sealed with his seal of office

when the missive so ably performed its duty that the thunders of Miss Margery's wrath suddenly died away in low growls of ill-suppressed indignation.

And what of my Lord Glenfillan himself?

Like his daughter, he felt all the mortification of Mr. Tilden's plebeianility; but like her he had also very readily *mit le chat en poche*, and satisfied himself that she was not altogether to be pitied. His own little money matters were arranged with his son-in-law by a cordial shake of the hand; and when, as he lounged in his dressing-gown and slippers in his study, with the "Morning Post" in his hand, he read, with sparkling eyes and gratified pride, of all his fair and wealthy daughter's triumphs, he was much in the same mood of mind as he who sang on a somewhat similar occasion:

> "'Tis a very fine thing to be father-in-law
> To a very magnificent three-tailed bashaw."

CHAPTER VI.

The newly-married couple had, as I have already stated, at the close of the London season, repaired to the west of England, to take possession of their new estate; whither they were to be followed in August by a numerous party of sporting men and pretty women. It had been my father's first earnest request to his beautiful young bride that they should proceed there alone. It was his only rational prospect of a quiet month with the fair creature whom he now called his wife; and she conceded the point, although with considerable reluctance. She remembered Glenfillan, and considered that she had already sacrificed sufficiently to duty in that way. Moreover, Sir James Dornton was the best riding companion in the world, and Mr. De Clifford was to teach her billiards, and she wanted the second of Lord Otterford in her new duets; and it was very vexatious to suffer dictation on the subject of filling her own house; but, as she was not yet the wife of a year, she determined to yield; and having come to this virtuous resolution, she was too high-bred, and too conscious of what was due to her own dignity, to do so sullenly, and like a pouting school-miss. She only asked herself, with something like a shudder, how long the month was likely to endure, which she was destined to pass in solitude with Mr. Tilden?

As for my father, he was still deeply and passionately in love with his young bride. He would not believe that either pride or indifference was the root of the unswerving coldness, the calm, fashionable placidity, with which she met all the ardor of his generous and self-abnegating affection. No, no. Since their marriage, they had been in one constant whirl of dissipation and frivolity. Her heart had not had time to speak—poor, self-deluding reasoner! as though the heart were not independent of all such secondary influences. They were not yet thoroughly acquainted. He had not hitherto been essential to her happiness. When they were left for awhile alone, among the lawns and glades of Rooksley, nature would speak out in tenderness, and they should become everything to each other.

A wit, celebrated during the regency, amused himself by advising the newly-married to beware of exhausting all their stock of heart-enthusiasm during the solitude of the honeymoon, and to avoid the peril of the

> "Long probationary week
> Of close retirement, as profound
> As if they both were underground;"

warning them of the consequences likely to accrue from entire and uninterrupted mutual dependence.

> "Be counseled.—Stir not, near or far,
> But stay, I charge you, where you are.
> The dream of passion, soon or late,
> Is broken—don't anticipate.
> Haste not to lose your hopes in fears,
> Stark mad for moments, dull for years;
> Devour not, for your comfort's sake,
> At once, like children, all your cake;
> Truth (on your memory well engrave it)
> Whispers, you cannot eat and have it.
> Gold is too precious—lay it not
> So thickly on a single spot;
> But beat the bullion—husbands, wives—
> And spread it over all your lives."

My mother's worldly sense had been prophetic of this counsel. Married quietly and unostentatiously at Glenfillan—for, as both she and the earl agreed, the less parade made on the occasion of becoming the wife of a commoner, the better—it was not for *them* to seem to invite congratulations—the journey to town had occupied a sufficient space of time to enable Lady Madelaine to announce herself at once to the gay world, and to rally around her all the hundred and one friends whom she had left, grief-stricken, when she was last compelled to abandon "London and its dear delights." The anticipation of coming pleasures—the foretaste of anticipated triumphs—the newly-insured possession of affluence and independence—all conduced to make the mood of the lovely bride sunny and sweet as the most exacting bridegroom could desire; while the pleasant languor arising from a long journey so luxuriously and deliberately performed as to make fatigue impossible, rendered the anxious and tender attentions of the newly-made husband alike well-timed and welcome; and they were consequently so gracefully and graciously received that my father was enraptured with the brightness of his destiny.

From the hour in which they reached town, all was changed. The splendidly-mounted mansion, which had been carefully prepared for the occupation of its young mistress, startled her into an exclamation of delighted acknowledgment. Her boudoir, lined with plate-glass, and draperied with pale-blue silk; her toilet, covered with costly toys; her morning-room, where pictures by the old masters were paneled into walls hung with crimson velvet, and exquisite *statuettes*, mounted on pedestals of *ormolu*, filled up the niches; the spacious reception-rooms, over whose arrangement the hand of wealth and elegance had successfully presided; all these flattered the pride, and satisfied the ambition of the earl's daughter. The better feelings of her nature were awakened by the effort, everywhere visible, which had been made to gratify her peculiar tastes and wishes; and the first evening "at home" was spent *tête-à-tête* by my father and his patrician bride in harmony and happiness.

There was so much to examine—so much to

admire—and when, on touching the spring of a casket which stood upon her toilet, as the lid flew up, my mother discovered a set of diamonds which a monarch might have envied, she forgot her *morgue* for a moment, and gave loose to all the sincere delight inspired by the princely present.

My father was, as a matter of course, overpaid for all; and he believed, unhappily for him, that this was but the commencement of a long life of love and confidence. No friendly voice had whispered in his ear that the beautiful Lady Madelaine Glenfillan had considered it necessary to apologize to her own pride for her condescension in becoming his wife; and that his magnificence gratified her the more because it tended to show her that, at whatever sacrifice of dignity, she had done right. He believed that they had met upon equal terms. The earl was a needy man, to whom the retention of the slender portion destined to his daughter was an object of great and serious importance—he had asked only the hand and heart, and not the portion, of that daughter. The first had been ceded to him readily and gracefully; he had yet to learn in how far he had secured the other.

Lady Madelaine Tilden had taken her measures skilfully, and like a good tactician. The first evening of her arrival in Grosvenor Square was the last which she was compelled to spend alone with her husband, and perhaps it was better so; for these compulsatory matrimonial duets are more frequently cases of moral *dos-à-dos* than *tête-à-tête*; and it is difficult to decide, when this occurs, which individual of the conjugal *duo* is the best entitled to commiseration.

A woman, however pretty and graceful she may be at other times, when once she has resolved on investing her spirit in its wrapping-gown and *papillotes*; and a man, however intellectual and fascinating in society, who determines on permitting his higher faculties to appear at home in the easy negligence of a *robe de chambre* and slippers, are each apt to appear considerably less attractive to the one looker-on, for whose peculiar benefit the scene has been got up, than may be altogether desirable. Certain it is that the system of "hanging up the fiddle at home" is a somewhat dangerous one for the performer, who is accustomed to "discourse eloquent music" elsewhere.

Here, then, was another peril from which Lady Madelaine wisely resolved to deliver herself at once. It was out of the question that she, young, handsome, highly-born, and fashionable, should hide her advantages from a world which she was so well calculated both to enjoy and to adorn, in order to shut herself up with Mr. Tilden, even in a room lined with plate-glass and draperied with pale-blue silk; and, acting upon this principle, she had been careful to apprise her friends of the probable period of her arrival in town.

The season was just commencing. The race of idleness and folly had scarcely begun. The arrival of the beautiful bride of the wealthy Mr. Tilden (the fame of whose large fortune had reached London, through the medium of the earl, some weeks before) was an agreeable event; and not the least pleasurable emotion which she had experienced on taking possession of her new home flushed the cheek of my mother, as she saw the table in her morning-room covered with minute notes, and upheaped with visiting tickets.

She had no sooner examined them on the morrow than she found herself in the very vortex of dissipation. Admiration in some, and curiosity in others, had combined to send "all the world" to Lady Madelaine's door, and each had some engagement in which she was included. Her eye brightened, and her lip smiled, as she threw aside each note after a hasty perusal, until she opened one upon which she dwelt long and earnestly, with a heightened color and a beating pulse, and which she consigned to her reticule as soon as she had, for the second time, reached its conclusion.

Here it is:—

"Eureka! you are really, then, once more on your way to town, *ma toute belle!* I am enchanted, and so is Sir Herbert. Of Otterford I say nothing, save that I have not been able to trust him out of my sight, since the news arrived. *Al buon intendidore, poche parole bastano!* *Can* you condescend to the opera before Easter? I shall reserve a seat in my box for Saturday, as perhaps you may not yet be *montée* there; at all events, let me have you the first night! Pray make my *baisemains* to *il marito*, and say how much I regret that I cannot make room for him; but I have been persecuted since this French *danseuse* made her appearance, about whom all the men in the world, *save one*, have gone mad; and I have not moral courage enough to say 'no,' so long as I have a chair left. She goes to Milan next week, so don't fail me for your own sake. How did you leave Lord Glenfillan?

"*Toute-à-vous!*

"SYDNEY DEVEREUX."

And this was Saturday. This was her first day under her husband's roof. For a moment she hesitated. Mr. Tilden might think it ungracious were she to leave him the first evening in a house as strange to himself as to her. He might not approve of her appearing for the first time in public under any protection but his own. But then the French dancer, whom she might never see at all, if she missed her to-night! It was very provoking that there should be no room in the box for Mr. Tilden. To whom could Lady Devereux have promised all her ivories? It was a strange question for my mother to ask herself, as she had been so long absent from town; but nevertheless, she did begin guessing who were to be the occupants of the box. No more women, she knew. Lady Devereux was far too fastidious to hold a parliament of petticoats at the king's theatre. Sir Herbert detested all places save the pit. (There was no omnibus in my mother's time.) And the result of her self-questioning upon the subject was—Lord Otterford.

Lady Madelaine threw herself back among the satin cushions of her *bergère*, and fell into a fit of deep musing. Lord Otterford had worshiped her for a whole year. Her aunt had looked forward with confidence to their marriage. They had sung, danced, and rode together. Otterford was very handsome, with large, almond-shaped black eyes, a well-formed

and prominent nose, fine teeth, and a graceful figure. Had there been any mind under the mask, he would have been eminently handsome. As it was, Otterford was only a musician and a *roué*. He had pursued the Lady Madelaine until he discovered that she was nearly penniless; when, having bestowed upon her, in a fit of sentimental regret, the title of *la belle mal dotée*, he quietly withdrew his pretensions to her hand, and left it to be sought by others with fewer wants and more resources than himself.

Lady Madelaine felt his secession severely. It was not that she loved him, for she had at once discovered his mental deficiencies, while his moral lapses had been more than once hinted at in her presence; but he was well-looking, fashionable, and heir to an earldom; and she had, moreover, become accustomed to his assiduities, and conscious of his admiration. Among the defections of this nature, which we elsewhere hinted to have been comprised in the early experiences of the flattered beauty, she had been less insensible to that of Lord Otterford than to those of many more wealthy, and, in the acceptation of the world, more eligible admirers.

The lip of Lady Madelaine curled, as, in thinking of the past, she remembered how her flatterers had likened her to a new and brilliant sun in the hemisphere of fashion; and how truly they had borne out their own hyperbole, by melting away like snow-wreaths under her influence, when they discovered that she had little beyond her beauty and her high birth, with which to compensate their homage; and as the memory came back upon her, she instinctively suffered her eye to wander over the magnificent accessories of her married home. But with these reminiscences of her first triumphs came also the dangerous recollection, that Lord Otterford had been the last and the most reluctant to withdraw his pretensions, and that, in truth, his expensive habits and comparatively slender resources had left him without an alternative; for Lady Madelaine had no conception of the beautiful self-abnegation, which will occasionally lead a man who truly loves to divest himself of his own tastes, and to "cleanse his bosom of the perilous stuff" which separates him from the object of his affection.

Her first impulse, after these reflections, was to show the note of Lady Devereux to her husband, and to claim, upon the score of her old attachment to her friend, his indulgence on the present occasion; but, on recurring to the note itself, it struck her that it was not exactly calculated to afford him any particular satisfaction; or to impress him with any great prejudice in favor of the fair writer; and then her two besetting sins came to her aid. Her pride told her that she owed it to herself not to appear to shrink from a meeting with her former admirer, who would be an eligible acquaintance for Mr. Tilden, and who could, of course, never again be more to herself: while her haughtiness reminded her that it was unworthy of Lady Madelaine Glenfillan to suffer herself to be trammeled in her social arrangements by any one, simply because that "any one" had been honored by her hand.

Just as she had arrived at this conclusion, a curricle drove to the door, and a footman shortly afterwards put a card into her hand, with an intimation that Lord Otterford was at the door, but would not intrude upon her at so unseemly an hour; having merely called at the desire of his cousin, Lady Devereux, to request a verbal reply to the note which had been left some days previously, in order to save her ladyship the trouble of a written answer so immediately upon her arrival. My mother hesitated for an instant—the position was sufficiently perplexing—but, in the next, an affirmative reply was given, and the well-appointed curricle drove off.

The rubicon was passed. At whatever cost of annoyance to her husband, the engagement must be kept; and the haughty lady practiced her first lesson in dissimulation, by tearing the little note of her giddy and thoughtless friend into minute pieces, and throwing them into the superb basket of Sevres porcelain, which stood under her writing-table.

Mr. Tilden returned to dinner at eight o'clock, having been engaged during the morning at the Heralds' Office, in the agreeable occupation of superintending the quartering of the Glenfillan arms into his own shield, and in selecting a superb *parure* of pearls for his beautiful young wife. He was somewhat surprised, but infinitely more flattered, by the exquisite toilet in which he was received; and hastened, after a brief and eager greeting, to fasten upon the throat and arms of the young beauty the ornaments of which he was the bearer, and which he tenderly denominated "her welcome home." They could not have been presented more *apropos*, for they gave the last touch of elegance to the simple and rich costume which she had selected; although it is equally certain that they, at the same time, rendered the ungracious act which she was about to commit tenfold more difficult.

It was, however, necessary that an immediate explanation should be given, as Lady Madelaine had ordered her carriage at nine o'clock; and she accordingly mentioned her engagement with as much *insouciance* as she could command; dwelling principally upon the French dancer, and the regret of Lady Devereux that, *on this occasion*, she was unable to offer Mr. Tilden a seat in her box; and winding up her communication by entreating, with the sweetest smile in the world, that he would not trouble himself to dress, as she had not a moment to spare, and would therefore, for her own sake, overlook the solecism.

The astonishment with which my father listened requires no comment. He was stung to the very soul; and had Lady Madelaine raised her eyes to his countenance as he left the room, she would have been at no loss to understand the effect which her words had produced; but she was already too good a tactician to expose herself to unnecessary annoyance, and she consequently kept them riveted upon her bracelet.

My father was no longer a young man, and he loved for the first time. It is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at, that before he descended from his dressing closet, after a hasty and imperfect toilet, to conduct his bride to the dining-room, he had found what he endeavored to believe were sufficient excuses for her thoughtlessness. She was so young, and so

admired—here he involuntarily winced a little, but soon recovered himself. She had been so isolated at Glenfillan; and now she was again among the friends of her early youth, and the scenes of her first girlish happiness: such a circumstance would not, in all probability, occur again. She had been taken by surprise, and could not properly be blamed for wanting the consideration which a married woman, considerably her senior, had not deemed it necessary to display towards himself. Still, it *was* provoking; and when he had fancied, too, that the becoming and careful toilet had been made for him!

There was, however, no possibility of showing even the shadow of harshness to so beautiful a being—the bride of two weeks only—and so—most gracious reader! my father reentered the drawing-room, in which he was to spend his solitary evening, with a smile upon his lips, and thus taught his fair wife a lesson on her own power, which she never afterwards unlearned; and, at the close of a constrained and hurried dinner, handed her carefully to her carriage, to feel, as she drove towards the Haymarket, that, after all, Mr. Tilden was really less unreasonable than many men whom she had known; and to wonder whether Lord Otterford would be glad to meet her again.

She was not long left in suspense; for, as her carriage stopped at the Opera House, the subject of her thoughts stood at the portal, ready to assist her to alight, and to conduct her to Lady Devereux's box. She at once saw, however, that he was no longer the laughing, joyous rattle, from whom she had parted a few months before. There was a tremor in his voice as he addressed her; an unsteadiness in the arm which he intended for her support; an evident effort in the cold and brief congratulations which he terminated with a smothered sigh, as though their utterance had cost him a pang; and his manner was altogether so contagious, that Lady Madelaine felt confused and uncomfortable in her turn; and was glad to find herself in the box of her friend, as though the presence of a third person were necessary to restore her self-possession and composure.

As the carriage drove off, my father lighted a cigar, and strolled into the square; and when he was weary of this amusement, he returned to his splendid home. The two footmen who had attended "my lady" were already in the hall, and he knew that she had arrived safely at her destination. When he reached the drawing-room, he took up a book, but he could not read. Disguise it as he would from himself, he was wounded to the heart. He knew nothing of Lord Otterford—how should he? but he could not avoid feeling that he had been treated, if not exactly with contempt by his wife, at least with a want of courtesy eminently galling to a proud spirit like his. In short, his reverie was anything but pleasant; and he was glad when, at midnight, he heard the carriage once more drive from the door to fetch home his truant wife.

On this occasion he, for the first time, paid the penalty of his wealth; for his establishment was formed on so extensive a scale, that it was impossible for him to relieve the tedium of his solitude by making one affectionate arrangement to welcome her return. There was nothing which he could do that would not be tenfold better done by her maid or her footman; so he amused himself by walking up and down the spacious apartment, and accommodating his paces to the pattern of the carpet, in order that, at least, he might not appear weary when she came in.

But amusements, even as intellectual as that which he had selected, will not interest forever; and my father had omitted to remember, that the departure of a carriage did not necessarily involve the return of its mistress; and so it proved in this case; for Lady Devereux had a *petit souper* after the opera, and she declared, and Lord Otterford *looked*, the impossibility of consuming chickens and champagné without their long-lost friend; while Lady Madelaine was so delighted with the admiration which she had elicited "from all parts of the house," and was so bewildered by the strange and unaccountable melancholy of the once gay and brilliant man who had stood throughout the evening behind her chair, taking no share in the lively conversation of his cousin, but assiduous in his silent attentions to herself, that she could not forbear a feeling of curiosity as to its cause; so she resolved to join the supper, and to take an opportunity of questioning Lady Devereux upon the subject.

There is assuredly a spell in those Opera suppers; and this particular one was enchanting! As she left the house, Lady Devereux was besieged by entreaties for permission to accompany her home, but, having formed her party, she was obdurate. "Not to-night, my lord—not to-night, my dear sir.—Impossible, Sir James; I never exceed a dozen"—formed the running accompaniment to her retreat; and when Lady Madelaine drove off in her friend's chariot, her own was ordered to follow her to Portland Place.

Half-past two o'clock on Sunday morning had chimed, when once more the knocker of the hall door sent its *staccato* thunder through the house; but, loud and prolonged as it was, it failed to awaken my father, who, worn out with watching, had, an hour previously, flung himself upon a sofa, and fallen into a deep sleep.

Lady Madelaine, pale and exhausted, hurried to her dressing-room, and, having urged her Abigail to expedition, soon was, or seemed to be, buried in as profound a slumber as that which had overtaken her husband.

And so ended their second night in town.

CHAPTER VII.

The last ball had been given; the last dinner eaten; the last lounger had departed, or, *faute de mieux*, had declared himself gone, and become temporarily invisible; the belle of five seasons had reluctantly admitted to herself, and been reminded by her chaperone, that another chance was lost, and had despairingly betaken herself to a cheap watering-place, to recruit alike her health and her finances, and to sigh over the past; the last benefit was over; the drive was dusty and deserted; a few who had announced that they were "off to the continent" had been

compelled to content themselves with crossing the water in the neighborhood of the Borough; pedestrians could venture upon passing from the pavement of one great thoroughfare to another, without risking their necks; tradesmen began to reckon up their profits, and fathers of families to reflect upon their bills; in short, "London itself was out of town," and still my mother lingered. Rooksley, and a matrimonial *tête-à-tête* of a month's duration, were more than she had courage to contemplate, after the brilliant and triumphant *début* which she had made. There was, however, no alternative. The season was at an end. Lady Madelaine Tilden had been the fashion. Royalty had eulogized her beauty and her grace; diners-out had decided on the excellence of her *chef*; sour dowagers had sneered at her *mésalliance*; and budding beauties had intrigued and entreated for invitations to her ball; where

> "——' Wreathed smiles' went round, and speeches
> Fine, forced, and plentiful—as peaches;
> And costly wines on every side
> Poured their bright current far and wide."

And what *rôle*, it may be asked, did my father enact in this brilliant drama? I am proud to answer, that it was one so dignified and irreproachable, that Lady Madelaine herself, had she had time to remark it, must have felt how greatly her own consequence was enhanced by the noble bearing of her husband. They were occasionally seen together in public; especially at the Opera, where she had secured a box next to that of Lady Devereux; and, on these occasions, the manly beauty and graceful bearing of Mr. Tilden never failed to elicit both comment and curiosity. Who was he? Where did his money come from? These were the two principal queries; and, although they were frequently answered, it was always by inference or surmise; for the "set" into which his marriage had introduced him, were as little likely to know anything of the late firm of Osbaldiston and Co., as of the leading tea-mart at Pekin. That he was a man of refined tastes and fastidious habits was visible at once—there was nothing of the *parvenu* about him. Half a dozen titled acquaintance volunteered to propose him at their respective clubs; a few accommodating friends were anxious to transfer to him some of the best horses in England; but they quickly discovered that Mr. Tilden knew as much of horse-flesh as themselves, although he might not condescend to make his talent quite so profitable; and, in short, it was soon evident to every body who was anybody, and these composed Lady Madelaine's visiting list, that Mr. Tilden, be he who he might, was not a man who could either be "shelved" or "done."

And now, a circumstance has just struck me, which, from my own knowledge of the veracity of my narrative, never before presented itself to my mind; but which may very fairly have induced some doubt in those of such of my readers as may feel disposed to be difficult and hypercritical.

I have made repeated allusions to the refined mind and elegant tastes of my father, and there may be individuals, who, themselves highly-born and elaborately educated, may revert to the early training and occupation of the young merchant with a feeling of fastidiousness and contempt; and please themselves by believing in the impossibility of so utter a change as that which I have represented, and in comparatively so short a space of time. They have only, however, to remember that *human will* is a most powerful engine; and that where it was worked by ambition, pride, and self-respect, it was urged on by three of the great impulses of our nature. Nor was the social conversion of my father a sudden miracle, wrought by the mere possession of wealth; it was the slowly and steadily attained result of time, and distance, and application. I have myself not spared the satisfied ignorance of the traveled novice, who, anxious to assume the attributes of a connoisseur, dabbled in doubtful originals, and consigned to the address of his agent in England a case or two of worthless pictures: but those follies were the early mistakes of his inexperience, by which he had far too much sense and discrimination to be long misled. A total estrangement from the scenes, the associates, and the pursuits of his early manhood, threw the active mind of my father upon the individuals and habits of those by whom he was surrounded; and the same steady and strong will which had initiated him into the complicated mysteries of commerce, soon provided him with an *open sesame* to the more easily-attained conventionalisms of general society. Wherever he paused during his travels, he applied himself strenuously to the examination and comprehension of all that fell under his notice; while he was careful to select his casual society among that description of persons with whom he was desirous thenceforth to associate on equal terms. His evident wealth and total want of pretension rendered this by no means so difficult a matter as at first sight it may appear. Long voyages at sea, in the infancy of steam, and the generalizing accommodations of foreign posting houses, were able aids to his design. But who that has traveled, even of late years, has not experienced the truth which I am here endeavoring to enforce! Suffice it that my father did succeed to the full extent of his wishes; and that at the period of his marriage with Lady Madelaine Glenhillan he was at once a finished gentleman and a complete man of the world; and perhaps he had the more readily adopted the tastes and usages of the noble and the wealthy, because in the outset of his career of ambition *he had nothing to undo.*

It is only those who have trammeled themselves with low-bred associates, and degraded their own minds by low-bred habits, who cannot rise with their fortunes; and this is a fact which the narrow-minded insolence of the "exclusive" would do well to learn, instead of affecting to believe that his "order" came into the world after "every god had set his seal" upon it, while all other classes of society were branded with the mark of Cain.

To this, my reader's first possible objection, not only to the positive veracity, but even to the verisimilitude of my family sketch, he may also advance the improbability of the decision and the world-wisdom of which I have shown my mother to be possessed at so early an age as nineteen; but, should he indeed do so, he can know little of woman's nature. With women, I do not hesitate to affirm that intellect, strong will, and extraordinary powers of perspicacity

and *fitness*, are of no particular age. Watch an intelligent girl as she passes from childhood into youth, and my argument will be at once borne out. I am hazarding no rash opinion. The assertion is founded upon extensive experience. Generally speaking, the youth at sixteen is still a boy, absorbed by his lexicon, his boat, and his pony; but the girl who at sixteen is not a woman, alike in intellect and in *heart*, bids fair to die a child or a simpleton at the close of a long life. All children, particularly those who are banished to the nursery, and consigned to the companionship of hirelings, necessarily hear many things which they are not supposed to remark, far less to understand; but the young are peculiarly susceptible to all that is passing about them, and nothing falls to the ground unheeded which is brought under their observation.

In comparative infancy boys experience this external influence far less than their sisters. Their habits, at once boisterous and active, afford to them fewer opportunities of hearing discussions, and arguments, and inferences, relating to social ties and social usages. The sedentary amusements of girls lend themselves, on the contrary, not only to momentary attention, but to after-speculation. Jemima, as she trims her frock, is frequently employed in wondering what mamma meant last night by telling Mrs. Smith that Miss Jones had jilted Mr. Brown, because she discovered that Mr. Robinson was a richer man; and when the frock is completed a day or two afterwards, she is very probably still occupied in wondering whether, when she is a little older, she shall ever jilt any one, and if it is a pleasant amusement, and what it really means. Fanny, as she dresses her doll, bids her be good and quiet, and then she shall have a rich husband, and ride in a carriage, and *do just as she likes*; for mamma told papa yesterday, when he was angry with her, that she would do as she liked—while the girl of thirteen already begins to criticise her mother's beauty, and to ask herself what will be the probable effects produced by her own.

Where there are strong powers of mind, these are merely subordinate speculations. The intellect, as it awakens, is insatiable; and it seizes upon every aliment within its reach. How often do we all witness instances of this fact? How often do we see the really clever and intelligent girl sink into the dull and mindless woman! Woe be to them by whom the holy lamp of intelligence was suffered to flicker and go out!

Gifted with extraordinary powers of perception, of retention, and of analysis, my mother, under the able tuition of the world-worshiping Lady Sinclair, was at fifteen a woman in tact and fashion. She fully understood the privileges of her high birth, the advantages of her extreme beauty, and the necessity of making both contribute to her after-establishment. These were her aunt's lessons. The world itself, ere long, taught her others. Intoxicated by the adulation of the men and the envy of the women, she might have become insolent, had she not felt the *impolicy* of such a weakness; and the same admirable tact which preserved her in this instance, saved her a second time, when, as her flatterers fell away, "each after each," on discovering the slender amount of her dowry, she learnt that even she—the highly-born and the beautiful—could be put into a humiliating competition with — money! Then, again, her woman-wit lent its aid; and, where a weaker mind would have become bitter, she only became wise. Her after-fate confirmed this wisdom. In the seclusion of her father's castle, and rendered painfully aware of that father's trammeled position, she had time to revert to the past. She began to concede that the fortune-hunting adorers, by whom she had been first worshiped and then deserted, might advance a valid excuse for their apostacy—she began to discover that there was wisdom as well as wit in the old song, which declares that

"Not even love can live on flowers;"

and—she married my father.

Lady Madelaine Tilden had not studied for the nine long years of awakening womanhood under such able tutors as the world and Lady Sinclair; she had not suffered mortification and disappointment; she had not felt her pride prostrated, her self-love wounded, and her heart made the toy of idle and interested foplings; she had not been suddenly withdrawn from the giddy vortex of fashion and celebrity, and buried alive in the Highlands, to muse over the motives, the impulses, the feelings, and the weaknesses of those among whom she had previously lived, to reappear in the same bright and busy world a woman in stature, but a child at heart.

Remembering my mother vividly, as I still do, I feel satisfied that, with the same experience (had that been possible), she would have played at fifteen the same cold, and haughty, and decisive part. Age has no influence upon principles, and feelings, and prejudices, like those of Lady Madelaine Tilden.

The season was at an end. The woods and glades of Rooksley were in all their beauty. The domain was extensive, and in admirable taste. If a fault could be found, it existed in the absence of all ancient timber — the leafy honors of Rooksley Chace had been stricken down by the hammer of the auctioneer. It is true, that great skill had been evinced in repairing this evil, in so far as it was susceptible of reparation; but the antique grandeur of the mansion seemed to frown forth, in haughty scorn of the new generation of forest timber that was growing up about it.

Lady Devereux, on her first visit to the Chace, laughingly told her cousin that the new acquisition of Mr. Tilden reminded her of himself: it was very stately and very magnificent, but *it wanted time!*

"At last, my sweet Madelaine," said her husband, as for the second time they sat *tête-à-tête* by lamplight under their own roof, "at last you are all my own, and I have time to ask you a thousand questions, which you, more strangely still, have time to answer. And, first, how do you like Rooksley?"

"It is impossible not to like a place upon which the Duke of Dorchester prided himself so much," replied my mother, who had never been surprised out of her *nil admirari* since her arrival in Grosvenor Square; "but it sadly wants timber."

'Our woods are very promising, and we must

have patience," said my father, in whose voice there was a slight tone of disappointment.

"And you must excuse me if I add, Mr. Tilden, that the house as sadly requires—inmates. We are positively lost here alone."

"But just now, my dear Madelaine, repose and quiet are so essential to you. Your roses have waned fearfully during the past season. I shall not be happy until I see them bloom again."

"Have we any neighborhood?" asked the young wife in her turn.

"I have not yet made the inquiry. I only fear that we shall ascertain the fact too soon. In so fine a sporting country, there can be little doubt that we shall find many resident families, who will not fail to seize so admirable an opportunity of making the acquaintance of the fair and fashionable Lady Madelaine Tilden."

"Provided that they prove visitable, it will be a blessing;" said my mother, as she suppressed a yawn; "Glenfillan has perfectly disgusted me with empty, echoing, overgrown family houses."

My father walked to the open window, and drawing back the curtain, looked out upon the beautiful expanse of wood and water, which lay steeped in moonlight, beyond the lawn. The deer were lying in groups upon the soft green sward of the home-park, and their long shadows formed fantastic outlines upon the grass. The nightingales were answering each other from the leaf-laden boughs. At intervals a hare started from the underwood, and scudded across the open glades, brushing away the heavy drops of dew which fringed the blades of the long grass; and the peculiar cry of the pheasants broke the silence for an instant, as it rose from the more distant preserves.

It was a scene of rich and tranquil English landscape beauty; and as my father mentally ran over the various and vaunted spots which he had visited during his wanderings, he could recall nothing by which it seemed to him to be rivaled in pure and placid loveliness.

After having contemplated the enchanting view for a time in silence, he could not refrain from expatiating upon its extreme beauty to Lady Madelaine, who rose languidly from her chair, as if rather with a courteous desire to give him pleasure, than from an idea of receiving any herself. My mother was no whit a sentimentalist: she had never been taught to consider the country otherwise than as the most correct refuge after the season, and that portion of the British empire in which the flowers were grown that composed her bouquets. But even she was not altogether proof against the spell of the quiet holiness of nature: and, for a time, she gazed long and silently on the clear glory of that summer night; watched the reflection of the bright stars, as they appeared to dance upon the undulating ripple of the lake; and then sent her long and searching glances deep into the blue and cloudless sky, over which they were strown like diamond-studs upon a regal mantle: while the moon, that lay lovingly upon the open glades, and on the glittering waters, only touched the summits of the tall trees, and crowned them with silver, leaving broad masses of shadow about and beneath them, which lent a mysterious indistinctness to the distance.

Hers was not, however, a nature to remain long thus absorbed. The very beauty of the scene soon suggested other and more worldly ideas. She began to think how admirably the park lent itself to the idea of a brilliant *fête champêtre*. Fireworks would have a delightful effect, if let off from the island on the lake. Nothing could be prettier! And two or three boats, gaily decked with streamers and colored lights, would be fairy-like and magical, as they appeared and disappeared among the overhanging willows. Then she peopled the lawn with dancing booths, marquees, and parti-colored groups; and then she heaved a sigh, as she remembered that they were utter strangers in the county, and that, to do all this, the few friends whom they expected would not suffice; while, even for the advent of those few, she had yet a weary month to wait.

"Is it not calm and lovely?" asked my father at length, as with affectionate anxiety he threw a shawl over her shoulders, and passed his arm about her waist. "The long, deep sigh, to which you just now gave utterance, awoke me, my sweet wife, from the most delicious train of thought in which I had ever indulged. Dare I tell you what was its subject?"

"As it would seem that we were similarly engaged, we have alike done treason to the beauty upon which we looked;" was the reply; "for in me, also, it induced a *château en Espagne*, that was not without its charms."

"Will you not confide it to me?"

"I see no reason why I should refuse. I was picturing to myself how beautiful a *fête* we might give here, and how well everything would *tell*, for no natural accessory is wanted; when I suddenly remembered that we knew no one, and that, consequently, I could do nothing, save console myself with the Italian proverb, *Soffri il male, e aspetta il bene*."

"And I," said the husband, as he looked down fondly, and yet somewhat mournfully, upon the beautiful face, on which the moonlight shed its clear, calm radiance; "I was thinking with how proud a heart I might one day see you lead forth *our child* to gambol on that velvet lawn, and to sport beside those glittering waters. I was thinking—"

"I beseech you, do not read me a homily;" said my mother, withdrawing herself from his clasp with a slight shudder, and returning to her seat: "that is a subject which I by no means wish to dwell on. I assure you, Mr. Tilden, that to a young and fashionable woman such a prospect is by no means a pleasant one."

"But to a wife, Madelaine—"

"Ha, that is the text of another homily. Fifteen years hence I shall myself, perhaps, babble of maternal duties; at present I do not affect to understand them, and am only thankful that, at all events, such things have been created as nursery-maids and governesses."

"One day I trust that you will feel differently," said my father, forcing a smile.

"Perhaps;" was the cold reply; "but at present I will only ask you to ring for the chessboard."

CHAPTER VIII.

The dreaded month went by more rapidly than the Lady Madelaine had anticipated. It was impossible to be thrown entirely upon my

father's society without appreciating his many admirable qualities; and had not the twelve previous weeks of dissipation, coquetry, and folly, thoroughly unhinged the mind, and perverted the feelings of the young wife, she might, possibly, have learnt to love her husband as he deserved. But, alas! those twelve short weeks had been sufficient to destroy this hope forever.

Let it not be thought that my mother wilfully, and with her eyes open, plunged herself into positions of difficulty, and resolved to indulge her own predilections *conte qui conte*. Far from it. Had she imagined that Lord Otterford was a deliberate and cold-blooded profligate, who was amusing himself at the expense of her vanity and inexperience, she would have shrunk from him with horror. It was that very vanity and inexperience which blinded her. Had she gone a step further, and suspected that he had yet darker and more guilty designs, she would, in all probability, have sought for protection and refuge in the affection of the man to whom she had given her hand; but no such idea ever crossed the pure mind of Lady Madelaine. She was vain, imprudent, and exacting. She required homage, but she never dreamt of paying it by a return. The haughtiness of her natural disposition made her jealous of all interference on the part of her husband; and the line of conduct which she had adopted immediately after her marriage had so thoroughly emancipated her from his control, that she soon ceased to understand that he had any right to exert it. It was true—as her friend Lady Devereux had sententiously observed, in one of those hours of female confidence which are productive, at times, of a vast amount of evil—that Mr. Tilden had rescued her from the monotonous exile of Glenfillan, and surrounded her with magnificence; but what had *she* not done for *him?* Look at her rank—her connexion—her beauty! Was he not almost old enough to be her father? And—her dear Madelaine must forgive her for speaking frankly—was he not, before their marriage, a nobody!

All this was undeniable—and upon these premises my mother acted. There can be no doubt that there must have been moments in which the question *would* arise in her own heart, in how far her renewal of intimacy with Lord Otterford was either desirable or correct; but, if it were so, the extreme pride, which was her besetting sin, must equally in those moments have proved her worst enemy, by blinding her to the danger she had so thoughtlessly evoked.

Be all this, however, as it may, the month of matrimonial domestication wore away swiftly; the neighborhood proving not only visitable but sociable. My father's surmise was a correct one. The fame of the dashing Lady Madelaine Tilden had preceded her, and all the country were anxious to be numbered among her acquaintance. The men were prepared to lose their hearts, and the women to profit by so admirable an opportunity of imitating the dress and style of a celebrated beauty. It is true, that the extremely cold and sometimes arrogant bearing of my mother, led a few of the most important families to doubt whether, after all, the long-talked-of Tildens would prove any very great acquisition; and to contrast the haughty and indolent courtesies of their new neighbor with the easy and winning manners of the Ladies Trevor; but, as the frank politeness of my father offered an agreeable relief from the supercilious *insouciance* of his wife, and invariably healed the wounds which her indifference had inflicted on the self-love of their visitors, no decided affront was given to the female portion of the guests; while the extreme beauty and inherent love of admiration which made my mother so attractive to the other sex, sufficiently propitiated their husbands and brothers, to induce them to believe and to declare that Lady Madelaine Tilden was an angel!

As a matter of course, invitations poured in at Rooksley; and among the rest, came one from the Vernons, whose estate joined that of my father. Mrs. Vernon was a widow, whose husband had represented the county in parliament; and who, although he had been dead for several years, had never quite recovered her loss. She was a gentle, amiable woman, still possessing the remains of great beauty, but thoroughly indifferent to everything, save the happiness of her son and daughter, at whose entreaty she had emerged from retirement, to make the acquaintance of the new owners of Rooksley.

Frederick Vernon was a fine young man of six-and-twenty, with a full appreciation of his personal and worldly advantages; which latter attribute I mention rather to give a proof of his consistency, than from conceiving it to be an extraordinary feature of his history which required to be put on record. He had recently returned from a tour of Europe, and was strongly tinged with foreign habits and ideas. To him the sojourn of Vernon Priory, beautiful as it was, would have been insupportable, had not the extreme affection which he bore to his mother and sister made every spot which they inhabited not only bearable, but pleasant to him. Frederic Vernon was not constituted for retirement. His talents were dazzling, but by no means solid; his acquirements were barely respectable; but he had the tact to appear far wiser than he was—a secret more generally diffused in society than it is supposed to be, and particularly easy to practice by a handsome young man of good property, whom no one is vastly disposed to criticise with severity. His success abroad had been considerable; and it was even rumored that he had been requested to quit the territories of a petty Italian *Duca* within twenty-four hours, although it had never occurred to Mr. Vernon to have any political opinion out of his own country; but he *had* danced, and sighed, and looked love-lorn in a quarter where such proceedings were not admissible; and he accordingly obeyed without demur the obliging suggestion of the official who waited upon him at his hotel; and passed out of the duchy on the following morning, carrying away with him a heavy heart and an exceedingly magnificent brilliant ring.

No one could exactly decide how this traveling adventure became whispered in England, as his valet was, of course, as secret as the grave; and the affair was altogether too delicate to have borne mention from himself; but, nevertheless, it *was* whispered; and it is, therefore, not surprising that Mr. Frederic Vernon was considered, and considered himself to be,

the hero of the county. He had fits of abstraction—in society; occasionally started painfully as his eye fell upon the ring; sung one particular and pathetic Italian ballad with peculiar pathos and expression to his guitar; and was, in short, a drawing-room Corydon.

Emily Vernon was a charming girl of eighteen. Tall, and fair, and gentle; tenderly attached to her widowed mother, and devotedly fond of her handsome and sentimental brother; without one thought of self, or one craving for admiration.

Mr. Tilden had been from home when the Vernons called, and my mother had returned the visit without him, by leaving cards at their lodge-gate during her drive; nor had she considered it necessary to mention the circumstance, until the arrival of the dinner-card; when she carelessly inquired of my father if he considered it expedient to accept the invitation.

"Since you request my opinion, I should say decidedly yes;" was the reply. "On passing their place, a day or two since, I inquired to whom it belonged, and was informed that the late proprietor represented the county during several sessions, and that the ladies of the family were almost domesticated at Rooksley, with the daughters of the duke!"

"And Félicie tells me," followed up my mother, "that Mrs. Vernon's son, who is now at the Priory, is a sort of *hero de roman*, who eloped with an Italian Principessa, fought a duel with the prince, and was expelled the country by the pope himself—a *personage*, in short, who is contraband over half Europe."

"Ha, indeed! Is it so? Am I fated to find my old traveling comrade, Frederic Vernon, in my nearest neighbor?" said my father with a smile. "The name was not sufficiently uncommon to strike me: but the affair with the Italian *Duchessa* settles the point."

"And was he really involved in a duel, and afterwards expelled the country?" asked my mother, roused for a moment into a feeling of interest.

"So it was said; and it is certain that his disparition from the duchy was so sudden that he did not favor his friends by any leave-taking. There was decidedly some mystery attached to him; but as we never afterwards chanced to meet, I am unable to afford any precise information on the subject."

"We will dine with the Vernons, at all events," said the bride; "I will cancel my acceptance to Lady O'Halloran; the hall is at least four miles from hence; and the Vernons live nearly at the park gate; the fatigue will be much lessened by the change."

And having so decided, my mother once more bent her fair head over her desk; gave the note which she had already written to Lady O'Halloran to her spaniel for a plaything; wrote an acceptance to Mrs. Vernon with her best crowquill; and then threw herself back among her cushions, to wonder what effect her own beauty would produce upon a man who had been expelled from an Italian duchy, to save the honor of its female sovereign.

For the first time since her arrival in the country, Lady Madelaine took considerable interest in the operations of Félicie, on the evening of Mrs. Vernon's dinner. She resolutely resisted all the endeavors of her attendant to induce her to make her *début* in the country *en grande dame:* refused to wear any ornament; and, notwithstanding the voluble horror and visible mortification of the *scabrette*, declared her intention of eschewing all *coiffure* save her own magnificent hair. Félicie urged, entreated, and eventually wept over the extraordinary resolution of her mistress; and closed drawers and caskets with a series of gestures of offended dignity which were quite indescribable; although she afterwards conceded to Mrs. Lockall, the housekeeper, that it was a comfort to know, in spite of the *caprice* which induced *Milady* to go out for the first time in a costume better suited to a *petite fille*, than to the wife of a *millionaire*, that she had seldom seen her look so well; and therefore, it was easy to imagine how she *would* have looked had she been *mise comme il faut!*

It was, however, as I need scarcely explain, no part of Lady Madelaine's system to owe admiration to a ribbon or a set of baubles. If she could not command it by the graces of her person, she scorned to win it by the magnificence of her attire; or to share it with diamonds and gauzes. That she had judged wisely, in the present instance, she at once perceived by the expression of her husband's countenance, as she joined him in the library, previous to their departure for Vernon Priory. She had indeed, as Felicie wisely remarked, seldom looked so beautiful. There was an utter absence of pretension in her whole appearance; a dignified simplicity in her dress and bearing, which delighted my father. She had evidently no intention of overawing her new acquaintance by the power of her wealth—that most undertoned of all ambition—and her extreme loveliness was so conspicuous in the utter absence of extraneous ornament, that, as he raised her hand to his lips, he could not resist the utterance of a compliment more lover-like than matrimonial.

Five minutes' drive from their own park gate brought them to that of Mrs. Vernon; and even in the twilight my father could not forbear remarking the magnificence of the old avenue through which they approached the house, which was surrounded on all sides by elms and beeches of stately growth. The building itself appeared to be coeval with the timber. A great portion of the exterior was overgrown with ivy, amid which the lofty lancet-headed windows, streaming with light, produced at that hour a magical effect; while the deep perspective of the principal entrance, whose receding arches were terminated by massive doors of iron-studded oak, gave an antique stateliness to the edifice, and heightened its monastic character.

Considerably less extensive than Rooksley, Vernon Priory was infinitely more attractive to a stranger. No woodman's axe had ever sounded in that quiet spot. It was easy to see that sire and son had alike respected the place of their birth, and the home of their ancestors. When a giant tree lay prone within the limits of the moss-grown fences, it was because time had eaten away its stout heart, and relaxed its weakened roots; and while the scattered rooks cawed their hoarse requiem over the prostrate ruin, it conveyed no reproach to the lords of the soil. No croupier's rake had ever swept

away the leafy honors of the Vernon woods; no dice box had ever rattled its triumph over their sturdy trunks. Like the treasure of the pre-adamite sultans, to which travelers tell us that every monarch is compelled to add his share, while none are permitted to withdraw any portion of that already hoarded, so did every succeeding Vernon plant his saplings in the soil of his ancestors; while each would have considered it as sacrilege to destroy the work, or counteract the intention of his predecessor.

When my father and Lady Madelaine entered Mrs. Vernon's drawing-room, the party, which was by no means a large one, had already assembled; the hostess received her stranger guests with a quiet elegance of demeanor which accorded well with her stately although faded beauty, and her deep mourning dress; and after having presented her son and daughter, proceeded to introduce my mother to the lady who occupied a portion of the sofa to which she led her, while my father renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Vernon.

This lady, who chanced to be Lady O'Halloran, found an immediate topic of conversation, in her regret that Mrs Vernon should have proved more fortunate than herself, in being the first to receive their new neighbor; and then she proceeded to congratulate herself on having at least so agreeable an opportunity of making her acquaintance. Lady Madelaine bowed and smiled, although she felt greatly disposed to yawn; but she found the volubility of her new friend less importunate when she discovered that there was no necessity for her to offer any reply; so she continued to bow and smile at intervals during the five minutes which preceded dinner; and she had scarcely left her seat, and taken the arm of Mr. Vernon on its announcement, ere Lady O'Halloran assured Dr. James, the rector, under whose escort she was preparing to follow, that Lady Madelaine Tilden had been cruelly misrepresented by her correspondent, Mrs. Gordon, for that she had seldom met with a more simply-mannered or sensible person. The worthy gentlewoman was not aware, or had forgotten that "the beard does not make the philosopher;" and that it was very possible for a fashionable beauty to be all that she had heard, when she felt it expedient to assert herself; and yet patiently to suffer the garrulous civility of an elderly gentlewoman where she was anxious to disarm local criticism.

Lady O'Halloran was, accordingly, by no means the only person whose golden opinion my mother won that evening. Mrs. Vernon was delighted at the prospect of obtaining such a friend for her gentle Emily; who, on her part, was enchanted with the quiet grace and high-breeding of the new mistress of Rooksley. But of all those whom she thralled, not one was so thoroughly the slave of her fascinations as Mr. Frederic Vernon. He assured Mrs. Alexander, who sat on his left hand, that Lady Madelaine Tilden reminded him almost painfully of a woman of high rank whom he had known abroad; and then he sighed, and glanced down upon his brilliant ring, and fell into a fit of abstraction; during which his dark blue eyes were riveted on the table-cloth, and he looked like one who lived rather upon the memory of the past, than the realities of the present.

When the ladies retired to the drawing-room, my mother turned the light of her most sunny smiles upon Emily Vernon. She was precisely the person calculated to please a handsome young married woman of high fashion. Strikingly pretty, and highly accomplished, she was nevertheless so gentle and so new to the world, that her attractions were veiled by her extreme timidity—she had not within her the elements of a rival! Nothing could have been so fortunate; and, acting upon this conviction, Lady Madelaine, instead of closing her eyes, and throwing herself upon a sofa to await the reappearance of the gentlemen, at once entered into conversation with her young hostess; and ere twenty minutes had elapsed, she was seated at Miss Vernon's harp, explaining to her a difficult passage in a popular piece of music; after which, as enthusiastically as though she had only that one delighted auditor, she swept the chords with a master hand, and electrified the assembled party by her brilliant execution; and then, suddenly suffering the strings to vibrate into silence, once more established herself beside the astonished and delighted girl, and resumed the conversation which the music had interrupted.

"You know Rooksley well, I understand," she said in a subdued voice.

"Oh, very well—too well. It was almost as much my home as this, before the duke's"—She paused, not knowing how best to shape her meaning.

"I understand;" said Lady Madelaine as she laid her own beautiful hand upon that of her companion; "but, Miss Vernon, you must cease to say 'too well,' or I shall despair of making it again agreeable to you. Remember that you are my nearest neighbor, and that I shall depend greatly upon your kindness. Doubtlessly you had your own apartment at Rooksley; you must come back, and take possession once more"

Tears swelled in the mild eyes of her listener.

"Mr Tilden and I are at present *tristes comme des bonnets de nuit*," pursued my mother; "but we promise to behave better ere long. I am supposed to be worn out by the London season, and am consequently sentenced to a month's quiet. I shall not regret it so much if you consent occasionally to share my solitude We expect a shooting party in August, and Mr. Tilden is already full of anxiety about his preserves,—in fact, he is endeavoring to become a respectable country gentleman; which is, I imagine, quite correct under the circumstances."

"His Grace of Dorchester was immensely popular," said the eldest, over-dressed, Miss Alexander, who sat near them.

My mother turned upon her a freezing look of non-recognition, and then calmly withdrew her eyes.

"You are not, I believe, Lady Madelaine Tilden, acquainted with Miss Alexander," said Emily Vernon, whose cheek was crimson with confusion. "Will you permit me to present her?"

The ladies bowed; and at the conclusion of

the ceremony my mother threw herself back upon the sofa, and made no reply to the remark of Miss Alexander, that her mother had done herself the honor of calling at Rooksley. It was no part of her system to be condescending and approachable to all the county.

The gentlemen and the coffee appeared together; and Mrs. Vernon hastened to make known to her new neighbors Dr. James, the worthy rector of the parish, and chaplain to his grace the Duke of Dorchester. Nothing could be more amiable than the reception which he met with from my mother; and Miss Alexander was once more compelled to feel how charming Lady Madelaine Tilden could make herself when she pleased, and how exceedingly ill-bred she was when she thought proper to be so. Indeed, as Dr. James afterwards remarked, the Lady Madelaine Tilden not only met him in the most charming spirit in the world, but even summoned her husband, who was at the moment in deep conversation with young Vernon, in order that he might reiterate her own friendly assurances of a universal welcome at Rooksley.

And Dr. James was quite correct in this statement. When he was led up to my mother, Miss Vernon was summoned to her harp; and, when Miss Vernon obeyed the summons, the reverend doctor remained standing before his fair and smiling interlocutor, until a gesture brought her husband to her side, leaving Mr. Vernon *planté* in the centre of the room; who, as a matter of course, no sooner saw the doctor engrossed by Mr. Tilden, than he hastened to establish himself in the seat which had been vacated by his sister.

It was a feeling compounded of coquetry and curiosity, which led my mother to exert her utmost fascinations against Mr. Vernon. She was not new enough to flattery and adulation to value them for their own sake; but her vanity was piqued in this instance, and she was at present thrown upon every passing folly for amusement. She did not even remark (as she did subsequently) that Frederic Vernon was amazingly handsome, and that he had the sweetest voice and the whitest hand in the world; she only thought of the *Duchessa*, and was anxious to see if, indeed, as Félicie had informed her, "*il n'avoit plus de gout pour le sexe.*"

Need I say that she had arrived at a totally different decision before her carriage was announced; or that, as he handed her up the steps, and saw Mr. Tilden take his place beside her, Mr. Vernon believed himself to be once more desperately in love?

My mother left one heavy heart behind her when she quitted Vernon Priory; and that heart beat in the bosom of Miss Caroline Alexander. She had long loved the truant knight, who had evidently become the slave of the beautiful and fashionable stranger; while Mr. Vernon, on his side, had ever, previously to this evening, appeared more happy in her society than in that of any other marriageable young lady in the county; and, with that unfortunate facility common to good-looking and well-dowried girls, who are frequently thrown into the society of handsome and idle men of sentimental tendencies, she had very readily allowed herself to believe that the inclination was mutual; an opinion strongly supported by her mother, a dashing widow, who was quite willing to see her daughters established; and by her elder sister, who being a year or two Mr. Vernon's senior, had no designs upon him on her own account.

It will be easily understood, therefore, that the undisguised admiration of Mr. Vernon for my mother, sent a pang to the heart of Caroline Alexander; and when, on his return to the drawing-room, he proceeded at once to the instrument where his sister had again taken up her station, instead of sharing the lounge upon which she was herself seated alone, she had great difficulty in suppressing the tears which rose to her eyes. She had dreaded, during his absence from the room, that on his reappearance she should be condemned to listen to his admiration of the new star which had risen in their hemisphere; but she did expect that she should have been the auditor whom he would select; and she accordingly comforted herself with the recollection that Lady Madelaine Tilden was a married woman; very heroically compelled herself to join in the comments which were made upon her grace and beauty directly she had taken leave; and had also quite determined on agreeing with her recreant lover (for such she believed him to be) in every particular, however provoking his hyperbole might prove.

The unexpected movement which he had made, however, on entering the room, and his utter silence on the subject of the departed guest, counteracted all her projects; and as she watched him, half buried in a large chair, with his eyes fixed upon the carpet, and the thick masses of his auburn hair falling partially over his face, she for the first time felt a bitter pang of jealousy and doubt. The memory of the *Duchessa* did not affect her—but the apparition of my mother rendered her wretched; and the rather as she was compelled to acknowledge to herself that it was an effect produced without effort. Nothing could be more unpretending than Lady Madelaine's manner; nothing more simple than her costume. What would it be should Frederic be fated to see her in all the magnificence of dress and fashion, as she had been described in Mrs. Gordon's letter to Lady O'Halloran! Poor Caroline looked down upon her own elaborate toilet, and could have wept. It was a relief to her overcharged heart when her mother's carriage was announced, and they, in their turn, departed from the Priory, which had so long been the centre of all her hopes and of all her ambition.

Nothing could be more simple than that the Vernons, who, in addition to their near neighborhood, claimed, through the gentlemen, a previous acquaintance, should become speedily intimate at Rooksley. The fair Emily proved an admirable *cicerone* to my mother through the mysteries and beauties of her own domain; while she soon discovered that Mr. Vernon rode as well as Sir James Dornton, and was even more careful. Under these circumstances, the time ceased to hang so heavy indeed, when in addition to her new inmates, for such they nearly were, Lady Madelaine found herself absorbed in a never-ending round of dinner engagements, she had no longer a moment unemployed.

My father, through the medium of Mr. Vernon, soon made acquaintance with all the gentry on his own side of the county; and was prevailed upon to make some extensive purchases in land, which brought him into close contact with the farming interest. His old habits of business enabled him to do this at less loss than generally attends upon such speculations; and he derived perpetual amusement from his schemes of improvement and amelioration. At the suggestion of Emily Vernon, my mother adopted the schools which had been established by the Ladies Trevor, under the sanction of the duke, and spared no expense in rendering them "model-schools." The children wore the prettiest of all pretty uniforms; they had a dinner in the servants' hall at Rooksley every Sunday; the teachers were amply supplied with books of every description; and, in short, the gentle Emily was rejoiced to see all the schemes carried out which had been the day-dream of her former friends. But the Ladies Trevor, nevertheless, had done for these local schools what my mother was by no means inclined to imitate: they had watched over the individual welfare and progress of their little scholars; and, through the medium of their artless communications, they had ascertained the necessities and struggles of many a deserving family, and had thus been enabled to relieve their wants with judgment as well as kindness.

Into the detail of the establishment, my mother was, on the contrary, quite incompetent to enter. Her ideas of poverty did not extend beyond the deprivation of particular luxuries, or, at worst, comforts; but she liked to see the children looking pretty and well-dressed in church on the Sunday; and it was pleasant to feel that it was her own work. She really felt glad, too, when Miss Vernon suggested that the school-house, which stood on the verge of the Rooksley estate, was in a dilapidated condition; and that on driving out with her friend to look at it, she discovered that it was an unsightly barn-like building, which had been erected with a view to do the greatest possible good at the smallest possible amount of outlay. This was a charming circumstance; and before they left the village, a cottage, which chanced to be untenanted, was at once secured by Lady Madelaine for the use of the children until their own school-house could be rebuilt; and, immediately on their return home, my father was commissioned to write to town for architectural drawings, from which a design might be selected to replace the present building.

No proposition could more thoroughly have delighted Mr. Tilden. He was rejoiced to see so wholesome a taste superseding the frivolous pursuits by which his beautiful wife had hitherto been totally engrossed; and, as he lost not a moment in complying with her desire, the plans soon arrived, and were at once submitted to the fair speculators.

After great deliberation, the choice of Miss Vernon was absolutely negatived. It was too small, too plain, and too insignificant. Lady Madelaine was anxious for an erection which should be at once imposing and picturesque; and, when my father smiled at her earnestness, she looked serious, and talked of improving the estate. Mr Vernon agreed with her in every particular; and they accordingly proceeded together, and selected a spot at the entrance of the village, where a handsome gothic edifice was soon in progress, wherein all the poor children in the county might have been commodiously lodged and taught. Such being the case, the centre was appropriated to the schools, and the wings were fitted up as alms-houses; an arrangement which at once rendered Lady Madelaine popular throughout the parish. The respectable inhabitants got up an address of thanks, which was presented by Dr. James; and the sensation was so new and so delightful, that for a time my mother was engrossed by this novel occupation; but, unfortunately, just as the walls began to show themselves above the ground, Rooksley suddenly became full of guests, and the thoughts of *la dame Châtelaine* suffered a serious revulsion.

The first arrivals were Sir Herbert and Lady Devereux, who had, as her ladyship expressed it, been stupifying at their place in Kent, until the happy moment when they should fly to Rooksley. She cast a surprised and rather chilling glance upon Miss Vernon, whom she found calmly employed at her embroidery-frame in my mother's morning-room; and, the necessary introduction over, threw herself upon a sofa near her hostess, and forthwith plunged into a stream of fashionable jargon totally unintelligible to the simple-minded Emily.

"And now, *cara!*" she continued, after a momentary pause, "how have you managed to exist so long alone in the country? You really deserve to be canonized! So idolized as you are in the world, your virtue must have been Spartan to bear you up. I am well aware that *cosa nuova sempre piace*, but this of yours was really an extreme case. What have you done! Where have you been? I am not cruel enough to taunt you by asking—whom have you seen? I suppose you have a parson in the parish. I believe there always is one where there is a church, and I saw yours on my way here—*et après?*"

"*Après*," was the reply; "there is our neighbor—our near neighbor, Mrs. Vernon—the mother of my young friend here;" (Lady Devereux) drew her eyebrows together, and again glanced at Emily) "her daughter and her son, who is now walking with Mr. Tilden:—then there are half a score of county families within twenty miles, with all of whom we have made a sort of acquaintance."

"Ah, yes—I perceive. Will you allow me to ring for my maid, and change my dress?"

"I will accompany you," said my mother, rising as she spoke. "I am quite sure that Miss Vernon will excuse me."

"Otterford will be here to dinner," observed Lady Devereux, as she lounged out of the room. "Sir Herbert wished him to accompany us; but he was not proof against a journey with Damon and Phillis; that is, after their loves had been rendered dull and legitimate by matrimony." And she disappeared, followed by my mother.

"And is this the chosen friend of Lady Madelaine Tilden?" murmured Emily Vernon to herself, as her eye followed their retiring figures. "Alas! alas! how unfavorable is the impression which she has made on me, beautiful as she is!"

CHAPTER IX.

The distaste which Miss Vernon instinctively felt towards Lady Devereux was returned with interest by Lord Otterford towards her brother. When they met, there was a mutual feeling of distrust and suspicion. The handsome person, insinuating manners, and romantic reputation of Mr. Vernon, had rendered him highly acceptable to my mother; while to my father, comparatively in a land of strangers, he had stood in the position of an old friend—a link between the past and the present. I have already hinted that he was a vain man; and I am bound in justice to add that he had become passionately attached to my mother, although she had never for a moment suspected that such was the case. His quiet but zealous attentions had flattered her vanity; his evident admiration had gratified her self-love; he had amused her idleness, and piqued her curiosity—but that was all.

Nor had Frederic Vernon any ulterior designs in his adoration of the beautiful wife of his friend. He loved her ardently, but he never looked beyond the moment. He was jealous of every hour that was spent out of her presence; happy under the influence of her smiles; proud of the confidence with which she honored him; and anxious to render himself necessary to her by every means in his power. Had he been suddenly deprived of her friendship, he would have felt it bitterly. It would have been to him a far more severe trial than his romantic separation from the *Duchessa;* but he never suffered himself to speculate upon such a contingency, and so lived on, *au jour la journée*, occupied only in devising new methods of giving pleasure to the bright object of his homage.

But, as Lord Otterford could only form his judgment of others from his experience of himself, and of his own motives and impulses, so he could not for a moment imagine such a state of things as this. He saw before him a man eminently handsome, evidently well-bred, and palpably established as *l'ami de la maison*. He watched him closely for five minutes, and thenceforward honored him with his hatred. Lord Otterford patronized no half measures.

Was it not enough that throughout his sojourn at Rooksley, he should have Mr. Tilden for ever in his path? Before the party separated for the night, he had vowed vengeance against this new intruder. But how to accomplish it? "An idle brain is the devil's workshop," says a quaint old proverb; and man seldom prepares the anvil, that his satanic majesty fails to provide the hammer!

From the period of Lady Devereux's advent at Rooksley, each day witnessed some new arrival, until the expected party was complete. The gentle Emily was nearly domesticated with her new friends, and became completely so, when important business suddenly and unexpectedly called Mrs. Vernon to town. After having duly escorted his mother on her journey, and seen her safely established in the house of her sister, Frederic returned in all haste to the Priory; for his local knowledge and his ready kindness had rendered him so indispensable to my father, that they saw each other daily, almost hourly. His moments of active usefulness were given to Mr. Tilden; while those of relaxation and feeling were all devoted to his wife.

Rooksley became the scene of perpetual dissipation and amusement. The game had been well preserved, and the prowess of the sportsmen was sufficiently murderous to merit mention in the county paper. Nor was the slaughter within doors inferior to that without. Bright eyes did as certain execution as patent fowling pieces; and the wet days and the long evenings were perhaps more full of peril to the said sportsmen than was their own aim to the partridges and pheasants. More than one of them ere long abandoned the sport altogether, beneath the influence of some more potent attraction. Among the first—the ladies called them "rationals," and the gentlemen "deserters"—was Lord Otterford, at whose special instigation the party had originally been made. The sportsman, *par excellence*, whose admirable *tenue* and skilful shot might have suggested the description of a witty poet of more recent times—

> "——Ne'er was such a brown and green
> In gaiters or in jacket seen.
> Indeed no partridge could do less
> Than tremble at the shooting-dress,
> In which, through all the livelong day,
> Fresh and untired, he blazed away,
> Scrambling through bush and briar to trace
> Haply, but *half* another brace;
> Till, near the house, one might remark
> From both his barrels, just at dark,
> Two short, smart pops—ill-omened sound,
> Echoed o'er many a turnip-ground,
> Where coveys fed, in fear and sorrow,
> Prophetic of their fate to-morrow."

His secession was, under the circumstances, matter of amazement to all parties. Sir Herbert Devereux, who lived only during the hunting and shooting seasons, and contrived unaccountably to exist, he never thoroughly understood *how*, for the rest of the year, was unsparing in his sarcasms and comments; all of which produced upon his friend much the same impression as pumice flung against a rock. Lord Otterford was decidedly a man of character.

Surrounded by a phalanx of her own friends, and thus secure from all undue neighborly familiarity, my mother issued continual invitations to the families who had left their names at Rooksley; while she held herself excused from all return visits by the guests whom she was compelled to entertain at home; and among those who never failed to obey her summons were Mrs. Alexander and her daughters. The lady herself had a passion for making new acquaintance. She was never happy save in a crowd. The elder Miss Alexander, tall, dressy, showy, and perfectly self-possessed, felt that, at eight and twenty, there was no time for her to throw away in solitude, if she ever contemplated an establishment; while poor Caroline was eager to find herself in a house in which she was but too well aware that Frederic Vernon spent two-thirds of his time.

To Lady O'Halloran, the great attraction of Rooksley was the table. She was at once *gourmette* and *gourmande*. During her lord's life they had kept open house in the county Kildare; a fact which had compelled her, as a widow, to close her doors. The family estate was, at this period, "at nurse" for her son; and, as she herself declared, "the lawyers proved very sorry dry-nurses indeed." Lady O'Halloran was universally popular; she was earnest in everything, and thoroughly good-natured; frank to a fault, accommodating, *facile à vivre*

and of a temper proof against all trial. To my mother, she was, however, notwithstanding al. these social qualifications, displeasing in an imminent degree. To her, the earnest frankness and joyous good-humor of the Irish widow conveyed nothing but vulgarity and coarseness; but as she had no plausible pretext for declining her society, and as she was certain to find her in every visitable house in the neighborhood, she contented herself by expressing her disgust to her own immediate friends, and suffered her laughing ladyship to be included in every invitation which collected at Rooksley her particular intimates.

Since I have grown old, and have been compelled to make home-avocations, I have found a great resource in novel-reading. I have a few sententious associates, who tell me that such a pursuit is too trifling for my years; but I let them say on, and read not a volume the less. My retrospective vanity is flattered by the graceful fictions, which so often make power, wealth, and even virtue itself, bow down before the omnipotence of beauty. I love to identify myself with the bright-eyed heroine; to live over again, in her company, past experiences of triumph; and, although all this may, in point of fact, be trifling, it is only the more consistent, and worthily winds up the life of a pretty woman. Of art, doubtlessly I have had my share in my time: the only science which I ever understood was the science of pleasing; how then was I to gainsay in my old age the pursuits of my whole life?

My motive for this apparent digression is to remark that if, in the said works of fiction, it be admissible for the author, who has all the unities at his control, and who may take what liberties he pleases, both with times, places, and persons, to put ten or twenty years into a parenthesis, I may well be excused for arrogating to myself a similar liberty in writing my own veritable memoirs. All that I have yet placed upon record was, of course, in my case merely traditionary; but I felt it to be necessary that my readers should know my father and mother "in their habits as they lived, with the habits they'd acquired," before I introduced that more important personage—myself; and, as I was born within eighteen months after the marriage of my parents, all reasonable readers must at once concede that I have availed myself of my privilege with singular discretion. I shall therefore make no apology, my conscience being at peace.

It may be as well, however, to premise that, in the interval, the school-house was completed, and that its expanded wings afforded shelter to twenty aged paupers. The ceremony of the "opening" was a festival for the neighborhood; there were drums and fiddles, and beer and beef, for the poorer classes; and a procession, in which the children appeared in new uniforms, the old men in blue coats and gray worsted stockings, and the old women in brown gowns and scarlet cloaks. These having been duly installed in their pinnacled and picturesque domicile, the "gentry" were, in their turn, entertained at Rooksley, where a splendid ball succeeded a sumptuous dinner, and where many speeches were made, on the disappearance of the ladies, tending to impress upon my father the extent of his worth, and the many virtues of his wife; for which he, deeply impressed by the *unexpected* (!) honor done to Lady Madelaine and himself, returned thanks in a speech eulogistic of the friend who had made himself this "bright honor's monthpiece," and begged to propose the health of some one else then present, who did the same in his turn, until, at length, the whole company presented the spectacle of "a suit of ditto's;" after which, there remaining nothing of importance to detain them longer, they joined the guests, who were already rapidly filling the ball-room.

This was the great starting-point of my father's popularity in the county.

It is true that the Duke of Dorchester had not only given the land upon which the original school-house stood, but built the house itself; while his amiable daughters had clothed the children, and, as I have already shown, moreover made them the medium of far more extensive charities; but the duke had a very expensive family, and had been involved by his sons to an extent which compelled him to sell off a portion of his estates, and to retire into Italy with his daughters for a few years, in order to give him time to retrieve himself.

Now it was, perhaps, somewhat unreasonable in his Grace of Dorchester, when he disposed of Rooksley, to consider that he had done quite sufficient for the parish, in giving them the said land and house in perpetuity. He should have remembered that the parochial authorities had a claim upon him. He had built the school-house for his own gratification, and it had been a great amusement to the ladies of his family; and such was the opinion of the vestry, when an intimation was made to them at one of their meetings, that some repairs were needed to the building. They very naturally decided that, had not the Duke of Dorchester thought proper, at his own instigation, and on his own authority, to build the said school-house, the parish would not have been burdened with its repairs: the children learnt very well previously in Margery Drake's cottage; and it was perfectly clear that if noblemen and gentlemen had a fancy for building schools, it was their duty to endow them, and to prevent their becoming a burden to the parish.

In short, the neat, plain, appropriate little tenement, which had been the admiration of the churchwardens and other local authorities, when it replaced the brick-paved kitchen in which the young ideas in —— had previously been taught to shoot, and for which profuse thanks had been lavished upon his grace on its erection, was no sooner discovered to need some trifling reparation, than it was decided to be "a burden on the parish;" and as, under such circumstances, the conscientious members of the "select vestry" would have considered it a dereliction of principle to apply the parochial funds, where it was so clear and self-evident that the Duke of Dorchester was the responsible person, it was unanimously agreed that an official letter should be written to his grace, representing the state of the building; and suggesting, at the same time, that as the number of scholars had greatly increased of late, some additional forms and desks would be very acceptable. This luminous idea was at once acted upon; but the letter superscribed "Imme

date," in order that their noble correspondent might not keep them in unnecessary suspense by attending to any irrelevant personal affairs before he replied to it, never received any answer, having been forwarded to Florence from the duke's town-house, and lost on the way.

My mother, at the suggestion of Emily Vernon, took the affair into her own hands, at the most fortunate moment in the world. The slight dilapidations, which, had they been immediately attended to, might have been effectually checked, had increased greatly during the progress of a long and wet winter. The relatives of the children, anxious to preserve them as long as possible from the weather, had patched and pieced the roof during a stray leisure hour, but the great evil remained unremedied; and, as I have already stated, my mother, in the first burst of her philanthropy, found herself compelled to hire a cottage even for the temporary accommodation of her little *protégées*, before the great work of building the new edifice commenced.

Nothing could have been better timed. The *intention* alone afforded conversation to the whole neighborhood; and, when half a score of carpenters and masons, who had been for some weeks out of employ, found themselves once more in full work, and that the result of their labors began to show itself above ground, the county-paper spread the news far and wide. Paragraphs, headed, "PRINCELY LIBERALITY!" "GENEROUS MUNIFICENCE!" and "NOBLE EXAMPLE TO LANDED PROPRIETORS!" appeared in weekly succession. The festival of the "opening" settled the business. Not a man got drunk upon my father's strong ale that day, who ever remembered such a gentleman, or who had ever seen such a lady. And when, in the midst of all this excitement, it was ascertained that my father had purchased some extensive farms in the neighborhood, every individual present was ready, glass in hand, to work upon them for nothing; an arrangement which would, no doubt, have proved extremely economical, had it ever been acted upon.

Most political reader! do you not discover the embryo M. P. under all this popularity, and all this acquisition of land? Of course, you do. Will it be objected that my father was *new* in the county, and that there were old ties and old sympathies still existing, and still dear to true hearts and fast memories? Pooh, pooh! the Marquis of Portintown, the duke's elder son, had, it is true, represented the county during three sessions; but his noble father was no longer a resident; and it had been evident, even at the last election, that the marquis did not "bleed" so freely as formerly; and as to the letter which he wrote on the dissolution of parliament, stating his perfect reliance on the stedfastness, good-faith, and old attachment of the "worthy and independent electors of ——," it was, of course, "nothing but proper, and what they had a right to expect, seeing what they *had* done for him;" but, unfortunately, straightforward, manly letters, even written by the sons of dukes, will not suffice to pay bills, or to supply "unlimited refreshments" at the Angel or the George—and my father was known to be very rich.

The Marquis of Portintown was a superb young man, whose aristocracy was written on his brow; and he was, moreover, affable, and polite, and considerate. The women were, one and all, in his favor; but my father had a handsome wife; and, although the ladies might have the voices, their husbands had the votes.

And thus it occurred that my birth took place on the close of a contested election, during which money, and heavy dinners, and still heavier speeches had been at a discount, although "bribery and corruption" had been scrupulously eschewed. A few small landholders got their farms that year for a peppercorn rent. The times were hard, and my father's agent was a man of intense feeling. There was an immense display of new gowns and showy ribbons at church for the next month. My mother was a philanthropist, and liked to see happy faces about her. The circumstances of certain families changed in a sudden and extraordinary manner; but who requires to be reminded of the unaccountable mutations of fortune? The school-children, wearing the Tilden colors, paraded the streets with banners, and created a general feeling of generous enthusiasm; for, when they appeared, they not only reminded the local authorities of what the new candidate had done, but of what the father of the old one had left undone, which was better still.

In short, my father's gold, his agent's tact, and my mother's beauty, carried the day. All the old ducal virtue, and liberality, and munificence were forgotten; but still, it must be said, in my father's praise, that so thoroughly satisfied was the marquis with the frank and manly bearing of his adversary in the struggle, that he consented, at the close of the election, to become a guest at Rooksley for a couple of days, while he arranged certain matters of local business; and where the family tradition declares that the bright eyes of my mother so thralled him, that he extended his visit to a week, and ultimately took his departure on the best possible terms with his successor in senatorial honors.

My birth followed closely upon his retreat. Extreme fatigue and excitement had overtasked the strength of my mother; and the establishment was still *sens dessus dessous*, when I appeared to claim some share of the public attention.

CHAPTER X.

My first tangible memory attaches itself to a frock of white muslin, looped on the shoulders with strings of jet. I was supposed to be in mourning for my maternal grandfather, the Right Honorable Alexander Duncan, Earl of Glenfillan. My name was Eveleen, and I was the pet and plaything of a party of ladies, who passed me from one lap to another, and from one pair of white arms to a second quite as handsome, under the light of a superb chandelier. I believe that this was my *début* in polished society, and that I was indebted for my early honors to Lord Otterford; who, having met me by accident in one of the galleries, when returning from a walk in the park with my nurse, was so enchanted with my likeness to my

mother, that he petitioned for my immediate presentation in the drawing-room.

I have said that this was my first *tangible* memory, but I had many others, misty, indistinct, dreamlike, yet nevertheless far more delightful. Memories of tender endearments lavished on me by day and night, amid my nursery sports, and over my little bed. The endearments of a fond father, bestowed, in all their tender profusion, upon his first-born. And yet, surely I must have been a breathing disappointment to that fond father, who had doubtlessly sighed for a son and heir, an inheritor of his name; which, however insignificant it might have appeared to my mother, her friend Lady Devereux, and *id genus omne*, was without doubt a matter of interest to himself. If such indeed I were, however, it was a fact which I never learned. The apparition of my father was to me the signal for a scream of joy; his presence always brought delight; but it was not until I grew to girlhood, and was compelled to feel its loss, that I learnt to appreciate his value, both as a father and a man.

The noise, the glare, and the novelty of the drawing-room delighted me. It is probable that, half unconsciously, I looked around for my good genius in this scene of enchantment; but, be that as it may, it is certain that my father was not there; while it so chanced that, satisfied with feeling that my nurse was near me, I exhibited no fear, I uttered no cry; and thus I was transferred from each to each, receiving from every one in turn a word of delighted commendation.

"What an angel!" exclaimed one. "What a lovely creature!" said another. "What a perfect image of Lady Madelaine!" apostrophized a third. "What a miniature of perfection!" expatiated a fourth; and then I was rekissed, rehugged, and dismissed to the unknown regions in which the nurseries were situated.

This opening scene of my little drama of existence is the more forcibly impressed upon my mind, from the unpleasant effect of the transition which immediately supervened. The head-nurse, on arriving in her own dominions, forthwith gave me over to the tender mercies of a deputy, while she doffed her best cap and collar, exclaiming loudly against the new caprice which had at once broken up her evening nap, and delayed her tea-drinking.

The voice of murmuring and complaint, coming so directly after the pleasant whisperings of adulation and endearment, produced an uncomfortable contrast, to which, young as I was, I was nevertheless fully susceptible; and accordingly, while Mrs. Harris retired to her private apartment to deposit her finery, I commenced a *feu de joie* of screams and lisping entreaties to be carried back to the beautiful ladies. I might as well have asked for the moon. I was first soothed, and then threatened, and then shook, until my feeble breath came gaspingly from my little heart, and ultimately put into the corner, with a chair before me to prevent my escape, and left to sob as I pleased, while my guardian resumed her novel. This was, however, hurriedly restored to her pocket, and myself once more caught up in her arms on the reappearance of her principal.

Of course a renewal of shrieks broke up the quiet of the nursery, and the "miniature perfection" of the drawing-room was suddenly transferred into the "brat" of the north wing, in which the apartments of myself and my dependents were situated.

But the ice was broken. My vain and beautiful mother was, it appeared, herself struck by my infantile loveliness, to which she had previously paid no attention; the reflected compliments induced by my appearance were pleasing from their novelty; and the caresses which I lavished upon her were an agreeable variety in her daily existence. Thenceforward I became her frequent companion. My childish attractions were enhanced by all the auxiliaries of dress. I was one of the "lions" of Rooksley: while to its mistress I was a new toy, an animated plaything.

Alas! I was destined to outgrow this character; nor was such an amusement suited long to satisfy the tastes of a young and fashionable woman, surrounded by flatterers, greedy of pleasure, and devoted to dissipation.

Abandoned, as a matter of course under such circumstances, to the care of hirelings during three-fourths of the day, I imbibed instinctively and unconsciously the germ of the many defects which my after-life so sadly developed. Nor did the violent transition from the high-breeding and luxury of my mother's circle to the sordid and interested tactics of the nursery tend to improve my natural disposition. I came, with my mother's kiss still warm upon my cheek, into my own apartments, to hear the dress, the temper, and, above all, the liberality of her guests freely canvassed. I was so very a child, that all was discussed unhesitatingly before me; and although I understood much of what I heard, it was probably fortunate for me that my perception was not more extensive; for the morals of my mother's intimates met, at times, with quite as little quarter as their manners.

The first lesson which I learnt, and it was by no means inculcated with gentleness, was the necessity of utter silence upon all that occurred in the nursery: I was neither to repeat what I heard there, nor to mention who were its visitors. No wonder that, when I began to be conscious that I understood a great deal which I was not supposed to hear, far less to comprehend, I should instinctively keep this secret as well as the other. I saw much, in caricature, in my own apartments, which I witnessed in high comedy in the saloon of my mother. If Lord Otterford or Frederic Vernon kissed the hand of Lady Madelaine, so did my father's "gentleman" kiss the cheek of Mrs. Harris. There were the same coquetries, the same grimaces, the same interchange of unmeaning follies; the only difference existed in the fact, that, in one instance, the canvas was touched by the pencil of a master, and in the other, daubed by the brush of a sign-painter.

At six years old I was provided with a French governess. She was a sister of Félicie, who had, like herself, been destined to the honors of the dressing-room, but who had not evinced sufficient talent to be intrusted with the toilet of a woman of rank, and who naturally could not condescend to serve a *bourgeoise*.

When my mother decided upon this appendage to my individual establishment, she named it, as a matter of course, to her attendant, who immediately, like an affectionate sister, recommended Mademoiselle Joséphine, who, as she assured her lady, "*avait des talents extraordinaires pour l'éducation!*" Such an assurance from such a quarter settled the affair at once; my mother merely stipulating that she must "look at" mademoiselle before she was definitively engaged; and as Félicie felt that nothing could be more reasonable, her extraordinarily talented sister, who was too dull to dress hair and "get up" point-lace, was immediately summoned; and being very pretty, very graceful, and remarkably well-dressed, was secured at once by Lady Madelaine at a high salary, to form my manners and direct my mind.

Her installation in her new dignities followed within a month; the day-nursery was duly promoted into a school-room; and Mrs. Harris, not with the best grace in the world, subsided into vice-president.

Soon after the arrival of Mademoiselle Joséphine we removed to Grosvenor Square. Parliament had assembled, and my father was at his post. It took two or three weeks to settle my mother comfortably for the season. Her arrangements were minute and complicated. During this period I saw but little of her. The rooms appropriated to myself and my preceptress were situated at the back of the house; and save that my father generally came into my sleeping chamber on tiptoe, on his return from St. Stephen's, to kiss me as I slept, and that I was informed of the circumstance on the morrow by my maid, I might well have believed myself to be forgotten.

Nevertheless, mademoiselle did not participate in my *ennui*. The transition from a home of penury, where she had been daily reproached with a want of common capacity, which threatened to make her a burden upon her family, to a situation of authority and trust in the mansion of Lady Madelaine Tilden, was of itself happiness; but when to this circumstance was superadded the control of a carriage which was called mine, and a liveried lackey, nicknamed in like manner, she was intoxicated with her good-fortune.

How I hated the everlasting Park, where we drove slowly to and fro, amid dust, and noise, and clatter! It used to make my head swim, and my eyes ache. It had, however, a far different effect upon my companion. She was too pretty to pass unobserved. Her identity was soon ascertained; and Miss Tilden's governess was, ere long, as well known to the horsemen as the Serpentine itself. But if the drives were thus distasteful to me, the walks were a hundredfold worse. I remembered the woods and glades of Rooksley, its glancing lights and shifting shadows, and contrasted them in sadness with the dreary and monotonous garden of the Square, and the unfamiliar and people-thronged avenues of Kensington Gardens. In time, however, I became reconciled to both, and thus the last touch of nature was removed from my heart.

My mother's personal arrangements once made, she turned her attention to myself, and masters of every description were forthwith provided for me. The exertions of mademoiselle had already commenced. It was decided that, short as had been the period of her dictatorship, I was undeniably improved—in appearance. I made a more graceful courtesy, had got rid of my shyness, and did not, by any unladylike demonstrations of energy, disturb the propriety of my dress.

Nothing could be better! Compliments were showered upon mademoiselle, and praises upon myself; after which we each made a lower and more elegant courtesy than before, and with drew to our *ultima Thule*.

Under the care of this invaluable preceptress I learnt to apply the apothegm which has since been (falsely) attributed to her distinguished countryman Prince Talleyrand, that "words were given to us to disguise our thoughts."—By the way, how frequently it occurs that the world fastens upon an acknowledged wit, a shrewd saying to which he has never given utterance! It would appear that individuals who occasionally stumble upon a good thing, of which they themselves do not perhaps appreciate the full merit, anxious that it should not be lost, terminate it with "as so and so said;" and in this manner, in order to save their saying, sacrifice themselves. Even so, I should imagine, was the really profound and diplomatic "saw" which I have just quoted fastened upon the modern Machiavel, who, nevertheless, disclaimed its parentage.

I learnt, also, to agree—at least in words—with every one upon every subject, and never to betray my own sentiments and opinions; to look upon everything through the medium of expediency; and to appreciate rank and riches beyond all other human attributes.

In this manner, and under this guidance, I alternated between Grosvenor Square and Rooksley, until I had reached eleven years of age. I had been told incidentally that I had a sister, who was born twelve months after myself, but I had never seen her. The reason for this extraordinary fact, as I afterwards ascertained, existed in the circumstance that her birth nearly cost the life of my mother, who continued for many months afterward a confirmed invalid; while, *pour comble de malheur*, the infant proved so sickly and so irreclaimably plain that Lady Madelaine could not endure its presence; and it was consequently, at the instigation of my father, sent down to Scotland under the charge of a trusty nurse, and placed in the care of Lady Flora Glenfillan.

I well remember that my first sensation on hearing I had a sister was one of intense delight. I longed to fold her in my arms, to clasp her to my heart. I felt the blood rush into my face, and the tears into my eyes. For a moment my whole being overflowed with love. But these highly-wrought feelings were soon repressed by Mademoiselle Joséphine; who, not being herself troubled with any particular sentiment toward her own sister, save one of intense jealousy, was at a loss to understand the meaning of my emotion; and who most effectually rebuked it by reminding me that had *miladi* considered this invisible sister as so great a blessing, she would not have been exiled from her paternal home; that I should be more reasonable if I gave myself the trouble to

recollect that my fortune would be diminished one-half by the birth of this sister, whom I was prepared to love so ardently; and who, being both ugly and sickly, would, of course, be constantly envious of my beauty and grace.

No argument was ever more effective. I dried my tears, stilled the beating of my heart, and sat down to think! What subjects of reflection were these for a pure young mind! No marvel, trained as I had been, that the evil seed took root quickly; and that, at the close of the longest fit of musing in which I had ever indulged, I almost loved Mademoiselle Joséphine for the *generous devotion* to my interests, which made her so vehement against my unknown sister.

It *was* provoking that I, certain as I was of creating a sensation by my beauty, should be robbed of half my wealth by one so greatly my inferior. Mademoiselle was right. This unwished-for and unloved younger sister was better away. This was my conviction at eleven years of age; and as my mother had never in her life mentioned to me the existence of her second child, I had no difficulty in avoiding the subject.

Of my father I saw less than ever. As a public man he was popular and powerful, but at home he was a cipher. No voice had ever been raised against Lady Madelaine; no murmur low but deep had ever turned toward her the eye of suspicion or the finger of scorn; but my father was no less a wretched man. Fortunate indeed was it for him that ambition was the most powerful principle of his nature; for it enabled him to pass by without comment or expostulation those thousand small and minute indications of indifference and supercilious coldness which characterized the bearing of my mother. He felt that they were touched so lightly and so skilfully, that, taken individually, they would be almost imperceptible to a common observer, and that the world could have no sympathy with such sorrows. He therefore folded them closely in his heart; and, satisfied that the very egotism of my mother's nature was his best safeguard against dishonor, endeavored to forget, in the vortex of political excitement, that he had ever formed dearer visions of happiness.

Many who were acquainted with public men and public measures upwards of half a century ago, will have little trouble in deciding the identity of my father.

I have already said that I had attained my eleventh year. I had naturally quick talents, and great powers of observation; it was consequently not wonderful that my progress in all womanly accomplishments was rapid. My masters spoke of me in flattering terms; my mother's guests fondled and praised the "show-child" who relieved their high-bred weariness with her harp or with her voice; and forgot that the same instinct which awoke in me the power of combination and exertion in the one instance, was not likely to lie dormant where my own personal feelings were still more active and acute.

Young as I was, I required no prompter to point out to me that my mother lived only for admiration, and that among the most devoted of her slaves were Lord Otterford and Mr. Frederic Vernon; but I also discovered more than this. I saw that the sweet and dove-eyed Emily—she, whose caresses were to me the most welcome, and whose praises were the most judicious and well-timed—loved the selfish and cold-hearted nobleman who wore my mother's chains. How often did I long to clasp my arms about her neck, and tell her how, in my young spirit, I loathed—I knew not, nor cared not wherefore—that polished hypocrite! But I had studied in too false a school to give way to so natural and pure an impulse; and so I looked on, and marveled, and reasoned with myself, as children will do, upon the social phenomena that were taking place about me.

I was not then aware of the vow taken by Otterford on his first meeting with Frederic Vernon; or in the pale cheek and aching heart of the fair and innocent girl before me, I might have traced the operations of his vengeance.

How well do I remember a certain evening in August! The first dressing-bell had rung, and all the Rooksley guests had obeyed its summons. As I was, of course, excluded by my tender age from my mother's table, it conveyed no warning to me, and I consequently lingered in the drawing-room after it was deserted. For a time I amused myself among the costly toys which were scattered in all directions; but, as they were familiar to me, I soon wearied of an occupation so devoid of novelty; and being attracted by an unusually brilliant sunset, I sauntered into a smaller apartment formed in one of the turrets, and known as the octagon-room; a place of comparative retreat occasionally sought by those of the company to whom, from some passing cause, the movement and hilarity of the more public reception-room were for a moment distasteful. The large bayed window stood invitingly open, and I approached it, and leant out, watching the rich and changeful colors of the western sky, unconscious that I was screened from observation by the ample crimson curtain which was drawn partially across the recess.

How long I had been thus engaged I know not, when I was aware of voices in the adjoining apartment, and immediately afterward, of steps approaching the spot on which I stood. My first impulse was to discover myself, but a feeling of false shame—a fear of appearing to have overheard what had been already said—deterred me; and I drew still farther back behind the folds of the damask drapery. Perhaps, had another moment been left to me for decision, I might have obeyed the better prompting which had suggested my first thought, but the hesitation of an instant had rendered this impossible. My heart beat painfully. Accustomed as I had been to mean and unworthy theories, I had never yet reduced them to practice; and I consequently shrank like a coward from the bare semblance of a dishonesty which I had still nerve enough to execute.

The voices became more distinct—they were those of Miss Vernon and Lord Otterford. There was a tender persuasiveness in his tones, which struck me on the instant. I had heard him gay, and sententious, and sentimental, and even eloquent; but this was an inflection of his voice altogether new to me. They entered the room—they paused beside the window, just beyond the curtain, where the last beam of the

rapidly descending sun sent a ray of brightness to the brow of Emily, and made her luxuriant hair glitter like threads of gold. She was hanging upon the arm of her companion, heavily, languidly, like one who rather sought than needed his support.

I was still a mere child, but I had already read her secret—she loved him!

What a rush of thought swept across my brain! I was bewildered. I had seen him look into my mother's eyes, as though he knew no other light. I had seen him bow to her slightest caprice, as though her will invested it with reason: and yet there could be no doubt that he loved my best friend, my gentle, indulgent Emily. I was lost in difficulty. Had I even doubted the latter fact, I should at once have had that doubt removed when he next spoke, and that I could distinguish his words.

"You are ungenerous, Emily," he said, in an accent of tender reproach; "you accord nothing to the difficulty of my position. Why will you thus persist in misinterpreting my every word and action?"

A deep and painful sigh was the only answer.

"Look dispassionately at my very delicate and peculiar position in this family, my sweet girl," resumed his lordship. "You are well aware that my cousin Lady Devereux is Lady Madelaine's chosen friend; that I have known her for years; and that, in short, like all spoiled beauties, she exacts unlimited devotion from her male acquaintance. See your own brother, for example! Has he eyes, ears, or senses, for any woman save our fair and haughty hostess? And yet, do you believe that if his heart were to speak in opposition to his fancy, his reason would not soon sever the idle links which bind him now? Fie! fie! You are a child, my dear one, and must be schooled into more sober judgment."

"But Frederic," faltered Miss Vernon, "never knew, never loved Lady Madelaine before her marriage; and I have heard—"

"What!" interposed her companion, impetuously; "that, in all probability, I did both. Why, this is still more idle! I *did* know this vain beauty in her first youth—in all the insolent glory of her opening loveliness; and yet you see that I have survived her union with Mr. Tilden. Think you that, had I willed she should be mine, she, with her haughty and imperious spirit, would have rejected me, to give her noble hand to a commoner! Surely you know her better."

"All this may be, my lord," was the reply; "and yet I feel degraded by the part which I am now playing. To me your suit can but bring honor, and surely to yourself it can convey no disgrace. *I* also am a commoner, the titleless daughter of a gentleman, but one of no mean race, and of no tarnished memory. I have done wrong, very wrong, in so long permitting you to talk to me on such a subject, without the knowledge of my mother. While you are present, I find a thousand excuses for my weakness; but when I am alone, my reflections are one long reproach."

"These refinements, Emily," said the wily voice of her lover, "are unworthy of you—of both of us. If you believe that there never existed a man insensible to the spells of this wedded Circe, then must I frankly tell you that you argue from your perfect ignorance of the world, and in the very wantonness of your own over-susceptible nature. Am I too bold if I ask more even-handed justice?"

"It may be as you say," replied Miss Vernon; "but as the Circe—since you see fit so to designate your friend and mine—is the wife of another, why should there exist a necessity for the mystery which you have flung over our mutual affection? The ambition of my own mother would have been satisfied with less. She asks for my husband only a gentleman, and a man of honor; and her principle is to me sacred. Do me justice, my lord; I am no love-sick girl. That I esteem you—that I—in short—I scarcely know what I meant to say; but of this be assured, that if, since the moment of enthusiasm which prompted you to tell me that you loved me, you have seen cause to regret the impulse; if, in calmer hours, you have thought it probable that a union with myself would not realize the hopes of your family—your own views in life—or the interests of your ambition, speak frankly. Be assured that, far from reproaching, I shall honor you, and reverence your truth. There are some things, my lord, which are often learned too late for all parties concerned."

There was an instant's pause. His habitually fluent lordship was evidently probed to the quick, but he soon rallied.

"I see—I see it all," he said, with a light and bitter laugh. "You are kind, you are generous, Miss Vernon, to open my eyes at once. It saves suspense—it spares the necessity of doubt. And now, perhaps, in this moment of overweening confidence, you will even intrust me with the whole secret, and tell me who is the happy man by whom I am so suddenly supplanted. Sir James Dornton is, as I am well aware, an Apollo in the eyes of your sex; and De Clifford is a *millionaire*. I must abide my fate."

"My lord," said Emily, haughtily, as she raised her drooping head, and withdrew her hand from his supporting arm, "you outrage me, and I have not deserved this insult. But I appeal to yourself—to your own ideas of justice and propriety—whether the silence which you have imposed upon me, on the most important measure of my whole life, is either womanly or correct? I would be respected as well as loved."

"You are both—on my soul, both!" exclaimed Lord Otterford, repossessing himself of the hand that she had withdrawn; "but, for the moment, all mention of our mutual attachment would be inexpedient in the highest degree. Can you not trust me? Have you, rigid moralist as you are, given your heart to a man in whose good faith you have no confidence? I will not—I dare not believe it. I ask only for time, and I ask it for my own sake, fondly hoping that I can urge no stronger plea."

"But surely to my mother—" murmured the soft and tremulous voice of the agitated girl.

"I have done," said his lordship, coldly, in his turn. "I have deceived myself, and have no desire to blame you in what has taken place. I have perhaps merited no better treatment."

The sound of low and suffocating sobs succeeded.

"Nay, nay; do not distress yourself, Miss Vernon," pursued Lord Otterford; "we will mutually forget and forgive. You will probably hear of me occasionally, and you shall have no reason to deprecate the period of our friendship—of our intimacy—of our—"

"I cannot bear this, my lord; indeed I cannot bear it," wept his victim. "Why will you so wilfully misunderstand me! Do not confound me with the heartless coquets of fashionable life. Remember that I have been educated in retirement—that I am unused to the world's ways—that I am but as a child in your hands."

"Only swear to me that you love me."

Again there was an instant of deep silence.

"Do you really love me, Emily?"

"Deeply—devotedly!"

The murmuring lips were silenced by a kiss. I heard it—I felt it—and I hated him thenceforward with a tenfold hatred.

"And you will trust me?"

"As my own soul."

And once more she hung upon his arm; her hand was clasped in his; and his breath trembled in her hair. They stood thus for several minutes, and then it was the voice of Emily which broke the stillness.

"Only promise me that you will be less engrossed by Lady Madelaine. I love her. She is my friend. I am ashamed of my own weakness; but when I see you devoting your every care, your every thought to her, I feel as though my heart would break."

I heard a sudden movement. I leaned forward. I saw Miss Vernon clasped to the heart of her lover. Her head rested on his shoulder; her lovely face was hidden in his breast; but it was only for a moment. By a sudden and determined action she liberated herself from his grasp, and I saw the tears stealing silently down her cheeks.

"You are answered, Emily," said Lord Otterford, as he stood tenderly beside her. "Is it possible that *you*—you, young, pure, innocent, and lovely, can be jealous of the meretricious attractions of a practiced woman of the world!—How little do you know our sex! How little are you able to appreciate the merits of your own! Should you indeed require the assurance that I more value the clasp of this small white hand than all the blandishments that can be lavished upon me by a Lady Madelaine Tilden."

"Yet, why, why do I feel so self-reproached."

"Because, dear girl, you love for the first time, and love is born of fear. See, now, how very a coward it can make of me! I shall not approach her splendid ladyship to-night, without the dread of seeing tears in the deep blue eyes which may be turned upon me."

"Not tears, my lord!"

"Yes, tears, my little lady. Traitorous tears, springing from want of faith where faith is due. Know you not that such faith will be your bounden duty, when—"

"Enough, enough," said his companion; and the tones of her voice were rich and mellow with happiness; "I will promise to be less weak."

"I must have a pledge."

"My honor," said Miss Vernon, almost gaily.

Lord Otterford laughed. The laugh grated unpleasantly upon my ear.

"Shylock, who was learned in bonds and mortgages, refused so untangible a deposit. I must have better security."

"My bracelet"—laughed Miss Vernon—in her turn, but in a different spirit, as she affected to unclasp the jewel from her arm.

"Your lips!" whispered her lover; and once more he pressed them to his own His peace was made.

Voices were heard in the next room. Twilight had fallen over the earth. The servants were busied in lighting the lamps; and, ere long, the dinner-bell rang out. The supposed solitude of the lovers was over; yet still they stood an instant side by side, and hand in hand. They spoke no more. There was no need of words.

A light laugh in the drawing-room heralded the reëntrance of Lady Devereux, and her cousin immediately sauntered forth to meet her, after one long, last look into the eyes of Emily. For a moment she believed herself alone. She stood where he had left her, motionless. Gradually, her head sank upon her bosom; and a deep sigh, drawn from the very depths of her spirit, fell sadly on the silence. After a time she rallied, but it was evidently by a violent and painful effort: a slight shiver passed over her graceful limbs; and then she hastily approached the window, and leaned out, as if greedy of the refreshing breeze which swept into the apartment.

Need I say that I shrank into the most remote corner of my retreat! I felt as though I should expire upon the spot. My brow burned; my heart beat almost to bursting; my clenched hands were rigid in their tension. I had heard my mother mocked at—made the theme of scorn and banter—branded as a Circe!—and, although I knew not then the precise meaning of the appellation, the tone in which it had been applied had left me little doubt that it was one which reflected slight honor upon her own.

And still Emily Vernon stood there, and I had no opportunity of escape. I thought that I was suddenly smitten with fever. I felt the curtain quiver with the trembling of my limbs. My tongue was parched, and I had set my teeth so hard, that I heard the laboring breath as it escaped from between them. But she heard nothing. She was alone in that still hour of darkness, with her love, and with her doubts. Ay, they were there still—hushed, but not annihilated; for she sighed, and at intervals swept from her cheeks the tears which had gathered there, and shuddered, as if some vision darker than the night had risen upon her spirit. Poor Emily! Even in the paroxysm of my rage I pitied her. There was a prophet whisper in her ear that told of ills to come!

When she at length withdrew her head from the window, smoothed her bright hair, and slowly prepared to leave the room, the sound of voices was loud in the next apartment. There was no other egress from the retreat that she had chosen; and accordingly, after shrinking back into the darkness more than once, she eventually disappeared; and then I threw myself upon a sofa, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XI.

HAD I been differently constituted, or had I been differently educated, I should probably at once have made my way to my mother's dressing-room, and, in the frank and overflowing confidence of girlhood, have told her all. No such idea, however, crossed my brain even for a moment. I had never been a child. I had sprung from the infant into the woman, as the hothouse flower is forced into premature blossom by unnatural warmth. The examples by which I was surrounded, the spirit in which I was tutored, the self-appreciation in which I was encouraged, all tended to the same point. I felt as if upon me, and me only, devolved the duty of revenging the affront offered to *my* parent.

The vengeance of a girl of eleven years of age appears absurd, and no doubt generally is so. I know one tall hoyden, of about that period of life, whose ideas of mischief to others were all concentrated in throwing stones at them; and laughable as this may seem, it is doubtlessly quite as rational as many other methods of revenge adopted by children of the same age; but such is not universally the case. All we adults and centenarians may rest assured that there are many instances of precocious thought as well as of precocious action; and we should be wise to remember that there is a small species of worm in existence, which has frequently destroyed a three-decker.

Had I been able to appreciate my father's real character, it is also probable that I might have unveiled to him the true moral qualities of my mother's favorite guest: but with the close of my infancy came also the cessation of that demonstrative paternal tenderness which had made the joy of my baby-life. I no sooner degenerated into the plaything of the drawing-room, differing only in stature from those about me; engrossed by the same vanities, encouraging the same selfishness, and eager after the same adulation, than my father seemed altogether to have forgotten my existence. He visited my little bed no more. When we accidentally met, he had always a kind word and a hasty kiss for me; but neither his voice nor his caress was what it had once been; and as occasionally, when more hurried than common, instead of pressing his lips to mine, he merely greeted me with, "Ha, Eveleen, is that you?" and patted me on the head without stopping, my dignity took offence, and I universally returned the salutation by, "Really, papa, you are too bad; you derange my hair in a shocking manner!"

My poor father! How, as I look back upon these things, I can now understand what closed his once loving heart against his home, making a cold and careless world the shrine at which he knelt, and that world's smile his idol.

Under all circumstances, it cannot, however, be matter of surprise that I confided not my secret to any one. In about half an hour, during which time coffee had been served in the drawing-room, and my retreat hau continued uninvaded, I contrived to overcome my agitation; and, creeping once more to the fatal window, I turned my hot brow and my aching eyes toward the sweet evening wind that was lifting the leaves of the trees and the buds of the flowers, and weaving a double web of perfume and melody over the bosom of nature. I had, however, at the moment, no such poetical association with the said wind. All I sought was that it should restore the freshness to my forehead and the brightness to my eyes. that it should, in short, be an efficient aid in my first grand essay in hypocrisy. And it was so; the fair, full cheek and the sparkling eye of early youth do not tell their tale of suffering like the worn features of after-years. The green and vigorous leaves of June, moistened though they may be by the thunder-shower, are restored to vigor and to beauty by the next gush of sunshine; but those which have outlived the summer months, are scattered by the raindrops, less heavy, perhaps, but more frequent, to which they are exposed.

Even so was it with me. Ten minutes after I had mastered my emotion, and sought in the sweet influences of nature for the relief I needed, I was once more perfectly presentable; and did not hesitate to join my mother's guests: but I reëntered not that luxurious drawing-room as I had left it. The best and purest moral remnant of my girlhood had been torn away. I hau learnt that even my own proud and beautiful mother had descended from her pedestal, and could be spoken of in other terms than those of adoration. Emily, too, the mild, the loving, the gentle Emily, whom hitherto I had considered faultless, she had also her secret sin—her cherished hypocrisy—her dangerous mystery. As for Otterford, words have no power to tell how bitterly, how utterly I loathed him.

As I passed into the saloon, I saw him, as I had seen him a hundred times before, lolling over the back of the large lounging-chair which was sacred to Lady Madelaine. The company were scattered in groups over the room; Lady Devereux and Frederic Vernon occupied the same Persian couch, and were almost lost among the yielding cushions. I had grown an age in experience within the last two hours; and the first-fruits of my awakened perceptions might have been discovered in the fixed and almost stern attention with which I observed these two friends of my mother. Lady Devereux was languidly, but not the less assiduously, endeavoring to appropriate the thoughts and glances of the handsome young man beside her. Her magnificent arm, half-veiled by rich black lace, lay, in all its rounded beauty, upon the pillow against which he leant. The ample folds of her black velvet dress were confined by a plain girdle, clasped with jewels, which drew the eye to the smallness of her waist, and the fulness of her beautifully-moulded neck. Her little feet were coquettishly grouped together upon a cushion, and were visible beneath the embroidered stockings even to the well-turned ancle. There was an arch smile playing about her lips, and a languid softness glistening in her eyes, which rendered her more beautiful than I had ever previously believed her to be.

As I advanced up the room, I saw that she was speaking playfully, almost tenderly, though I could not hear her words; but a single glance sufficed to show me that her companion little heeded their import. His look was riveted upon my mother; not fully and freely, but with all the caution of one who cares not that his secret

should be read by idle eyes—and how full of misery was that look!

I followed its direction. The triumph of unstriving and undoubting vanity sat on my mother's brow, and flushed her cheek. Her eyes were closed, but the play of her rich lips, and the frequent motion of her small head, showed that she did not listen unheedingly to the low murmur that fell upon her ear. And Lord Otterford? He it was who was breathing those honeyed sounds; but, though he bent over Lady Madelaine, his gaze was turned elsewhere. Emily Vernon stood near the harp, which she had been engaged in tuning and at her side was Mr. De Clifford. To those who, unlike myself, were not in the secret of Miss Vernon's heart, she must have appeared all calmness and mental repose. The tears had been dried, the pulse had ceased its tumultuous throbbings, the flush had faded from the fevered brow; she was graceful, easy, and self-possessed. Her taper fingers wantoned among the chords of the instrument; her small foot pressed down the yielding pedals: and ultimately, at the close of a brilliant prelude, she shook back her long ringlets, and looked up with a smile in reply to a remark of De Clifford's, when her eye chancing to wander further, I saw her suddenly falter and turn pale; the smile fled from her lips, and the light from her countenance; while at the same moment Lord Otterford started from his position near my mother, and, passing rapidly beside her, I heard the word "Woman!" breathed bitterly from between his clenched teeth.

Here, then, was another coil of the reptile; for, in my present excited and suspicious state of feeling, I was at no loss to read, in the alarmed expression of De Clifford's face, as he marked the change which had so suddenly come over his fair companion, a more lively interest than mere friendship would have inspired. He loved her—but the serpent had already made its way into his Eden; his dream was nearly over.

Lady O'Halloran was asleep. Miss Alexander was endeavoring to draw the fashionable and fastidious Sir James Dornton into a flirtation; and her sister sat apart, beyond the more busy guests, with her eyes riveted on Frederic Vernon. Mrs. Alexander, all blonde and bracelets, was doing her utmost to appear interested in a political discussion which was going on between my father and Lord Cornbury, a brother member; while good old Dr. James, more sincere, and already outwearied by their prolixity, had settled himself comfortably in an ample *fauteuil*, and was half-way to the land of dreams.

How false, how hollow, and how tedious, everything appeared to me, child as I was! I felt saddened, disappointed, dissatisfied. I had indeed succeeded in subduing all trace of the violent emotion which I had lately undergone; but I soon discovered that I had by no means resumed my ordinary manner, from the expression of my father's eye, as, during a pause in his conversation, it chanced to turn upon me.

"You are unwell, Eveleen," he said, tenderly, as he approached and took my hand. "Your cheek is pale, my poor child; these hours and these habits are undermining your health. Would that I could see it otherwise!"

I felt a deep blush rise to my brow. "Indeed, I am well, quite well," I answered, hurriedly. "I have been annoyed—agitated—but it is all over now."

"And may a grave, middle-aged, old-fashioned individual, like myself," said Lord Cornbury, in a tone of quiet sarcasm, as he also approached and seated himself upon the sofa beside me, "venture to inquire what event can have occurred of sufficient importance to 'agitate' and 'annoy' the charming Miss Tilden, the embryo beauty, he precocious wit, and the envied heiress?"

It was the first time that I had ever been addressed in such an accent, and my indignation fully equaled my surprise; nor was it by any means diminished, when, on glancing towards my father, as though I looked to him to revenge the insult, I saw a quiet smile dancing in his eye, and playing about the corners of his mouth. I was petrified. I could not have spoken, had my earthly happiness depended on the exertion: but I felt my form dilate, and a frown of offended dignity gather upon my brow.

"What is the meaning of this, Eveleen?" asked my father, somewhat severely, after a moment's pause. "Did you not hear Lord Cornbury address you? and have you forgotten—quite!—" and he sighed as he spoke, "that you are yet a child, and should be grateful for the notice which is accorded to you?"

I hesitated for an instant, and then, turning calmly towards the astonished nobleman, I said, with all the composure I could command, "Since Lord Cornbury is obliging enough to take so evident an interest in my joys and sorrows, and since it is my father's wish that I should do so, I feel bound to inform him that I have been 'annoyed' to find falsehood where I looked for truth, and 'agitated' to discover hypocrisy where nothing but sincerity should have existed." And, as I ceased speaking, I rose from the sofa, courtesied ceremoniously to my father and his companion, and moved away.

"An extraordinary girl, that, Tilden, i'faith," I heard his lordship exclaim, as I crossed the floor. My father's reply I could not catch; and the rather that, as I approached Miss Alexander (who was just in the act of commencing a laborious sonata to Mr. De Clifford's flute accompaniment, evidently much to her own annoyance, and equally to the relief of Sir James Dornton, whose flirting vocabulary was fairly at its close, in so far as it regarded herself), I saw poor Emily, half-concealed behind the folds of an Indian screen, pale, listless, and drooping. Otterford, meanwhile, had resumed his station near my mother, and they were supposed to be deeply engaged in a game of chess.

It must not be imagined that, at so early an age, I was able to estimate, or even wise enough to glance at the probable results to my mother's reputation, of the heedless and reckless loose which she was thus giving to her vanity. My only and absorbing feeling was one of haughty indignation against the man who had *dared* to love another, while he professed to be her slave; nor can I deny that a considerable portion of this displeasure was reflected upon Emily herself. I knew nothing *then* of the tyranny of an awakened passion. I looked not beyond the visible homage which, from the moment of my

dmission to my mother's circle, had been the immediate object of my ambition. I had believed it to be real and genuine—a spontaneous offering at the shrine of beauty—and I was by no means prepared to find that it was a mere pleasing delusion—a shadow upon the wall—a vapor! I had heard at least twenty times a day of my own loveliness; for, when it became the fashion in the saloon to enumerate all my childish attractions, I was forthwith the admired idol of the servants' hall. Not a footman passed me on my way from the nurseries to the drawing-room, who did not assume a countenance of wondering admiration as he stepped aside; not a female servant, from the housekeeper to the laundry-maid, who did not utter a whispered comment loud enough to meet my ear, and flattering enough to make my little heart beat more quickly; while my inestimable governess, as time went by, buckled on the armor of her ignorance in quiet, satisfied that with my beauty, and my six masters—(there were no professors *then* for young ladies!) I was quite independent of *her* teaching; and she was frank enough to tell me so.

The understanding was a comfortable one, as, being under no obligation to mademoiselle, even for doing her best, which I must have been, at least morally, had she made a stand against her own ignorance, and struggled to do her duty, I was thus enabled to despise her at my ease; which I accordingly did, at an age when I should not yet have been permitted to form an opinion of those about me.

Sycophants, paid and unpaid, how little do ye reflect upon the pernicious consequences of your time-serving and degrading condescension, especially upon the minds of the young!

Years have passed—long, and weary, and eventful years, since the evening which I am now endeavoring to describe; since that first awakening of doubt, and suspicion, and hatred, in my girlish heart; and yet is all as distinct and fresh about me, even as when the moments were speeding by. It was a dark lesson, which I was never to unlearn. It taught me to muse, to reason, and to combine upon subjects ill-fitted to my age. It laid a false foundation for my after-life.

I roused Miss Vernon from her reverie. At first my conversation was evidently irksome to her; but, as she strove against her preoccupation, it became a palpable relief. I watched her narrowly. At times she sighed, even when we were speaking on the most indifferent subjects; and at others her eyes wandered to the chess-table, and she answered, as if unconsciously and quite irrelevantly, to my questions. Had she loved any other than Lord Otterford, I could have wept over her!

I once read a quaint German story, in which the secret marriage of a wealthy young widow, whose fortune was to be forfeited in the event of her disposing of her hand a second time, was betrayed to the watchful eyes of the heirs-at-law, by the fact of her dropping her fan in society, while in conversation with her new husband, and picking it up herself without his interference. I was then ignorant of the tale; but assuredly, judging from such premises, my mother was as free as air. Her slightest gesture was sufficient. One would have thought that Otterford could read her heart, and that speech was, in her case, supererogatory.

Six weeks afterward my mother returned to Grosvenor Square for the season; and for the first time I was left at Rooksley, under the very satisfactory and efficient charge of Mademoiselle Joséphine. My pride was wounded: I had begun to believe that I was necessary to the happiness of Lady Madelaine. It was a natural mistake. In her drawing-room in the country I was an attractive ornament. I created conversation, and I afforded to the guests in the house numerous and happy opportunities of flattering my mother, both directly and inferentially. I was a miniature representative of the prevailing fashion, however *outrée*; thus proving to the initiated that if the beautiful wife of Mr. Tilden clung to the graceful and the becoming, it was purely from taste, and not from lack of acquaintance with the reigning mode. My flippancy had been elevated into wit; and as children are naturally fearless, I had more than once spoken with a point well calculated to amuse all, save those who were the sufferers; while my whole education had been conducted on a system of surface and display, which made me a welcome plaything to the idle and the unthinking.

Religion I had none. Mademoiselle tried the village church, and the preaching of good Dr. James, on one solitary occasion, and then pleaded her conscience as an excuse for absenting herself thenceforward. I had occasionally accompanied my mother and her party; but as the family pew was closely curtained round with heavy damask, and I sat on a cushion beside the fire, amusing myself with the richly-illustrated prayer-books, and catching fragments of their conversation, which out of respect for the place was carried on in soft whispers, and thereby only rendered the more attractive, I seldom heard more than the responses, and the extremely inharmonious singing of the children of Lady Madelaine's schools, which, even at that early age, used to set my teeth on edge.

My notions of religion were consequently of a very vague and unformed description. When, as I sometimes saw my mother and her guests preparing to attend the morning service with undisguised and even acknowledged reluctance, I ventured to inquire for what reason she submitted to an annoyance which it was in her power to avoid, she answered me very sententiously that she went to church "for the sake of example"—that "it was necessary that the lower orders should see persons of station uphold the clergy, or they might presume to absent themselves in their turn, which was a thing not to be thought of." She did not explain for what reason, nor did I inquire, for she was evidently weary of the subject; while I, on my side, felt no particular interest in its continuance. I was accordingly quite satisfied from that time forth, whenever I swelled the train of my mother on this septenary duty, that I was setting an example to the "lower orders," and was consequently a person of considerable importance both to Dr. James and his parish.

Such was I, in body and mind, at the close of my eleventh year. My entrance into the twelfth was unwitnessed by any save my own

attendants; for, as I have already stated, I was left at Rooksley on the next departure of the family for town.

I pouted for eight-and-forty hours after their departure. My father had kissed me hurriedly, and put five guineas into my hand, as he stepped into his chariot. My mother had pressed her lips to my brow, and then turned away to desire mademoiselle not to suffer me to spoil my complexion over the fire. Lady Devereux had saluted me with an injunction not to grow any taller, lest in a year or two I should oblige Lady Madelaine to shut me up, and keep me out of sight; while the gentlemen were all so much occupied in final arrangements about their dogs, their horses, and their guns, that they overlooked my existence altogether.

Emily Vernon was the only individual of the party who embraced me with effusion and evident regret. She was to be Lady Madelaine's traveling companion to town, and then to join her mother in Curzon Street. What a long, sad, wistful gaze she turned upon all the familiar objects from which she was about to separate! She visited the octagon-room more than once: it had, doubtless, been the locality of many similar scenes to that which I had witnessed; and in what had they terminated so far? Even I could read the riddle on her pure young brow—in uncertainty and doubt, in anxiety and heart-sickness. Poor Emily! and amid all her sorrow, she was the only one who thought of me.

My heart swelled with resentment as I saw the party disappear; and I retreated to my room, fully resolved to tax the patience of Mademoiselle Joséphine to the utmost, by the manifestations of my virtuous indignation. But, alas! I had no opportunity of so doing, for during two hours no mademoiselle made her appearance. I was totally abandoned. This was, indeed, a new phase of my existence! Had not the little French clock upon my mantlepiece convinced me that my solitude had endured no longer than the said hundred and twenty minutes, I should have computed it at a day, so sad, and weary, and desolate did it appear. I rang the bell. It was answered by my own footman; and even he, as he opened the door, was evidently working himself into his coat, as though he had drawn it on hurriedly. I inquired for mademoiselle. She was just then particularly engaged with the housekeeper. Did I want anything? I replied that I did not think proper to be left any longer alone; and I was met by the remark that my harp-master would be with me in less than twenty minutes; at the close of which obliging and pleasant piece of information the man hastily withdrew, before I could make any rejoinder.

This was the commencement of my new mode of existence; and such, with very slight variations, it continued. The visits of my several tutors broke in, agreeably rather than the reverse, upon the daily monotony; and, moreover, a sudden fancy for carriage-exercise seized upon my preceptress. It is true that, eschewing all the romantic cross-roads which had hitherto been familiar to us, we no longer drove in any other direction than to the post-town, where mademoiselle lounged from one shop to the other, making purchases of the most heterogeneous description, and collecting all the gossip of the neighborhood.

To me, young as I was, these hitherto forbidden excursions were disagreeable to an extreme degree. I had never forgotten the malicious inuendos and withering witticisms which formed the staple conversation of my nursery; and, since I had become habituated to the polished elegance and epigrammatic wit of my mother's circle, the female cackle to which I was occasionally condemned in my own apartments was absolutely abhorrent. It may well be supposed, therefore, that I in no wise interfered with the new vocation of Mademoiselle Joséphine; and it was while she was collecting her "shreds and patches" for the edification of the housekeeper's room, that I first imbibed that love of books, to which I am indebted for some of the happiest hours in my stormy existence.

It will be readily understood that I had not been idle during the fortnight which intervened between the eventful evening last described and the departure of the family for town. I had closely watched the chief actors in the "Comedy of Errors," represented at Rooksley. The more narrowly I observed my mother, the more plainly I discovered that her vanity was a shrine, before which she required that a lamp should be constantly burning; but that her affections were quite independent of her self-esteem. Now as there existed nothing upon earth half so attractive in my eyes as my mother, and as children ever seek to imitate those whom they admire, so my scrutiny only made me the more stedfastly resolve to emulate the Lady Madelaine in all things. That I resembled her in person had been so endlessly repeated in my presence, that I was already aware of my natural advantages. Merely to be the object of general comment and admiration did not, however, satisfy me; I felt that there was a marked and unpleasant distinction between the homage paid to my mother, and the caresses lavished upon myself; and for some time, as I pondered over this fact in my enforced solitude, I was unable to comprehend it.

For a while my vanity had been gratified by the flatteries and blandishments poured out upon me; but, the feeling once awakened, that I was not worshiped like my mother, thenceforward rendered the triumph incomplete; and my pride was wounded as I remembered that, while I had merely been the pet and plaything of the idle and thoughtless, Lady Madelaine was an object of deep and exclusive devotion; making the happiness of one worshiper, and the misery of another. Why was this?

I was on the threshold of my twelfth year. I had been the almost constant companion of a young, giddy, flirting, and ignorant French governess since I emerged from the nursery, the remainder of my life having been spent in the society of my mother and her friends. Is it then matter of surprise that I soon discovered the solution of the enigma? "My mother is loved!" I whispered to myself; "and I—they look upon me still as a child, but this will not last forever. Emily Vernon is younger than Lady Madelaine, and yet Lord Otterford loves her—ay, and better than he loves my mother; for

did he not, to make Miss Vernon smile, call her a Circe! I will know what he meant."

I seized my dictionary, but I sought in vain. I was in despair; when, as a forlorn hope, I appealed to mademoiselle. "*Circé, Circé! mais certainement,*" said she, as a sudden recollection came upon her, "*Circé, c'est une déesse.* I remember an old schoolfellow of mine, *qui fit un très beau mariage.* She became a *modiste fort distinguée, Rue Richelieu,* and her *enseigne* was A LA CIRCE. *C'était une tête charmante, et admirablement coiffée.*"

This hint sufficed. My mythology completed the information. Mine was not the age of deduction, inference, or analysis; and I accordingly laid aside the volume, murmuring to myself, "and I too will be a Circe!"

I wearied in a week or two of my school-room volumes. I had many hours of solitude at home, many in the carriage; and, as Mademoiselle Joséphine and I appeared, as I have before remarked, to have entered into a tacit agreement to interfere as little as possible with each other, she made no comment when she saw me surrounded by books withdrawn from my mother's library. It were needless to do more than to observe that they were invariably novels and romances; and that, through their medium, I soon began to comprehend more perfectly both my own position and that of my mother.

I remember that I threw aside Sir Charles Grandison in disgust. It appeared to me cold, formal, and tedious. I had no taste for the tender passion treated mathematically; and I found many other works upon the same shelves which revenged me upon his monotony. From my first admittance to the drawing-room, I had heard the subject of love constantly discussed—my presence was unheeded; children are commonly overlooked at such moments; and yet upon children nothing is lost. Several arguments and opinions, of which I had thus become an auditor, remained impressed upon my memory; and now, when I began to reason and to reflect, they returned vividly to my recollection.

The example of my mother imprinted them on my heart.

CHAPTER XII.

UNHAPPILY for myself, I was abandoned to this existence of perverted taste and unwholesome occupation for upward of a long, weary year. At the close of the season, Lady Devereux, whose beauty was on the wane, and whose coquetry became only the more exacting in consequence, persuaded my mother to travel. My father's approbation was requested as a matter of form, and yielded as listlessly as it was asked. He could always establish a genial home at his club; and he had, moreover, the good sense to feel that what must ultimately be conceded was better unopposed.

To Paris, accordingly, the party proceeded; consisting of my mother, and her friend Lady Devereux, Sir Herbert, Lord Otterford, Frederic Vernon, and his sister. Thence they progressed to Rome, and ultimately to Sicily; returning to winter in Paris, where the elegance and beauty of Lady Madelaine created an intense sensation at the French court. The pure, pale loveliness of Miss Vernon also produced its effect, but her health was undermined—that precious health, to produce whose restoration her anxious mother had alone been prevailed upon to permit her absence; and her spirits were strangely depressed.

Nevertheless, as they traveled *en grands seigneurs*, and met with neither obstacle nor accident, the twelve months passed rapidly away; and the ladies returned to London for the season, renovated in health and refulgent in fashion.

I had meanwhile, ere their reappearance at Rooksley, entered my fourteenth year.

I have often since, after experiencing in myself the chances and changes of the world, looked back in wonder at the tenacity with which my mother's coterie held together. It is extremely probable that, were I aware of the personal motives and interests which conduced to this result, it might be no longer matter of marvel; but, with no other guide than my own bitter recollections, it is still to me a subject of unceasing wonder. True it is, that it was composed of individuals whose worldly position placed them beyond the hazard of requiring deep sympathy or serious assistance the one from the other. They were all butterflies, sporting in the sunshine of fortune. There was more matter than mind in the bond which held them together; and I have lived too long to place any reliance on the *soi-disant* friendship, which is alimented by the popularity or the worldly qualities of its object. Let one party be exposed to the pressure of circumstances; let health fail; let necessities sicken the heart and depress the energies; and, on the other side, let modish fools lisp lightly of a tie which they are unable to comprehend; let new pursuits, new flatterers, and new prospects supervene, and what becomes of the sick, the sad, the suffering absentee? There is still verbal pity—there is still lip-deep regret—where all good feeling is not utterly annihilated; but there is also more than this. There is a *want*, there is a *necessity*, for the favorite of fortune, first to conceal, and ere long to throw off these inconvenient feelings. The race of pleasure must be run; the path must be made easy, and the journey light; the shadow of another's sufferings breaks the comfortable and self-caressing progress of the better dowried child of chance; and it is accordingly swept aside, or passed by unheeded. Little think or reck they whose chariots press forward in the race, of the over burdened hearts which they assist to break!

But, pshaw! Complaint is not my purpose. I know the world. The lesson is, perchance, difficult to learn; but, once well conned, it is one which is never forgotten; and, after all, philosophy teaches us that we were born to trial; while a better faith points to a still more valuable truth.

And now, let me revert to myself as I *was*.

A year and a half of desultory, and in many cases of pernicious reading; of partial solitude, broken only by still more ill-boding companionship, at a period of life when the mind works out its self-development, and searches eagerly for subjects of interest and excitement; coupled with a disposition naturally precocious and observant, had done its silent, but no less certain work upon me, mentally and morally; now

had it failed to produce also its physical effect. I needed no prompter to whisper this. The looking-glass at which, on the departure of my mother, I could only satisfy myself of the propriety of my head-dress, now reflected my whole face; nor was I, by any means, inclined to quarrel with the reflection. One of my favorite amusements was to compare my features with those of a magnificent full-length portrait of my mother, which was suspended above the mantle of the library; and I was perfectly satisfied with the results of my scrutiny; while my heart bounded, as I remembered (thanks to Lady Madelaine's book shelves!) that *my* triumph was but beginning, while *hers* would be, ere long, upon the wane! Still I was conscious that there was a charm, a spell, about my mother, wanting to my unformed and neglected girlhood; and as I had treasured her looks, and tones, and caprices in my memory, I forthwith began to practice them, to the great annoyance of Mademoiselle Joséphine and my maid. I was unable to appreciate her better qualities, and therefore they escaped me; while I clung to her defects, with a tenacity which soon made them perfectly my own.

The next step was one which may appear exaggerated and unnatural. Let those who so esteem it reflect ere they affect to doubt; for they can know little of a woman's nature. It is a common assertion that events have been preordained—I had been *prēēducated*, in that most uncertain of all mysteries, the intricacies of the heart. And therefore—my next step was jealousy of the homage which my mother had hitherto engrossed. I had been often told of my beauty, of my grace, of my attractions, but it was in another tone. The child had been petted and pampered as a child; but the vanity of the girl could no longer be satisfied with such questionable worship.

When I made my first appearance in the drawing-room, on the evening of my mother's return to Rooksley—for she had not previously found a leisure moment in which to receive me—I remarked that a look of vague wonder followed my steps as I crossed the floor; but, as I felt that my appearance was unexceptionable, I consequently interpreted the sensation which I had created in a way well suited to gratify my vanity; although it received a very severe shock in the extreme coldness of my mother's recognition. She looked for a moment as though she really doubted my identity; and then a slight flush spread over her brow, and she turned her head aside, as if anxious to shut out an object that was disagreeable.

Resolved to follow up the effect which I had produced upon her circle, I had no sooner made the circuit of the room, and exchanged greetings with the guests, than I seated myself unbidden at the harp; and as this had been my favorite study, impelled as I was to exertion by a knowledge of the admiration which Lady Madelaine had always commanded when performing upon that showy and graceful instrument, my proficiency was, as I have reason to believe, something extraordinary; while it is probable that its effect was enhanced by the listless and unsettled mood of my hearers, who had not yet recovered the dissipations and exactions of London life.

Be that as it may, however, it is certain that exclamations of wonder and delight resounded on all sides; and that I engrossed, for full five minutes, the entire attention of the company. My father was not present. He was attending his parliamentary duties. It was well that I enjoyed my triumph freely and fully, for it was not destined to be soon repeated.

On the morrow, during the progress of my mother's toilet, Mademoiselle Joséphine was summoned to her dressing-room, to make a report of my mental and moral progress; and ten minutes afterward I was myself bidden to the conference.

Assuredly, Lady Madelaine was very beautiful; and on this particular occasion I was more than ever impressed by the fact. She was seated in a large lounging-chair, her fine hair falling in masses over her shoulders, her graceful figure loosely draped by the soft folds of a wrapping-gown of pale blue cashmere; and the extremities of her small feet thrust into a pair of crimson velvet slippers, edged with swansdown. Immediately opposite, and reflecting the whole of her person, stood a cheval glass of immense proportions, set into a frame of or-molu; upon which, after her first brief salutation on my entrance, the eyes of my mother were riveted with great complacency.

"What is this, Miss Tilden, that I hear of you?" she exclaimed, with a harshness of which, had I ever reflected upon the subject, I should have considered her incapable; "mademoiselle informs me that your vanity is so great, and so troublesome, that your maid has repeatedly complained of late both of your caprice and of your violence."

"Indeed!" I replied, with all the composure that I could assume; "I was not aware that mademoiselle considered it as a part of her duty to enter into the details of our late proceedings; but, since such is the case, I may probably, on my side, be enabled to afford your ladyship some interesting information."

My mother was evidently petrified at my audacity, while the frown and the blush which simultaneously spread over the brow and cheeks of the conscious Frenchwoman turned her complexion purple. I kept my eye steadily fixed upon her; she knew that she was in my power; and I never, thereafter, suffered her to overlook the fact.

"What is the meaning of this, Eveleen?" asked my mother, after a momentary silence.

"Much, or nothing, as Mademoiselle Joséphine may consider best," I answered, quietly.

"If you expect, Miss Tilden," pursued Lady Madelaine, evidently highly provoked, but endeavoring to conceal her annoyance, "that I shall consent to waste my time upon your criminations and recriminations, I beg you at once to undeceive yourself. Thus much, however, I feel it my duty to remark—that, had mademoiselle acted fearlessly and energetically, and as I had every right, from the recommendations upon which she was received into this family, to hope that she would have done—these complaints against my daughter never could have occurred."

No wonder that Félicie tossed her little head, and snuffed the air with an expression of virtuous indignation and outraged dignity, when she remembered that it was by her own un-

assisted cleverness that "*cette bête de Joséphine*" had been so pleasantly established.

"Vanity!" continued Lady Madelaine in a tone of contemptuous mockery, which, looking upon her at that moment, was quite an epigram; "can there be a more despicable, a more unworthy vice! Félicie, I am really weary of telling you that I will *not* have my ringlets so massed together! Scatter them, in order that the lines of the forehead may be traced in profile; and do not let me have to remind you of this again.—Then I have been compelled to hear of your violence, Miss Tilden. Upon my word! Your education has progressed in less than two years, since you have learned within that period to strike your maid."

I own that I did now feel considerably ashamed. The rebuke which I had just received for my vanity rather amused than disconcerted me. My mother was off her guard; she forgot that I was two years older in time since we parted, and she had yet to learn that I was ten years older in knowledge of the world, or rather in that shrewd and active observation by which it is the most easily attained. The second charge brought against me was less easily excused to my own heart. I was as proud as Lady Madelaine herself; and when my transgression was thus abruptly laid before me, there was a coarseness about it by which I was revolted.

Well had it been had my mother dismissed me at that moment, while a wholesome feeling of compunction planted a burning flush upon my cheek—well, alike for the respect which I owed to her, and for the effect produced upon my own character. But this was not to be. Lady Madelaine, who detested the exertion which she considered herself in this instance called upon to make, and who had evidently determined to avoid, if possible, all chance of its recurrence, had yet a few more "last words" to deliver; and I was still standing silently beside her, self-condemned and humbled in my own eyes, when Félicie, who was, unfortunately for herself, much more intent upon the conversation that was going on about her, than upon her own occupation, and who had just commenced operations on the other side of her lady's ringlets, began once more to pile the glossy curls thickly together; when the taper fingers of the angry beauty suddenly wound themselves about the handle of the brush, and wresting it from her hand, flung it violently into her face, whence it bounded off, and falling upon a table on which stood a breakfast service of Nankin china, brought the cup and saucer about to be used by my mother to the floor, where they lay scattered in fragments; at the same instant when Félicie, with a faint shriek, raised her black silk apron to her face, to stanch the blood which was flowing from her nose.

I remained for an instant aghast and motionless, and then I fear that, despite my better reason, I smiled. I imagine that I must have done so, for at that very moment, as the eyes of my mother and my own chanced to meet, I saw a cloud gather upon her brow. Her little hand instinctively clenched itself, and her slippered foot beat against the floor, as she exclaimed hurriedly "Leave the room, Miss Tilden! Have you not the good taste to leave the room?"

Had I been in the Presence, I could not have made a more punctilious courtesy than that with which I withdrew, followed by the shrinking and trembling Joséphine. I turned one look upon the unhappy delinquent, who was standing apart, crying bitterly with mingled pain and passion; but I have no doubt that she was easily consoled, for I saw her on the following Sunday, glorious in a dress of violet lutestring, which I remembered to have once noticed upon my mother.

Need I say that no particularly high moral effect was produced upon me by the interview which had been so strangely terminated. I was no longer a child—I felt my power. My own mother had shrunk from my observation. I forgot all that she had uttered, both in reproach and warning; but the action which had succeeded the words was, for months afterward, still vividly before me. Example is a hundred fold more potent than precept upon the spirit of the young. When the hour came at which I had formerly been in the habit of joining my mother's circle, I was already deep in doubt between a dress of white muslin, and a frock of blue brocade, when mademoiselle very sententiously informed me that *miladi* would dispense with my presence, and that I was not again to present myself *en société*, until I had received instructions to that effect.

A week before—even a day before—such a message would have made me furious; now, I received it with perfect calmness; and desiring that my maid would replace the rival dresses in my wardrobe, I flung myself upon a sofa, and was soon, to all appearance, deeply engaged in the last volume of Fielding's Amelia. I could see that my unquestioning resignation astonished both my governess and my waiting-woman; they exchanged glances of surprise which did not escape me, and which was just what I desired; but they had no sooner left me to myself than I laid aside the book, and began, as was now my invariable custom, to search for the explanation of my mother's conduct. I asked myself why she, who had been formerly so blind to my faults, so demonstrative in her affection, so indulgent in her rule when I was a mere mindless child, should suddenly have become cold, repelling, and even harsh in her bearing, now that I had attained a more companionable age, and was more capable of appreciating kindness? The simple banishment from her immediate circle I could at once, and without difficulty, have attributed to her annoyance at my presence during the scene of the morning, and her anxiety that the impression should have time to become fainter ere we again met. I did not waste a moment upon that phase of the affair. It was the abrupt, uncompromising dictatorial tone which she had assumed at that very interview, which struck me as incongruous and inexplicable. That she had listened to the complaints made against me, and to the circumstances which had called them forth, was evident from the spirit of her rebuke; but that she should not condescend to make some appeal to me individually, and thus enable me to excuse or to justify myself, was the great subject of my bewilderment.

Had I not for years been encouraged and applauded whenever I endeavored to imitate

her either in air or manner? Had I not been praised and petted when I succeeded in aping a tone or a gesture with sufficient accuracy to insure its immediate recognition? Had she not frequently chidden me for the disorder of a stray ringlet, or the discomposure of a ruffled flounce? Had I not received repeated injunctions not to spread the muscles of my hands, by attempting to grasp objects too large for them, and to be careful to tread evenly, lest I should spoil the turn of my ancle? Was not her parting command to Mademoiselle Joséphine connected with the preservation of my complexion? and were not all these cases so many incentives to vanity? My reason answered "Yes;" and I felt that herein at least I was entitled to the highest commendation for my implicit and unvarying obedience.

I walked to the glass. There could be no doubt that on this point my mother had every reason to be satisfied. She had given me a text, and I had composed a whole volume upon that single sentence. There could be no doubt, I say, upon the subject. I was decidedly a beauty, and it was beauty of a very high order. I tried my head in several positions, and it came triumphantly through every ordeal. I was tall, too; I felt it was extremely probable that in two years more I should be as tall as Lady Madelaine herself; and in two years I should be sixteen. How many of my most cherished heroines had been fenced in by lovers at sixteen! I wondered whether this fact had ever struck her; she must have known it, for I learnt it from her own books.

Decidedly she could not have been disappointed with my appearance. Wherein then could lie the cause of my disgrace? I was satisfied that my masters would report well of my progress, one and all; and, indeed, I had already afforded to Lady Madelaine herself the opportunity of estimating my musical proficiency. I had excited not only attention, but even astonishment. Here again I was consequently blameless. I could find no clue to the enigma.

CHAPTER XIII.

On one point I was, at the close of my deliberations, absolutely determined; and this was to endure the maternal caprice, for simply as such did I consider it, in dignified silence. I would not condescend to complain. I was no longer a child to be chidden without a cause. In two years I should be sixteen, and there was to me impunity and emancipation in the very thought.

As I resolved, so I acted. That I suffered deeply I will not deny; for, greedy of admiration, and accustomed to indulgence, I could not think of the brilliant circle collected in the other wing of the house, without severe mortification; but I suffered in silence. I did not relax a tittle in my application to the various accomplishments which formed my duties. I pursued my reading with the same avidity as ever; but I was now driven to the general library, for I dared no longer invade the bookshelves of Lady Madelaine. I found, however, an ample store of fiction even there, although, fortunately for me, it was of a higher class. Still, I had many unoccupied moments, and these were invariably employed in speculating upon my mother's extraordinary change of feeling; and in building some very magnificent "castles in the air," of which I was one day to become the tenant.

Things remained in this position for a fortnight, at the end of which time my father arrived from town; and with this information was coupled the command of Lady Madelaine, that I should take my coffee, as I had formerly done, in the drawing-room. I obeyed with the same composure as on the occasion of my banishment. In vain did mademoiselle, who condescended to superintend my toilet, endeavor to elicit from me some expression of surprise or curiosity; for, although I studiously tried the patience both of herself and my attendant, and three times changed my dress when they supposed me ready to join my mother's guests, not a syllable did I suffer to escape my lips upon the subject which actually engrossed my mind. At length their toil was over, I confessed myself satisfied—gave a last look at the glass—arranged a stray hair—and descended to the drawing-room, if not with the same feeling, at least with the same appearance of composure as though I had never been exiled from its gaieties.

As I anticipated, my father was the first who greeted me on my entrance. Absorbed by public business, as my mother had been by pleasure; and, moreover, with little cause to hope that my companionship would repay him for personal inconvenience, he had never once visited Rooksley during the whole period of her absence; and I observed that he appeared no less struck by the change in my person than Lady Madelaine and her friends had been upon the former occasion; but his surprise was evidently pleasurable. There was a proud expression in his eyes as they lingered upon my face, and a deep tenderness in the tone with which he addressed me; nor was I slow to remark that, mingled with that tenderness, there was a courteous deference of manner, of which a really high-bred man can never divest himself when conversing with a woman, but which I had never before observed in him when speaking to myself.

The conviction gave me courage. "In my father's eyes I am no longer a child!" I whispered proudly to my own heart; and, after having lingered for a moment at his side, I slowly approached the lounging-chair of Lady Madelaine, without looking either to the right or left, but making my way with all the grace and self-possession of which I was capable. When I stood before her, my mother gave me a slight nod, and a faint smile, just what would have been a graceful and becoming acknowledgment of my propriety of bearing, had we only parted an hour or two previously: and who, save myself, was aware that it was not so!

This ceremony over, I found my hand clasped in that of Miss Vernon, who, drawing me aside, began eagerly to explain that Lady Madelaine had peremptorily forbidden all invasion of the school room, or that she should have shared my solitude frequently, very frequently. I thanked her with a beaming smile and a heightened color; but it was not her affection

ete address which had elicited either the one or the other. At the very moment that she was speaking, I heard the voice of Sir James Dornton, who exclaimed, in an accent loud enough to reach my ear—

"Can it be possible that the beautiful girl I see yonder is Miss Tilden!—the little Eveleen of a few months ago! Egad, in a year or two my Lady Madelaine herself must look to her laurels."

I had never thought the fastidious baronet half so agreeable; and was glad when he soon afterward approached me, and I found that he had just arrived from town with my father.

"We traveled *en tiers*, Miss Tilden," he said, affecting intense disgust; "which is what no one should do who is not prepared to risk all the consequences, however fatal; and this alarming fact I considerately laid before your senatorial papa; but he gave no heed to my remonstrance; and accordingly, after we had each possessed ourselves of a corner of the chariot, the process was completed by the application of a human wedge in the shape of that tall young gentleman, who is now lounging against the mantle-piece, and staring most impertinently into the face of a young lady with whom I have the honor of being in conversation."

I instinctively looked in the direction which he indicated; and as I did so, even rapidly as he withdrew his gaze, my eyes met those of the stranger for an instant. I had never before seen such eyes; so large, so dark, and so soft in their expression. Tall, and slight, but with an air of fashion, and a gracefulness of attitude which appeared to realize all the fabled perfection of the heroes of my imagination, I saw at the first glance that the new guest was a mere stripling; but I dared not pursue my scrutiny: and the pause was consequently brief, which I terminated by inquiring his identity.

"That very fortunate young gentleman," said Sir James, "is the only child of your mother's pet friend, Lady Devereux—*que voilà*, showing her pretty foot to the insensible Frederic Vernon—and he is consequently the sole heir of Sir Herbert, who, I have been confidently assured, loves him almost as well as his favorite hunter. Think of that, Miss Tilden! and emulate his perfections. The *joli garçon* has just left college; and as his lady-mother is of opinion that black and scarlet blend very harmoniously, she has coaxed his unwilling papa—whose principal study is, as you are probably aware, how to do the least possible good in the longest possible time: or, perhaps, I should rather say, to live out his life without doing anything—to allow her darling to go into the Guards; and, such as you see him, he is actually and *bona fide*, at this moment, one of the defenders of his country, and has run down to Rooksley to 'kiss hands' on the momentous occasion."

"He appears to be very young," I hazarded in reply.

"He completed his seventeenth year a day or two since; but you must venture no remark upon his juvenility; horse-guardsmen of that age being wonderfully punctilious on the matter of their manliness."

The words were scarcely uttered when my father, followed by young Devereux, advanced to the sofa, upon which we were seated, when the subject of our conversation was made known to me; and Sir James, with a sarcastic ceremony, for which at the moment I detested him, rose, and resigned his place beside me to the stranger, who, however, possessed himself of it with a composure and good faith which soon restored my complacency.

I felt as though I now saw one of my favorite novels in action, and that I was to become the heroine of a plot full of romance and interest. I required no prompting to teach me that he admired my person; and I had been too long prepared for a similar event, to be found wanting in the attempt to display my perfections in the most favorable light. I closed my eyes languidly, after the fashion of my mother; and when the long lashes had produced their effect, I raised them suddenly to the face of my companion, only to avert them in the same haste. My triumph was great as I remarked his growing interest. He was evidently unsuspicious of artifice; and as all my mother's lady-guests were absorbed in their own peculiar partialities and avocations, no comment was made upon the fact of our continuing in conversation throughout the evening, and parting only when mademoiselle entered to reclaim what she was pleased to call her *pupil*.

As my father's public duties would not permit of his remaining long absent from town, it was intimated to me, that, with the exception of those hours which were habitually dedicated to my several masters, my time and movements were at my own disposal. I had suddenly attained to happiness! I was free to come and to go. I was beloved—this, above all, was the thought which gave a new charm to my existence; nor did I suffer myself to doubt that it must be so. It is true that at the end of a week I began to have some misgivings of the progress of the devoted attachment of which I was resolved to become the object. Engrossed by my own vanity, the idea of the conquest which I had made was ever present to me; nor could I force myself to feel an interest in any other subject. I did not reflect that it was far otherwise with young Devereux. He might admire me as a pretty girl, and find a pleasure in conversing with one who treated his sentiments and attentions with respect; but he had also other contemplations even more agreeable. He had just escaped the trammels of college, and taken a decided and honorable position in society. Bright visions of the future mingled, therefore, with his enjoyment of the present; and it is probable that long after I argued myself into the belief that I held his happiness in my hands, the placid reveries in which he loved to indulge were full of gold lace and thorough-bred chargers, instead of bright eyes and well-turned ankles.

This coldness did not, however, long continue. He was dazzled by the showiness of my accomplishments, flattered by the pleasure which I did not attempt to conceal when we met, and surrounded by an atmosphere redolent of gallantry and dissipation. Nevertheless, Herbert Devereux was a greater novice than myself in the language of admiration. Timid, wholly unconscious of his personal advantages, and deeply imbued with respect for the sex, he was guarded in every word and look. He lived in

perpetual fear of offending, and took alarm, more than once, at the very means which I adopted to give him confidence. Time and opportunity, however, were my best allies. My father returned to town, leaving the young soldier quietly domesticated under his roof: and thus the only watchful and wary eye which might have detected our childish folly was withdrawn.

Sir James Dornton was the first person who directed attention to the precocious flirtation in which we were engaged; but as he did so in merry mockery rather than in prudent warning, it was acknowledged only to become the new amusement of the circle. They even jested with us on the subject. They were wrong. These boy and girl attachments frequently lead to more serious results than is imagined by those who look on them in sport.

Lady Devereux alone never appeared to remark our growing fancy. It was her policy to affect perfect indifference and contempt of so extremely improbable an idea. It is certain that even her only son would have had some difficulty in making a more judicious marriage, in a worldly point of view. So, while Lord Otterford jested with my mother upon the prepossession of his young cousin, and revolted against the threat of my renewed banishment from the drawing-room, Lady Devereux pursued the even tenor of her way, leaving events to dispose of themselves.

My mother, always self-absorbed, and unwilling to contend with her devoted admirer upon so very immaterial a subject, left us in peace, and soon ceased altogether to remark our proceedings. Many romantic hours did we spend upon the lake; across which Herbert Devereux used to row until the boat was fairly hidden among the willow-boughs which fringed the island that intervened between them and the house. Here, with one of my favorite books, all which were new to my companion, or with my guitar, which he played to admiration, we spent long hours, during the riding excursions of Lady Madelaine's party; while the park afforded walks sufficiently secluded to satisfy even my exacting spirit of romance. At length Herbert told me that he loved me. Tall in stature, and perfectly self-possessed in manner, he had soon forgotten that I was still a mere girl; nor did I, on my side, pause to remember the fact. My day-dream was accomplished. I stood on the same level with my mother; and when the elegant stripling raised my hand to his lips, and prayed me to pardon the avowal, I was violently agitated. It was the first great triumph of my vanity, and I felt as though earth could thereafter hold no evil destiny for me.

My emotion gave me new charms in the eyes of my young admirer. He was too unworldly to suspect its source; nor was it a confidence which I felt called upon to make; but from that hour I was conscious of my power, and resolved to exert it.

An incident which shortly afterward occurred, nevertheless, changed materially, not only my feelings of self-reliance, but the actual tenor of my life.

Lady Madelaine had received from a friend in India a fan of carved ivory of magnificent workmanship. The Glenfillan arms, her own cipher, and other appropriate ornaments, were wrought upon it, with a delicacy and finish which rendered it of extreme value, especially to Lady Madelaine herself.

This fan she one evening chanced to mislay, nor could any of the servants succeed in finding it. A search by the guests ensued the following morning, after luncheon; and while each was engaged in disarranging some article of furniture in the saloon, under the plea of seeking for the lost fan, I passed on into the octagon-room, followed by Herbert Devereux.

As I was really anxious for the recovery of the pretty toy, I did not remark the circumstance; but approaching a sofa which stood in a recess, I at once began to displace the cushions, when I suddenly felt an arm folded about my waist, and a warm lip pressed to my cheek. I started, and turned round. My woman-instinct had at once told me who was the aggressor; but I had no time to chide, for in the doorway also stood my mother, with her dark and angry eyes riveted upon us.

Herbert drew back in evident consternation—it was the first time that he had dared so much, and he was cowed at the effects of his audacity. My own heart beat violently, and I felt the hot blood mantling over my brow; but I stood my ground. The after-conduct of my mother, however, for a time humbled and disconcerted me. She softly closed the door behind her, and pushed the bolt; and, this done, she seated herself haughtily upon the sofa, and turned towards young Devereux, who supported himself, as he stood, against a chair.

"I have intruded upon you at an unfortunate moment, Mr. Devereux," she said coldly; "but you must pardon me: This child is my daughter, and with her I shall know how to deal. With regard to yourself, you must pardon me once more, if I say that you had better, without more delay, enter upon your military duties."

"Miss Tilden is blameless, madam—" commenced the agitated young man, hurriedly.

"Of course she is—she is *my* daughter, sir," interrupted Lady Madelaine, in the same tone of forced composure as before; "she has not yet escaped from the nursery, and is consequently quite unable to take care of herself. I will henceforth be cautious that she shall not require to do so. The mail passes through Rooksley to-night; and perhaps you would now like to go, and take leave of your mother."

Devereux was thunderstruck. He made another attempt to obtain a hearing; but Lady Madelaine was inexorable.

"Enough, enough," she said impetuously; "you to your parade-ground, and this child to her school-room. All argument is useless."

Overpowered by her manner, Herbert bowed profoundly, turned one long, supplicating look toward me, as though to crave my pardon for the displeasure which he had brought upon me, and shooting back the bolt, slowly left the room.

"You have commenced early, Miss Tilden," was the sarcastic observation of my mother, when he had disappeared; "your education has indeed progressed far beyond my expectations, and you are likely to do honor to your father's name. These are then the creditable results of the vanity which I sought in vain to

curs! Do you not remember how seriously I expostulated with you upon this subject not a month since?"

"I do, madam," I replied, with a courage which it astonishes me even now to look back upon. "Your ladyship rebuked me, both for my vanity and for my violence. I am not likely to forget the circumstance; nor, from my own experience, to doubt the correctness of the Italian proverb, which says, '*Come canta il capellano, cosè responde il sacristan.*'"

"Ha! you attempt also to speak in epigrams," exclaimed Lady Madelaine, intensely provoked; 'truly you are a precocious young lady, and cannot fail to be one day a credit to your family! How long, may I venture to inquire, have these familiarities been permitted between yourself and Mr. Devereux?"

I was silent.

"It is not your pleasure to satisfy me upon this point. Perhaps you are right. I shall at least know when they terminated forever. And now, listen to me, Miss Tilden. I have, as you are aware, lately purchased a villa upon the Thames. Thither I shall remove, with my guests, in the course of a few days. You will remain here; not under the guidance of a weak and too indulgent governess, but under strict and stringent guardianship. I have condescended to explain this, because I shall never again permit myself to hold any conversation with you on the subject."

"And my father—" I asked proudly; "is your ladyship well assured that he will sanction the imprisonment of a daughter whom he loves?"

"The experiment shall be tried," answered my mother coldly. "I am, at all events, well provided with reasons for the step which I am about to take; nor do I believe that Mr. Tilden will be insensible to the disgrace which has already been brought upon him by your levity."

"Disgrace!" I exclaimed recklessly; "I deny that I have in any way disgraced my father. My fault, if fault it be, was involuntary. I was not even aware of Mr. Devereux's presence. I will not be denounced to my father as having forgotten the respect I owe to myself."

"You will not, Miss Tilden?"

"I will not, madam. It was the first occasion upon which Lady Devereux's son had done more than kiss my hand. I trust that he did not err in so mere a trifle as that salutation, and that I am not to blame in having permitted it. Should it be otherwise, your ladyship will forgive me if I once more recall the Italian proverb."

For the moment, I knew that my mother was in my power; there was no escape from the room, as I have before mentioned, save through the saloon in which the guests were now assembled; nor did she dare to raise her voice, lest the sounds of altercation should attract their notice; and it was doubtlessly the knowledge that such was the case which inspired me with a temporary daring, ill-suited alike to my age and to our relative position.

For a brief interval, Lady Madelaine exhibited, however, no inclination to reply. She was petrified by my insolence. She little knew or guessed the education which her own neglect and baneful example had combined to work out, in a nature as confident and as self-willed as her own. I feared her still; but, girl as I was, I had almost ceased to respect her. I was aware of her power; but I was also quite as cognizant of her weakness.

"This to me!" she at length gasped out, with an eye that flamed with indignant anger, and in a suppressed voice which vainly struggled to be calm; "is this the return which you make for my indulgence? Eveleen, Eveleen, I never anticipated this. Do you presume to measure your own conduct—the conduct of a mere child—by that of those about you? It is indeed time that the viper should be crushed I shall waste no more words; you are unworthy of them. Follow me."

She rose, drew up her stately figure to its full height, and disappeared into the saloon, leaving the door of communication open. I stood for an instant irresolute. My pride revolted at the possibility of being subjected to the ridicule of the assembled guests, should my mother deem it expedient to betray the unguarded action of Herbert; while I shrank with almost equal repugnance from the idea that I might be dismissed to my room like a chidden child, after having played the part of a woman before her circle. Suddenly a thought flashed upon me.—The window, which was pierced nearly to the ground, stood invitingly open. I laid my hand upon the frame, and sprang out. The sounds of laughter reached me from the drawing-room; and my brow burnt as I figured to myself that I was, in all probability, the object of the ridicule. I, so proud, so vain, and so self-centred.—The pang was terrible! For a time I had not courage to escape from the odious merriment, but supported myself against the wall of the house, and listened with an intensity which seemed to absorb all the faculties of my being; this state of emotion was, however, too violent to last. I had already maintained a severe struggle with myself, in order to preserve an appearance of composure before my mother; and this last trial was almost more than I could support. After a short pause, therefore, I rushed away into the wood which skirted the lawn, where I was alone with my own feelings, with no eye upon me; and where the voice of ridicule and sarcasm could not meet my ear.

I threw myself down under a tree, and tried to think; but I could not. Every pulse throbbed almost to bursting, and the pain in my head was intolerable. I clasped my forehead with my spread hands, and wept—tears of passionate energy, such as were ill-suited to my years. I felt that I had been harshly used—that I had been rebuked for errors similar to those which were hourly passing before my eyes—that all opportunity of justification had been coldly denied to me. I experienced no remorse for the mortification which I had entailed upon my mother; but rather, on the contrary, believed myself worthy of praise, for the generous forbearance which had induced me to conceal from her the interview of Emily Vernon and Lord Otterford on the very spot which she had so lately occupied as an inexorable judge. I understood her sufficiently to know that by such a revelation she would have been humbled to the dust, however successfully she might have

struggled to conceal it. I might have done this, and did not; and by a strange anomaly of feeling, perfectly incomprehensible to myself, I rejoiced that it was so. It was the one consolatory point of my reflections, when at length I was enabled to reflect; and the cool night-air and the deep stillness had, ere long, so beneficial an effect upon my nerves, that I arose in a state of comparative calm; and, slowly retracing my steps to the house, proceeded at once to my own room; where, ringing for my maid, I retired immediately to rest, on the plea of sudden indisposition.

Did I say to rest! It was a mere profanation of the word. I could not close my eyes; and now that I had in a great degree overcome the effects of my interview with my mother, my thoughts reverted to Herbert; and a burning blush overspread my cheeks as I remembered that I had been treated in his presence as a froward child, who needed chastisement. He was about to depart, too; to mingle with the world of which I believed and feared that he would soon become the idol; he might forget me, or remember me ere long only in the odious character which it had pleased Lady Madelaine to attribute to me; and this was the most bitter thought of all.

I found some consolation, however, in dwelling upon the changed manner of all the men who formed my mother's circle. They, at least, it was sufficiently evident, had ceased to regard me in the same light as Lady Madelaine. Foremost among those who had admitted my claim to be otherwise considered was Sir James Dornton; and I did not seek to restrain a feeling of triumph when I remembered this.

Perhaps I could not choose a more fitting place in which to describe the said baronet; who played so prominent a part in the history of my after-life, that it is necessary to introduce him formally to the reader.

CHAPTER XIV.

Sir James Dornton, one of the most important persons in my history, was of a family more ancient than illustrious. His fortune was greatly inferior to his ambition; and he valued money, as those universally do value it whose habits of personal luxury bear no proportion to the capability of its indulgence. I need scarcely remark, however, that this undignified passion was carefully concealed. Sir James was as proud as he was poor. He was one of those men of fashion, some of whom are encountered every day, who have the tact of passing off their counterfeit as current coin, without suffering the penalty of the law for their social forgery. Nature had done everything for him physically, but had been extremely economical in her dowry of virtue. He was tall and graceful; with a fine and expressive countenance; remarkably quick at repartee; and, like all persons who care not, when they launch their arrows, whom they may ultimately wound, so long as their flight attracts attention, he passed for a man of wit. Feeling he had none, save for his own comfort and convenience; and his principle was as accommodating as his sentiment. Affecting a hyper-fastidiousness which exonerated himself from criticism, and was used as a blind for his occasional insolence to those around him; gifted with extraordinary fluency, and a retentive memory; polite and fascinating in his more amiable moments; uncompromising and decided in those of greater importance, and singularly handsome, Sir James Dornton was the *enfant cheri* of his set; a welcome visitor to the gay and the idle; and celebrated among the dissipated as a *safe friend*—which means, that in keeping his own secrets, which he was always clever enough to do, he at the same time kept theirs. There can be no doubt that there is a certain degree of talent in being able to do this.

I need scarcely say, that this is not the portrait which I should have drawn of the baronet at fourteen; it is the production of a more practiced and familiar pencil.

And now—*revenons à nos moutons.*

My reverie was long and earnest; but I still failed to discover the actual motives of my mother's conduct; and I consequently, after a considerable time, turned from the speculative to the actual position which I now occupied. I was once more to be abandoned to the solitude of Rooksley. The first use to which Lady Madelaine proposed to convert her river villa, was that of ridding her of the obtrusive presence of a daughter who had gradually become distasteful to her. Mademoiselle Joséphine was to be discarded from the school-room. This, at least, was a relief; it was the only point of light in the picture. The Frenchwoman was peculiarly disagreeable to me—she was the most contemptible of all things—a cipher; a creature at once aimless and heartless, whom it was a waste of feeling even to despise; and I very soon satisfied myself that I should eminently prefer the "strict and stringent guardianship," with which I was threatened, let it come in what shape it might. My present imputed subserviency to a discarded lady's-maid was ignoble; there would be some glory, at least, in contention, if contend I must, against a superior intellect, and a less equivocal authority.

I can look back now upon this haughty reasoning with a smile, when I remember the result; but at the time it afforded my only consolation.

The threat of Lady Madelaine was by no means an idle one. Her removal to Putney followed within a month; and Rooksley was bereft of many of its more costly ornaments for the decoration of the new villa. Nor was this all. There were signs, impossible to be misunderstood, which convinced me, without a hint from others, that she did not look forward to a speedy return. So much, indeed, was done, or rather undone, that the mansion ere long assumed the appearance of a religious house, rather than the abode of luxury which it had lately been. I confess that this fact wounded me deeply. The elegances by which I had been surrounded from my childhood had become necessary to me. I worshiped the graceful and the beautiful. They were essential to my comfort. My mother was already revenged!

How often did I laugh in the bitterness of my spirit, as I walked hurriedly about the noble park, seeking in violent exertion to still the uncomfortable feelings by which I was haunted.

when I remembered that here at least Lady Madelaine had been unable to separate me from the loveliness I so much prized. My father's apartments alone remained intact. The genius of desolation had not invaded their precincts; and there I consequently spent a great portion of my time.

As the idea of my mother was always painful to me, present itself in what shape it might, I began to turn with more interest than I had ever hitherto felt, to that of my father; and to examine carefully and earnestly every object which could afford an insight into his habits and feelings. The more I studied the subject, the more I recalled his early caresses, his subdued tones, his tender indulgence; and coupled with these the many evidences of his fine taste and cultivated mind by which I was now surrounded, the more deeply I felt that I had never returned his affection as I ought. I had just discovered the delight of being beloved; and therefore I, for the first time, rightly understood the bitter feelings with which he must have seen his tenderness rejected. This conviction carried me far, very far; for I instinctively traveled from my own want of sympathy to that of my mother. *Et tu, Brute!* was the aspiration of my heart. Yes—it was even so—the wife of his bosom did not appreciate his worth. The holy shrine of home, which should have been wreathed with blossoms, was heaped with ice; and the only garlands by which it was rendered attractive were beaten out of cold and sordid gold.

Involuntarily my thoughts glanced towards Otterford; and my breath came thick as I remembered that his bland hypocrisy and unmeaning gallantries had turned away the eyes and heart of my mother from the higher and more noble qualities of the man on whom she had bestowed her hand.

Amid these uneasy and conflicting reveries time wore slowly on. Despite the new rule to which I had been informed that I was about to become subject, no alteration had as yet been made in the household, with the sole exception that Mademoiselle Joséphine had laid aside even the affectation of supremacy, and had quietly degenerated into a sullen and very inexpert attendant; while I could trace an expression of triumph in the manner of the bustling Mrs. Harris, in our occasional encounters, evidently intended to provoke inquiry. Such condescension was, however, foreign to my character. Lady Madelaine had made the communications which she deemed expedient, and I neither sought nor cared for any others.

Of my own fate I was still comparatively careless—my leading anxiety was my present position with Herbert Devereux. Could I have been fully assured of the continuance of his affection, I might have put even my mortified vanity to rest. Had we been separated with some degree of delicacy and consideration, I might, at least, have looked back in calm and dignified sorrow to our parting; but now its memory revolted me. I had been placed in a position for which the whole course of my extensive reading offered no precedent. I had been humbled in the eyes of my first lover!—and, let those laugh who list, this was no slight trial to a budding beauty, looking forward to her fifteenth year. When not overwhelmed by this recollection, I occupied myself in speculating upon the possible renewal of my father's affection. I was more conscious, day by day, of the value of the friend whom I had lost; and I became comparatively anxious to make some attempt to reillumine his extinguished tenderness. Alas! such a blessing was not destined to me—his heart had been for years a closed casket, of which he had flung away the key. Kind, and gentle, and indulgent, he could still be, for these endearing qualities were natural to him; but they grew no longer out of the deep feelings of a husband and a father.

Mr. Tilden in his own house resembled a stately forest-tree planted in a conservatory, and he sickened at the unwholesomeness of the atmosphere.

It was the beginning of autumn; Mrs. Vernon was still detained in town; and it had been determined that her daughter should remain there also throughout the winter, in order that she might secure the best advice for what the Galen of Rooksley had decided to be a confirmed chest-complaint. Mrs. Alexander and her daughters were sojourning at Cheltenham; and of all my mother's habitual circle, no one remained in the neighborhood save Lady O'Halloran and Dr. James.

I had been accustomed to hear her portly ladyship so slightingly mentioned when she chanced to be absent; to hear both her physical and moral attributes so freely and wittily discussed; and to look upon her so decidedly as a person rather tolerated than desired, that I confess it was with a feeling very far from pleasurable that I heard her name one day announced, and thus saw my solitude for the first time invaded.

It was immediately evident that she perceived the impression produced by her presence, but she was too generous to show any resentment.

"You are surprised to see me, Miss Tilden," she said kindly, as she extended her hand; "nor should I have intruded at Rooksley contrary to the express request of Lady Madelaine, had it not been at the desire of your excellent father."

This assurance changed at once the whole current of my feelings: I both looked and expressed my acknowledgments.

"I thought you also were absent from the neighborhood," I said in conclusion, "for I was not aware of my mother's prohibition; and believed it probable, that had any of her friends been within reach, they would have taken pity on the poor prisoner."

"No, my dear young lady," said my visitor with a smile; "I am content to remain at home throughout the year, when necessity does not call me to town. I have a holier and a better use for the little I can spare, than squandering it in folly and in dress. Not, however," she added hastily, with a delicacy which did her honor, "that I blame those who enter into the gaieties of a London life, or who find pleasure in change of scene; in all probability, I should have done both under different circumstances. And now, my dear girl, what can I do to be either useful or agreeable to you?"

For a moment I did not reply, for the language of Lady O'Halloran was new to me. I

had been so accustomed to consider that, as a matter of course, all persons of a *certain* condition in life had gold at command, and that to declare yourself poor was to acknowledge your own want of *caste* and consequence, that I was thunderstruck. I recovered myself, however, on the instant; and warmly thanking my visitor for her kind intentions in my favor, I requested her, in the first place, to give me tidings of my father.

"Mr. Tilden is doubtlessly quite well," she said; "for he writes nothing on the subject of his health, which is always to me, at least, conclusive. We are all so apt to dwell upon our little ailments, both of body and spirit; and it does us so much good to prose where we feel sure to meet with sympathy, that I do not think, had anything been amiss, he would have suffered so excellent an opportunity to escape; whereas his whole letter is filled with anxiety for your happiness and comfort, which he seems to fear will both suffer from the contemplated arrangement. He tells me that you have never seen either your sister or your aunt; and therefore it was that he encouraged me to break through the ban of excommunication, thinking that a familiar face, even though it should be that of an old woman, may occasionally afford you pleasure."

"My sister! my aunt!" I exclaimed breathlessly; "what can you possibly mean! I entreat of you, my dear Lady O'Halloran, to explain yourself."

It was now my guest's turn to feel surprise—she looked at me with an expression of wondering pity. "Can it really be, my poor child," she said at length, after a pause which to me appeared interminable, "that you have been kept in ignorance of Lady Madelaine's intention?"

"I know nothing," I answered, bitterly, "save that I am forsaken and disliked—that I have become an alien from my mother's heart."

Lady O'Halloran drew her chair closer to mine, and gently took my hand. "Do not suffer yourself to believe so," she said gravely; "such morbid fancies will only serve to render your own life miserable, while they can affect no one but yourself. To your father you are an object of deep and sincere interest; but, young as you are, you must already be aware that he is not demonstrative in his feelings. That your mother is at present exasperated against you there can be no doubt; while, however, it is quite as certain that the feeling will soon pass by. I know by experience," she continued, with a sigh, "that no mother can long retain displeasure against her child."

"But my father, Lady O'Halloran—may I not ask somewhat of him! You spoke, too, of my aunt—of my sister. Did I, could I indeed understand that they are coming here?"

"I feared that they would already have preceded me," she replied calmly; "and I entreat you to remember, my dear girl, that one is your own sister, and the other the sister of your mother."

"I, indeed, required to bear this in mind," I remarked, with increased bitterness; "I now understand all the extent of Lady Madelaine's diplomacy. In my childhood I was petted and caressed—I was encouraged in every caprice and in every folly—I was made the idol not only of others, but of myself also, in order that the reverse should be more deeply felt. You talk of the feelings of a mother, Lady O'Halloran; you talk as I have read of them in books; you do not understand the nature of Lady Madelaine Tilden."

"I implore you to speak no longer in such a strain, or you will banish me the house," said my visitor, shrinking beneath the violent passion which I displayed. "It is quite true that you were prematurely dragged from the nursery, and made to play a part utterly unsuited to your years, to the great regret of all who cared to speculate on the results of such a system; but this was merely for the gratification of a whim. You are now too old to be made a toy; and your mother, on discovering her error, has, probably in her haste to repair it, exceeded somewhat in severity. But you are still very young, my dear Miss Tilden; and, should you resolve to exert your good sense, and meet the new inmates of Rooksley in a feeling of welcome and relationship, it will be but a passing trial, which will ultimately tend to enhance the pleasures of that world to which you must necessarily return in a short time. Beside,—reflect only for a moment. *Shall* you experience no delight in holding to your heart a younger sister, ready to love you, and to cling to you for companionship and sympathy? Remember the long and tedious banishment which this unoffending sister has already undergone, while you have been lapped in luxury, and cradled in indulgence."

I laughed scornfully, as I recalled to mind all the comments which I had heard made in the nursery on the young lady whose cause my zealous visitor was advocating.

"Listen to me for a moment, Lady O'Halloran," I said, as quietly as though I were arguing a mere abstract question; "you are evidently laboring in the dark. Have you ever heard Lady Madelaine Tilden mention her younger child?"

"Never; but your father—"

I waved my hand impatiently.

"Shall I tell you why? Her advent into this world nearly cost the life of her mother. Was this no crime? That mother's recovery was slow and precarious. Was this no sin? ay, and sin past all forgiveness, in the eyes of an acknowledged beauty, whose triumph was dependent upon time. The child, sickly from its birth, was fretful and plain, and gave no promise of physical perfection. Did not this fact exonerate a fashionable parent from all natural ties? Of course—of course. All the world knew that the beautiful Lady Madelaine Tilden had given birth to a second daughter, whom she had thrust forth in her infancy, because—But shame upon me!" I continued contemptuously; "I was about to give a reason for the act; and why should I? Throughout the world which she worshiped, none sought to ask one of the Lady Madelaine; nor did she win a smile the less."

"Calm yourself, my dear child, I beseech you," murmured the astonished Lady O'Halloran.

"Have no fear for me, madam," I said proudly; "you have been kind enough to express a wish to serve me, and I will be frank

with you. You shall not lavish your civility upon an ingrate. I have been disciplined in a strange school; and would fain convince you that I have learned to judge for myself. I have told you what is Miss Adela Tilden's relative situation with her mother; now learn what it is toward myself. Physically, her worldly career must be a blank, for she is totally devoid of personal attractions. Of her education you will, at once, be enabled to form a correct idea, when I tell you that, since the death of Lord Glenfillan, my maternal grandfather, the Lady Flora, at once his daughter and my sister's guardian, has resided in the heart of the Highlands, with no other assistance in forming the mind and manners of her young ward than what could be afforded by a widow lady of good family and slender means, who chanced to have buried herself in the neighborhood; and who was happy to embrace any method of increasing her inadequate income. In addition to these circumstances, I pray you also to remember, that my own fortune will, in all probability, be diminished one-half by the existence of a sister so little calculated to do honor, either to herself or to her family, in those circles where it is essential that she should shine; and then I think that you will readily exonerate me in your heart for any repugnance which I may testify to her close companionship. At present we are utter strangers; mere matter of tradition the one to the other; and this is as it should be. Why disturb so simple an arrangement? When I was first told that I had a sister, my heart bounded to meet her; but I was rebuked and ridiculed for the impulse. I have been tutored into indifference—it may be into something more. I ask only to be left as circumstances have made me."

"You wrong your nature by such an argument, my dear girl," said my good-natured visitor; "these are prejudices which have been instilled by those around you; they cannot be the growth of your own mind, for they belong neither to your age, your sex, nor your disposition. You are, and have always been, essentially companionless; for I cannot consider your tolerated appearance among your mother's guests as society to one of your tender years. Reflect only how beautiful a bond is that which unites two sisters; especially when, as in your case, the two are alone to love each other; and believe me when I tell you that a very few weeks of close and affectionate communion will suffice to convince you that your present feelings are both erroneous and ungenerous."

"Have you the same, or as efficient consolation to offer as regards the Lady Flora Glenfillan, madam?" I asked, with a smile compounded of scorn and melancholy.

"In her case, my dear, I can say nothing," was the frank reply; "for, as I never had the honor of meeting the sister of Lady Madelaine, I am necessarily *hors de combat*. I would, however, venture to remind you of her near relationship to both your mother and yourself."

"Which you must permit me at once and most unequivocally to deny, as regards myself, Lady O'Halloran," I said, haughtily. "My grandfather was twice married—in the first instance, to the daughter of some obscure Scotch farmer, whose very name has escaped me—if, indeed, it was ever uttered beneath this roof and the second time, to a woman of rank equal to his own, and probably of more ancient descent —*my* grandmother. The Lady Flora is descended from the petty Highland laird; and is consequently a connection of mine, not a relative."

Lady O'Halloran shook her head in evident sadness. "I have done, my dear Miss Tilden; and yet, for your own sake, I would fain see you adopt a more conciliating spirit. Leaving this point, however, to your serious and dispassionate consideration, let me assure you that if my occasional presence at Rooksley can afford you either comfort or gratification, I shall glad ly avail myself of the suggestion of your father, and risk the displeasure of Lady Madelaine, to reconcile you to your new mode of life."

"Surely, madam," I said hastily, "neither this Scotch connection nor this unknown younger sister will interfere with my home-habits and occupations? Am I now at an age in which the novelty of unaccustomed coercion can be tamely borne?"

"Will you forgive me, dear girl, if I am honest enough to tell you that in the false idea which you have just put forth, lies your most dangerous error?" asked my visitor in her turn; "after all, what is this age of which you speak, and in which you would find a safeguard against authority? Had you been less thoughtlessly-I was about to say, less viciously—educated, you would still have been a mere child, with your nursery and your school-room for a world; but your mind is like an exotic plant forced into premature blossom; you have begun to think and to judge at a period when other girls only act, and even then merely as automata of which others direct the springs."

My dignity was wounded, and although Lady O'Halloran paused, as if in expectation of some reply, I remained resolutely silent. To tell *me* —I who was beloved and who loved in turn with all the ardor and romance of a first passion —that my proper and fitting sphere was the nursery, and my sole duty a blind and unreasoning obedience, was an excess of plain speaking to which I dared not trust myself to answer.

"That I am a sharp and rude physician, I am well aware," continued my companion, after a glance at my clouded countenance; "but this is a subject which I have often discussed with your excellent father, to whom I have faithfully promised that I will leave no measure unattempted to secure your happiness; and I have boldly braved your anger at once in order that you should be convinced I am really earnest in the work."

I bowed coldly. I had not yet recovered my self-command.

"When you have taken time to think, you will remember also, my dear child," pursued Lady O'Halloran, perfectly unmoved by my displeasure, "that if this premature plea of age is to avail yourself, your sister may also urge it in her own behalf, with almost equal pretensions, for she is merely one year younger than yourself; and you would probably, twelve months ago, have advocated your privileges upon this score as tenaciously as you do to-day. Moreover, believe me when I assure you that the society of a sister will be very dear to you. It is a pure and holy tie; and, in your case it will

be doubly sweet; for, reared as this poor girl has been, at a distance from all possibility of acquiring those accomplishments to which so large an amount of your own life has been devoted, you have it in your power to be to her a most generous and valuable friend, and to bind her still more closely to you by gratitude than blood."

I became instinctively interested.

"Will you not endeavor to accomplish this beautiful and sisterly undertaking!"

"I will, madam."

Lady O'Halloran bent over me, and, as if involuntarily, pressed her lips to my forehead. That calm and almost solemn kiss had a strange effect upon me. I had been accustomed to the most lavish caresses from my infancy, and I believe that I estimated them at their just value; but there was something so heartfelt, so matronly, so *real*, in that of Lady O'Halloran, that I raised her fingers to my lips, and the large tears gushed from my eyes.

"Why was I never before treated like a reasonable being?" I exclaimed mournfully. "If I were old enough to play my part among the other puppets in my mother's drawing-room, was I not also capable of being led by better impulses than those of vanity and selfishness? I have been unfairly dealt with; but I have at last a friend. I *will* love this unknown sister, dear Lady O'Halloran—that is, I will strive to love her; but my heart tells me that there is much to undo."

"She will come to you, meek, timid, and, it may be, strangely ignorant of all the showy lore of modern scholarship, perhaps," pursued my companion; "but then she will also come to you pure, and fresh, and charming; knowing no guile, unsuspicious of deceit, confiding, simple, and affectionate. Would you close your heart against so genial an inmate! Credit me when I assure you that it would be no easy task. But you have already decided that the attempt shall not be made; and I have sufficient reliance on your honor and good faith, my dear Miss Tilden—"

"Call me Eveleen!" I cried passionately. "All the world—even my own mother—seems to have forgetten that I bear another name beside that of my family; but you—dear, kind Lady O'Halloran—you, who are at once the friend of the father and the child, surely you will cease to address me so coldly, when I convince you that I am not altogether unworthy of your regard."

"Your father, at least, understood you, my poor victimized girl," said my visitor, as she opened her arms, and I flung myself, deeply moved, upon her bosom. "He told me that you would well repay my zeal; and you will repay it, will you not, Eveleen! And I shall see the little family-party at Rooksley at once affectionate and happy, even including the 'Scotch connection.'"

I could not join in the smile. Her description of the meek, confiding, deficient sister, to whom I was ere long to be all in all, had overwhelmed me with romantic delight; but the vision of Lady Flora Glenfillan—whose "stringent guardianship" had been the most bitter threat of my mother, passed like a dark shadow over my heart.

"I will pledge myself no further to-day, even to Lady O'Halloran," I said at length.

"Well, well, perhaps I am unreasonable to expect more," replied the good lady, gaily. "I hope to see you again before your new inmates arrive; you will then have recovered the first shock of your surprise. And now, will you do *me* a pleasure, my dear—Eveleen? If so, tie on your shawl and bonnet, jump into my pony-chair, and spend the remainder of this bright day with me. Your carriage can convey you home at night; and I promise, indeed I do, that unless you yourself provoke it, the subject which we have just been so earnestly discussing shall not be touched upon again. So come fearlessly, my dear girl, and admire the hundred expedients by which I endeavor to conceal from myself the fact that I am no longer rich; and learn, at the same time, the wholesome truth, that it is very possible to be happy without either establishment or equipage, when the heart is filled by a much dearer interest."

Need I say that I accepted an invitation so given as frankly as I received it. Far, however, from shrinking away from the subject of the forthcoming change in my destiny, I recurred to it more than once; and when I at length parted from my kind hostess, it was with a feeling of increased respect for her; and what I had never in my life experienced until that moment, a growing distrust of my own perfectibility.

CHAPTER XV.

It was fortunate that Lady O'Halloran's attention to my father's request had been so prompt, for the travelers arrived on the succeeding evening. Never shall I forget my sensations when their arrival was announced to me! Before I left the Hall, my zealous hostess had wrung from my reluctant lips that I would do my best to love, not only my unknown sister, but also the guardian of her childhood; in making the latter promise, however, I felt that my heart had no part in the pledge. Civil I knew that I should necessarily be, for I believed that I was too well-bred to degrade myself by any exhibition of rudeness; and I resolved to struggle at courtesy; but for aught beyond this I was still quite unprepared.

I rose from my harp with a throbbing heart. Stir a step beyond the room to welcome the new-comers I could not. I felt sick and faint. I was angry with myself for my ill-timed emotion, but I could not overcome it; and while I was endeavoring to rebuke myself into at least the semblance of composure, they were ushered into the apartment.

In the van stalked a tall, gaunt figure, draped in a cloak of woolen plaid; which checkered horror, I was subsequently informed, was the Glenfillan tartan. There was a head-dress also of some nameless material and indescribable form, which was flung off abruptly; and before I could command myself sufficiently to give utterance to one word of greeting, or had even caught a glimpse of my sister, I found myself clasped in two long arms, and hugged so tightly to the Glenfillan tartan, that I had not breath even to scream; while a shrill voice, in a strong

Scotch accent, was pouring forth a flood of vehement ejaculations.

I will not attempt to expatiate on my disgust. This was stringent guardianship, indeed! The travel-reeking cloak; the hot breath that seemed to stagnate upon my forehead; the fearful clutch from which I really believed my very bones to be endangered, settled the relative positions of Lady Flora and myself forever. It was an unaccustomed and coarse contact to which I instinctively felt that I could never submit without the deepest repugnance. I was at once terrified and disgusted; and when the grasp was at length relaxed, and that my tormentor (for such she seemed at the moment) drew back, and held me at arms' length, in order to examine my person at her ease, and that I saw the prominent cheek-bones, the sharp nose and chin, and the disordered and uncurled masses of grizzled hair which had escaped from beneath what was evidently intended to represent a cap, I involuntarily closed my eyes to shut out the unpleasant object which had forced itself upon me so abruptly.

My aunt! No, no—even in that moment of intense annoyance, I found leisure to thank the fates that if this were indeed the Lady Flora Glenfillan, she was at least no aunt of mine.

"And my sister—" I at length gasped out; "where is my sister?"

"Ay, come, Addy, and show yourself!" exclaimed the gaunt apparition, in a tone which betrayed at least as much asperity as affection. "Come and show yourself, child. Ye have no reason, that I ken of, to be ashamed of facing even your town-bred sister!"

And "Addy" did come forth from her hiding-place behind her aunt; and my romantic susceptibilities were somewhat chilled by the fact that while I had been imprisoned in the arms of Lady Flora, instead, as I anticipated, of being overwhelmed with emotion, curiosity, and awe, she had quietly divested herself of her traveling wraps, and was just giving a last touch to the glossy bands of auburn hair which were parted upon her forehead. I nevertheless opened my arms to receive her; but, instead of availing herself of the movement, she folded her hands primly over her bosom, and dropped me a courtesy which would not have been out of keeping at the close of a dancing lesson.

"Hech! child, is that what I bid you do?" harshly demanded the titled duenna. "Do you not know that Eve-leen is your own sister? Why should you not make free with her? Did you see me stand courtesying and making ceremonies? Are you not under your own mother's roof? And have you not as much right to expect a loving welcome as she has to offer it?"

The apparent automaton, upon this judicious, well-timed, and conciliating address, did as she was desired. The cheek was cold, however, which was pressed to mine, for our lips, as if through mutual disappointment, did not meet; the pulsations of the heart which for a brief instant beat against my own were calm and regular. I was altogether taken by surprise.

When we had seated ourselves, awaiting the announcement of refreshments, of which the travelers stood greatly in need—for Lady Flora had lived all her life beyond the Tweed, and made it a principle not to scatter her money upon the road—refreshments which, *par parenthèse*, she was provident enough to order as she passed through the hall, I had leisure to examine my two new companions. With the aunt my curiosity was soon fully satisfied. I felt that Lady O'Halloran herself would not have a word to say on that subject; and when I turned my eyes upon the niece, I discovered that she was similarly occupied with myself. What effect had been produced by my appearance upon the mind of my sister I could not, however, even guess. There was not a trace of emotion of any sort upon her countenance. She was as calm, as cold, and as composed, as though nothing had occurred for which she was not perfectly prepared.

As our eyes met, those of Adela were quietly withdrawn; and I pursued my survey in the intervals of a conversation in which I was little more than an auditor. It consisted of reminiscences of the road; comments on the grievous outlay to which they had been subjected by their journey; surmises of impositions, to which, nevertheless, Lady Flora could not attach any tangible proof; and other equally high-bred and interesting topics. I had, however, no alternative, save to sit by as patiently as I could, and endeavor to form some idea of what my sister *might* be, when relieved from the strait-waistcoat of her guardian's presence.

With her personal appearance I was astonished. She was decidedly not a beauty; nor did she give any promise of ever becoming such; but she had one of those *piquante* and peculiar faces which frequently prove more attractive than merely regular features. It was evidently a countenance capable of immense expression; although at the present moment it was as passionless and immobile as a pasteboard mask. She was unusually tall; indeed, in this particular, she had the advantage of me, for despite my year of eldership I stood no whit higher than herself; nor had she been under the roof of Rooksley many hours ere I discovered that if I had acquired elegance by study and long habit, my sister was no less gifted with a gracefulness to the full as desirable. Even disguised as she was in a costume in which I would not have permitted my waiting-woman to officiate at my toilet, this fact did not escape me; and it indnced a feeling of interest in the fair creature who displayed so much good material to work upon.

"And now, lassies," said Lady Flora, before we left the supper-room, where she had consumed a greater quantity of food than had ever been previously contemplated by the attendants; "now, we are all quite at home together, and shall, I dare say, get on weel enough. What Eve-leen does not know, you, Addy, can teach her; for I dare say her education, as they call it, has been but a strange rumgumfery o' useless and unprofitable nonsense; and if she should chance to know anything that you have not been taught, why, she can teach you. I shall say naething o' other things to-night. To-morrow will be a new day, and we shall soon understand each other."

I felt that we already understood each other; and my contempt for the new authority which had been set over me was so great, that an expression of scorn rose involuntarily to my lip,

which I instantly discovered, by the deep flush that passed transiently over her face, was not lost upon my sister.

"I have consented to leave my home," pursued Lady Flora, turning the lounging-chair upon which she had been seated at table toward the fire, throwing herself back in an attitude infinitely more easy than graceful, and crossing her feet upon the fender, with an expression of well-fed resignation; "I have consented to leave my dear Glenfillan, for the first time in my life, in order to be useful to my sister and her children. It is na every one who is competent to take charge of two young ladies wi' noble blood in their veins, and coheiresses into the bargain." (I winced slightly, as she spoke; but, on looking into the placid face of my sister, the feeling vanished.) "I flatter myself, however, even although I have heard some sad rumors of your giddy doings, Eve-leen, that all will end conformably," continued the lady, very sententiously, while I felt my brow burn on discovering that the large brown eyes of Adela were riveted upon me. "You will have a gude example in your sister, and a still better one in me; for I am proud to feel that never from my girlhood even to the present day—or I should rather, perhaps, say night, for I'm afraid that its growing awfu' late—has any one ventured even to hint a doubt of the virtue and propriety of Lady Flora Glenfillan."

"I can quite believe it, madam," I said, with another saucy smile, as I looked her stedfastly in the face.

"And not only it was never doubted," she resumed, "but I may also boast that there never was cause for it to be sae."

"The one position is as easily credited as the other," I again replied, in the same tone. "A woman's reputation, like the water of the ocean, should not only be able to reject all impurities, but also to resist all taint; a task in which it is probably sometimes assisted by its natural nauseousness."

I was conscious that my sister started as the words fell upon her ear; and their cool insolence was too palpable even for the obtuseness of Lady Flora. She turned her small, light, gray eyes upon me with a questioning expression to which her lips did not, however, provide an echo. The trope had bewildered her, and she could not clearly see her way.

"It is no sma' thing," whistled the shrill voice once more after a moment's pause, "to root out a' one's old habits, and to leave all one's old friends, to live in a strange place and among strangers; and, had the present Lord Glenfillan been a little more civil and wiselike towards his own kith and kin, I do not know that I should have had resolution to upset all my plans and arrangements, to come wandering the world now-a-days; but to be shut out o' the castle, where I had been born and bred, was more than I *could* bear; and, besides, it was time that Addy made acquaintance with her nearest blood relations, and had a chance of showing what was in her; and the difference between a good, honest, steady education in the heart of the Highlands, and a flashy, tricky, ne'er-do-weel bringing-up by French flirts and fly away dancing-masters; and so you see, Eve-leen, here we are; and I shall be glad if, by doing my duty to my sister, I should haply be the saving of you, while it's yet time; for, being both my nieces—"

"Your ladyship will pardon me," I hastily and resolutely interposed; for I was now urged beyond my forbearance by the stolid self-sufficiency of the speaker, and felt that the struggle for supremacy must come, and that, consequently, the sooner it were commenced, the less difficult I should find it to assert my pretensions and to secure the victory; "your ladyship must really pardon me, if I disabuse you without further delay of the error under which you appear to be laboring. Neither Miss Adela Tilden nor myself have the honor of being your nieces. Our connection with you, through the medium of our mother, is at once slight and undefined. We are the descendants of the Earl of Glenfillan through his marriage with the Honorable Miss O'Finistree; and we claim no kindred with the race of Mac—something—I have really forgotten the precise name—from which you are yourself descended."

I shall never forget the pause which ensued. Lady Flora lay back upon her cushions, with her small eyes dilated, and her large mouth wide open. The demure countenance of my sister was bent down over the hearth-rug; and I sat erect, and panting with indignation and offended dignity, confronting my victim.

"Heard ever human ears the like?" at length ejaculated Lady Flora in a tone of horror. "Before Addy would dare to breathe such blasphemy against the family-name, she would consent to be laid in the family-vault. And you not fifteen! Well was it that my father, the earl, was carried there before these things came to pass!"

"You appear to have taken your present step under a delusion, madam," I said coolly, so soon as she had delivered herself of this somewhat irrelevant apostrophe; "and I consider it better at once to undeceive you. The inducement held out by Lady Madelaine, which has decided you to undertake the charge of my conduct and principles, is, of course, best known to yourself. That I should find your delegated authority essentially disagreeable, and discordant to all the past habits of my life, my mother very considerately hinted to me; and I as resolutely made up my mind to abate the annoyance to the uttermost of my power. I had consequently schooled myself to receive you with civility and respect—even to go further than this, if I found it possible, and to endeavor to look upon you as a family connection. You have, however, at once and forever relieved me from the extreme difficulty of such an attempt; for you have met me in the spirit of a task-mistress, and sought to humble me, not only in my own eyes, but even in those of a younger sister, utterly unknown to me until within the last few hours. This line of conduct, as unexpected as it is indelicate, quite exonerates me to my own heart, for the future; and, as my mother has decided that you are to be an inmate of Rooksley for some time at least, we had better come to an understanding at once. You have been pleased to depreciate, in by no means measured terms, the education which I have received. It is a system, nevertheless, that I have not the most remote intention to abandon, and in which

it is more than probable that your ladyship will not feel the slightest interest. Your proposal that I should make it useful to my sister I accept cheerfully, for she *is* my sister—and I shall esteem it a happiness to be of service to her. This concession is, however, the only one which I feel inclined to make. In your eyes, I may probably be still too young to assume such a position, but I have been reared with different ideas; and an appeal to Lady Madelaine Tilden will convince you that I am quite capable of maintaining the resolution which, from your own overweening assumption of authority, and want of regard for my feelings, I have found it necessary to adopt at once."

I was somewhat overcome by my own effort at eloquence, but its effect was infinitely greater upon my auditor. She was absolutely transfixed with astonishment, and quite unequal to the emergency. It was, indeed, scarcely surprising that under the circumstances my indignation should have been great, for the transition was too violent and too sudden, from the adulation and encouragement of the refined and the educated, to the coarse comments and vulgar dictation of the ungainly woman before me. Feeling, nevertheless, that I had better not trust myself with further discussion, and satisfied that I should be wise to follow up the impression which I had visibly produced, I rose haughtily from my chair; and without giving my discomfited antagonist time to rally, I said, in a tone of sarcastic courtesy, "As I presume that we are all equally at home on all points at Rooksley, and, as your ladyship must need repose after such multifarious exertions, I will have the honor of wishing you good-night!" and laying my hand upon the bell, I rang for my maid.

Still Lady Flora was silent. She was half-frightened, and half-exasperated; while the scene in which I had enacted the tragic muse did not appear to discompose my incomprehensible sister in the slightest degree. She still wore the same expression of listless fatigue and unsympathizing ennui with which she had met my welcoming embrace; and, on the entrance of my attendant, when I had courtesied silently and distantly to the elder lady, she placed her passive hand in mine, and echoed my "good-night" as calmly as though she had never in her life retired to rest without our having exchanged a similar greeting.

When I reached my own apartment, and had hurried through the necessary duties in order to be once more alone, I dismissed Joséphine, and flung myself upon my bed in a paroxysm of passionate mortification. Was this the clinging, confiding, loving sister, whose affection was to repay me for every trial, and for every disappointment? Was this the guardian who was to control my destiny? *This!*

I need not expatiate on the result of my deliberations. I was at first startled at the extreme want of breeding and the homely idioms of Lady Flora, when I remembered that she was the sister of my dignified and fastidious mother, even prepared as I had been by the inferences and comments of the nursery (where my father's valet, during his period of favor with Mrs. Harris, had often beguiled the time by his broad sketches of the castle in the Highlands and its several inmates), to imagine that she differed greatly in all points from her more gifted and favored relative; I had only, however, to pass the salient points of her career in review, to feel that my astonishment was misplaced. The pupil of Miss Margery Macspleuchan, actually, if not nominally, deserted throughout her girlhood by her father—the despised step-child of a high-born mother-in-law—the tolerated companion of a half-sister, with whom she had neither taste nor sympathy in common—still dependent on the will and subjected to the contact of a vulgar aunt—the rejected kinswoman of the tenant of her dead father's home—and the great lady of a low circle, into which she was flung by circumstances, could not fairly be expected to make a very brilliant figure in the new position into which she was now forced.

Then came the question—How had my sister escaped? only to be followed by the more startling one of—*Had* she, in truth, escaped? and I felt a pang when I was obliged to answer my own query by the avowal that I could not judge. I had scarcely heard her utter a dozen sentences. I knew only that she was attractive and graceful in her person; with a voice of unusual sweetness, so slightly impregnated with the Scottish accent as rather to increase than diminish its charm; and that she had about her a collectedness and self-possession which would necessarily protect her against the vulgarity of which she had so fearful an example before her eyes. Altogether, she was an enigma. Lady Flora had even urged her to assert herself; but her ladyship had no Pygmalion touch, and the marble *would* not breathe.

At length I fell asleep, and dreamt that my sister was dumb, and that I was inventing a system of shorthand by which I might be enabled to converse with her; when suddenly the sounds of heavenly music stole upon my ear, and I saw her seated beside my bed, endeavoring to awaken me by the most delicious ballad to which I had ever listened. I saw her distinctly. There were the same soul-speaking, clear, brown eyes, the same attractive face, the same tall, slight, graceful form; but now every feature spoke; every lineament was redolent of radiant and loving expression; her gentle look was turned upon me; her fair arms were outspread to embrace me; we were indeed sisters, in heart as well as name.

It was a beautiful apotheosis!

CHAPTER XVI.

I was wide awake on the following morning for hours before Joséphine made her appearance, but I could not resolve to rise; for I felt that thenceforth I should be able to command no solitude save that which was afforded by my own apartment; and, for aught that I could tell, even that might, in its turn, be invaded by the extraordinary authority which it had pleased my mother to set over me. As I recalled the image of Lady Flora, I at times doubted if I were not bewildered by a wild dream, in which I had so blended fallacies with facts that I could not, at once, disentangle them. But no: the more I dwelt upon the events of the past evening, and the more I cast off the lingering trammels of sleep, the more I became conscious

of the hideous reality. I felt sick and feverish with disgust; and I strove to put away the image of the elder lady, and to think only of my sister. Here, at least, there was interesting food for speculation. I *could* not have seen her in her real character. Such coldness and reserve were incompatible with her sex and youth; and under the peculiar circumstances of the case, almost impossible had she been a free agent. My dream, too! Had not my dream shown me what she really was, when delivered from the incubus of Lady Flora's presence? Yes—yes—I had found at once a sister and a friend. And then my vanity awoke. How I should astonish this mountain-maiden by the exhibition of my dazzling accomplishments; and how delighted she would be when I undertook to initiate her in the same brilliant mysteries! Her toilet, too, must be reformed; and she should make use of my wardrobe until her own was rendered available. I was full of projects; and still my harmonious and graceful dream gave a charm and a melody to all which related to this new-found sister. I even became anxious lest Lady O'Halloran should not do her justice, in her horror of the maiden aunt.

"I fear that the sleep of mademoiselle was disturbed last night," said Joséphine, as she drew back my curtains, and let in a glorious gush of sunshine.

"By no means; I never slept more soundly, nor dreamt more pleasantly."

"Then mademoiselle did not hear her sister?"

"Hear my sister! Why, what apartments did she occupy?"

"Those next to mademoiselle. It was the order of *miladi*; and *madame la tante* has the rooms opposite. The gallery is now full."

"Ah, indeed! And did my sister walk the said gallery all night, that you imagined she had broken my rest?"

"*Point du tout*," said the Frenchwoman, somewhat surprised at the inquiry, and marveling still more at any question from my lips; "but before she went to rest, *la dame écossaise* was an hour with her in her dressing-room, where they were employed in reading; after which Mademoiselle Adele sang a hymn; *et vardi, c'est une belle voix!*"

Sang a hymn! My own sister sang a hymn before she retired to her bed! I felt as though I had received a heavy blow. I could have better borne anything than this! I was so overwhelmed that I remained for an instant with my eyes riveted upon Joséphine, and utterly unable to articulate a word. A mocking smile sat on the countenance of the *soubrette*. She evidently enjoyed my discomfiture, but I was indifferent to her triumph. I had but one feeling of mortification, of disappointment, of humiliation. My dream had not been all a dream—and my only sister was—a Methodist! This was, indeed, an unlooked-for misfortune—an almost irremediable evil. She might have stayed away from church forever, and refused to set an example to the lower orders, as I occasionally thought it right to do; she would have met with no interference from me, nor should I have commented upon her absence; but to fall into the other extreme was so low, so unladylike! I had no distinct perception of the meaning of the term "Methodist," but I knew that it *must* be low, that it *must* be unladylike, for I remembered to have once heard Dr. James tell my father that nearly all the tradespeople at the post-town were Methodists; and I knew, moreover, that my mother had refused to suffer a servant who professed Methodism to be received into her household.

And now—here was my sister psalm-singing under her very roof! These were the results of Lady Flora's guardianship. Poor Adela's prospects were ruined, if once her delinquency was noised abroad. I had no longer any hope of seeing her make a figure in the world. Without this misfortune, with time, and my instructions, she *might* have been rendered presentable; but now all was over. Who could make anything of a Methodist? Of course, as she sang hymns, she sang nothing else; while dancing and drawing must be deadly sins. No wonder that she always sat in silence; she evidently considered it wrong to converse; so there was an end of all prospect of companionship. She *might*, under other circumstances, have consoled me for the advent of Lady Flora; but now it was a case of Gog and Magog; and I should be inevitably tutored, and prayed, and preached to death! How sincerely I pitied myself, I need not say; nor in how haughty and self-centred a mood I descended to breakfast. *I* had, at all events, sung no vesper or matin hymn.

Lady Flora had taken a violent cold, and remained in bed. How happy this casualty would have made me had it not been for Joséphine's unlucky news; but now I met my sister with a face as composed as her own; and while we uttered our earliest greeting, each extended her hand, and neither appeared to desire a warmer salutation. I ought to have remembered the holy calm, the delicious happiness which was shed over my dream, but I did not. I felt only that my sister was a Methodist!

There is a strange and startling power in that mystic word, especially to those who, like myself, were altogether ignorant of its meaning. I looked upon it as a kill-joy, as a marplot; and, worse than all, as something quite beyond the pale of fashionable society. "We are all born to trouble as the sparks fly upward;" but this was a trouble—a misfortune beyond all polite calculation! Even my mother, in her first outbreak of displeasure against me, could never have imagined or conceived that she was about to make me the daily and hourly companion of a Methodist.

When our almost silent breakfast was at length brought to an end, I proposed to my sister that we should pass into the saloon, as I was anxious to prepare for my music-master, whom I expected that morning. She complied in the same tame, listless manner which had, since her arrival, distinguished her bearing. My principal motive in this arrangement was, however, as my reader will at once have guessed, to astonish her by my musical proficiency. After a slight apology for leaving her to amuse herself for an hour, I seated myself at the harp, and began to prelude, with a rapid finger and a steady touch, which I felt convinced must electrify my solitary auditor, but my skill produced

no such effect; or, if Miss Adela Tilden were indeed astonished, her surprise was sufficiently great to prevent all outward exhibition; for when I at length permitted myself to glance toward her, she was quietly lying back on a sofa, and deeply engaged upon a small volume which she had taken from her reticule—a book of Prayers, of course!

I withdrew my indignant eyes, and grew strong in the very recklessness of my mortification. My harp-master had lately brought to me a piece of music filled with elaborate and difficult passages; and although I as yet had studied it but imperfectly, still I felt satisfied that I had mastered its intricacies sufficiently to make an advantageous display before a novice like my sister. I accordingly commenced my undertaking with some little assumption of consequence—placed myself in a more studied attitude, and was difficult in the arrangement of my music-stand. At last, slapdash into my task I plunged, each moment in danger of being brought to a decided stand-still, and yet, thanks to my presence of mind, constantly extricating myself by some bold interpolation or omission, until I ultimately thundered through the last page.

Faulty as my performance had been, I nevertheless felt desirous of applause, and I accordingly turned toward my sister, and, in as modest a manner as I could accomplish, inquired her opinion, not of my own science, but of the rondo itself.

"I have no doubt that it is very fine," was the unmoved reply; "but I confess that I have found it impossible to follow all its movements. To me, possibly from my ignorance of the subtleties of harmony, there has seemed occasionally to be a great incoherency; but, as I before remarked, the deficiency was most probably in myself."

And she calmly resumed her reading.

I felt the blood rush over my face! I looked earnestly toward her, but I might with as much profit have consulted the ceiling for her latent meaning, if she really had one, as the immobile features that met my view. Still I was by no means satisfied, for I was conscious that the incoherencies alluded to had been quite perceptible to myself, and I began to apprehend that they might have been even more so to a listener. I was deeply mortified. My first effort at display had been a decided failure. I had neither courage nor temper to make another attempt; so, thrusting my harp from me, I approached the sofa on which my sister was seated, and inquired if she were musical?

"Not what *you* would consider musical, I am afraid," she said, with a faint smile. "I am no harpist, and know only enough of the more humble piano to set me above the necessity of troubling others to accompany my voice. Mine has been rather the teaching of nature than of art; but still, such as it is, it will at least enable me to return your own amiable endeavor to amuse;" and laying down her book, without one moment's hesitation, without one symptom of shyness or reluctance, she seated herself at the instrument.

Her account of herself had been a thoroughly correct one. She was by no means either a brilliant or a scientific musician; but she had not completed one stanza of the ballad which she had selected, before I perfectly understood that she had a faultless ear, and an unusually melodious voice. I thought of my patchwork rondo, and could have wept with annoyance at having so needlessly exposed myself

When she ceased singing, my sister rose as calmly as she had sat down, and again moved toward her sofa, but I resolved not to yield tamely to what I considered as a defeat; and therefore ringing for a servant, I desired that my drawing portfolios might be brought into the room. They soon appeared, and I did the honors of what my master had declared to be my performances, but which had derived no little advantage from his own skilful "finishing up," as demurely as I could. They were of a heterogeneous, or, as I should at that period have said, of an universal description. There was no style which I had left untouched; figures, flowers, landscapes, interiors, busts, and portraits.

Fortunately, idle young ladies and gentlemen had not then learned the art of degrading art, save by their imperfect efforts to portray it, so that my books contained neither poonah-paintings, nor transfer-pieces, nor japan-work, nor any other of those cheap, and despicable, and worthless monstrosities which in the present day are one of the triumphs of ignorant indolence over artist-aspiration.

My sister turned leaf after leaf with equal patience and placidity: she made no comment—she offered no criticism. She seemed to feel that by looking at each in turn, and persevering to the end, she had done all that could be expected of her; or, more encouraging thought! that here at least she must not venture an opinion.

"You paint, of course," I said, carelessly.

"Not at all."

"Nor draw?"

"Not, probably, as you understand the term. I can do none of these brilliant and showy things. I merely sketch from nature. I am an adopted child of the mountains, as you know, and needed little assistance to learn how best to make them all my own."

My sister was growing every moment more inexplicable—I had almost said, more provoking. She was certainly an extraordinary girl; as womanly for her years even as myself, but from totally different causes. We had not lived a week under the same roof, ere I discovered that, whatever advantage I might have over her in society by the greater variety and brilliancy of my acquirements, I must be particularly careful to avoid all rivalry in the higher and more solid branches of education. While I had been striving to attain to the fashionable jargon of my mother's set, she had been buried in books. While I had been talking, she had been thinking; and while I had been cheated out of my childhood by constant contact with a crowd, she had been beguiled of hers by the companionship of two staid elderly women, and the solitude of a mountain home.

Lady O'Halloran, who drove to Rooksley a day or two after the arrival of its new inmates, was enchanted with her.

The cold which Lady Flora had taken on the road proved more severe than she had antici-

pated, and she was still confined to her room, greatly to my relief. I, therefore, induced my kind neighbor to remain during the day, which, believing that she might benefit us by her presence, she readily consented to do. It required no great penetration on her part to discover the restraint which existed between my sister and myself; and with the most amiable zeal she at once endeavored to remove it; but the work of years can seldom be overthrown in a day. It requires extraordinary impulse and emotion to open hearts which have long been closed against each other; and we were alike, upon this subject, too indifferent for either. Had it been otherwise, Lady O'Halloran might in some degree have succeeded; for, by a happy coincidence, the post brought me that day a letter from my father, announcing his intention of running down to Rooksley to spend a week or ten days with his long-separated children, directly that parliament should be prorogued. My delight knew no bounds. A letter from my father—his *first* letter! Unlike the epistles of my mother, it contained no lurking sarcasm—no cold, dictatorial commands; no supercilious warnings;—it breathed only affection, hope, and confidence. I turned, full of joy, towards my sister.

"Do you know our father, Adela?"

"I have seen him twice."

"In the Highlands?"

"Yes."

I was silent for a moment. During the two years that I was left to the charge of menials at Rooksley, he had never sought me. A feeling of jealousy crept coldly over my heart; but I was too happy in the prospect of his promised visit to dwell upon this new mortification, and I once more turned to the letter. Lady O'Halloran, with instinctive watchfulness, had observed the change which came over me, and she hastened to exclaim:—

"But twice, my dear child, during your whole life! You have indeed been subjected to a deprivation beyond your comprehension. Now, however, we will trust that greater happiness is in store for you, for you cannot yet understand all the value of such a father."

"And yet, madam," said my sister, with more feeling than she had before betrayed, "you will believe that he is, nevertheless, very dear to me, when I tell you that to him I am, as yet, indebted for the few hours of hopeful happiness that I have ever known. It was from his lips I learned that I was not altogether an alien from the hearts and hearths of my parents, and that all the affection which they had to give had not been utterly poured out upon their first-born."

"And you have full proof that such was the fact," said our visitor, with good-humored eagerness. "You came into the world weak and sickly, my dear Miss Adela; the atmosphere of London was poison to your tender lungs; physicians recommended quiet and a bracing air until you should have grown to girlhood. Their injunctions were carefully observed; the period of trial is happily overpast; and now, here you are, under the same roof with your only sister, where I hope soon to see but one heart and one interest between you."

A bitter smile played about the expressive lips of Adela. Like myself, she felt at that moment the utter impossibility that such should ever be the case. Place the past in as kind and favorable a light as she might, Lady O'Halloran could not remove the conviction from my sister's mind that she had been the victim of an undue partiality for myself. While hundreds had already been lavished upon my education; while I was even now a woman of fashion in dress, in manner, and in self-possession, she had been comparatively left to her own moral resources for all progress. I say comparatively; for her next remark, still addressed to our guest, explained much in her acquirements and manners which had hitherto appeared to me inexplicable.

"The extreme care and anxiety which Lady Madelaine Tilden displayed to preserve my constitution from possible hazard, my dear madam, is an obligation which I am never likely to forget. Had she extended her solicitude to my education, it would undoubtedly have been still heavier; and the fact that my father did so, must be my apology, if all the filial affection which I have been able to call into action under the very peculiar circumstances of my position, are consequently centered upon him. To his care I owe the friendship and guidance of Mrs. Davenport, a lady whose widowhood reduced her income so considerably as to determine her, at the entreaty of my father, to take up her residence in a highland village, in order to superintend my education. She had formerly moved in the first circles of fashion, and she felt the contempt for such society which must pervade every well-regulated mind. She taught me to estimate at its just value the emptiness, hollowness, and falsehood of what is presumptuously enough called The World!—to hold time as too precious to be frittered away upon frivolous acquirements bereft of all intrinsic value; and to be sufficiently the mistress of myself to withhold my friendship and my confidence from the mere butterflies of vanity."

"And I should have decided that she acted wisely, my dear young lady," said Lady O'Halloran, with admirable calmness, as she marked the red and angry spot that was burning on my cheek at the covert sarcasm of the extraordinary girl beside her. "I should have decided that she had acted wisely, had she waited ten years longer before she inculcated a lesson of suspicion and self-righteousness upon a mere child, totally unable to substitute, for the brilliant trifles which she denounced, better and more solid qualities of mind and heart: or, had she shown sufficient good taste to ascertain what might be the wishes of your immediate relatives upon so serious a subject. At your age, you should have no misgivings, no doubts of others; it is only time and experience which can give the right to judge those about us; and who can tell the secret springs of soul which are touched to produce certain results, even then! Believe me—and I say it with regret—that upon so faulty a foundation as distrust and contempt of your fellow-creatures, a hideous superstructure of selfishness, arrogance, and prejudice may be easily built up. You must not be angry or offended at my frankness. I am your father's friend. I am anxious to see

his children happy in each other. You have both much to undo, my dear girls. You have been estranged, as well in heart as in person, by peculiar circumstances. You are both suffering in feeling and in disposition from an extreme system of education. You have both been forced beyond your years; Eveleen, my dear Miss Adela, who will, I believe, enter upon her fifteenth birth-day next week, has been for years one of the 'butterflies of vanity' whom you have just denounced: you, who are barely fourteen, are putting forth dogmas more seemly for thirty or thirty-five—for the lips of matured womanhood—than for those of an inexperienced girl, who knows nothing of the world beyond the mountains which overhang the secluded home of her infancy, and the sentiments of, in all probability, an amiable but disappointed woman. Eveleen has been prematurely fashionable—you have been precociously wise—each, understand me, in your own conceit; and you are alike self-deceived. You have still much to learn. Now, take my frank advice, and you will both live to feel that it is worth attention. Endeavor each to profit by the good qualities, whether natural or acquired, of your companion, and the advantage will be mutual. It is this fancied superiority on both sides which will prevent all perfect understanding and all kind feeling between you. Divest yourselves alike of personal and mental assumption; be what Heaven willed that you should be, gentle, mild, and loving; and, trust me, you have long years of happiness and affection before you."

As the child of her friend, and as the victim of a mother's caprice, Lady O'Halloran was evidently prepared, even before they met, to encourage a partiality for my sister. Delighted by her intelligence, by the docility with which she listened to her admonitions and advice, and with the extraordinary development of her intellect, so broadly contrasted with my overweening vanity and violent deportment, she watched her narrowly, almost fondly; and, I verily believe, succeeded in persuading herself, before she left us that evening, that she thoroughly comprehended her character.

The result proved her mistake. Circumstances alone could develop so peculiar a nature. Never, without being false, was there such a reserved disposition. Adela spoke little—her explanatory speech to Lady O'Halloran, which I lately quoted, was, as far as I can remember, the longest I ever heard her utter—and when she did converse, it was deliberately and guardedly. Occasionally vehement, but never gay; gloomy rather than serious in her general mood; passionately fond of pleasure, while affecting to despise its frivolity; her wishes and her will were like a spring, of which the power increases in proportion to the violence of the means used to counteract it. Sufficiently pretty to feel it unnecessary to shrink from competition, endowed with a fair portion of her mother's haughtiness, and gifted with a happy appreciation of her own advantages, Lady O'Halloran at once decided that she already betrayed the elements of a superior nature. She was astonished to find a girl of fourteen possessed of so much presence of mind, strength of character, and that faculty, so rare among young people, of rapid decision, whenever she was called upon either to act or to offer any opinion. We were, in truth, most singularly contrasted. Gay, lively, and even giddy, where my spirits were excited, I was frank and open by nature, and what dissimulation I possessed was the extraneous produce of education; and was, at all times, ill-sustained, and easy of detection. Yielding, and weak of purpose, when opposed; readily led away by my own tastes, by example, and by novelty, I required alike guidance and restraint; and I should not, in all probability, have found a companion better suited to me than my sister, if we could, as Lady O'Halloran suggested, have divested ourselves of the false estimate which we had each made of our peculiar personal superiority, and placed confidence in one another. But from this

"Consummation devoutly to be wished,"

we were a thousand leagues off. Our zealous friend pleased herself, nevertheless, by believing that, despite all which had gone before, we were still so young that the mere force of habit, when we had resided for a few months under the same roof, would produce affection, with all its blessed attributes of trust, and confidence, and peace. She forgot that all those by whom we were surrounded were not working in the same spirit as herself.

Adela, whose sickly infancy and weakly childhood had deprived her of the opportunities of physical exertion and healthful recreation which she could otherwise have commanded in her mountain solitude, was early thrown upon her own mental resources for occupation and amusement. The contracted ideas of Lady Flora, and the bitter retaliation of Mrs. Davenport upon a world from which her necessities had put her forth, were the only moral engines employed to direct and develop the extraordinary powers and feelings of the student-girl. No wonder that her mind and tastes were prematurely aged. I have before confessed that, in the sterner and more severe branches of education, she was greatly my superior. I felt and knew this; and the conviction should have brought with it a sense of humiliation. It had, however, a totally different effect. Not one of my sister's acquirements—save, indeed, that which taught her to give its full value to a voice of wonderful compass and harmony—was calculated to produce the slightest effect upon the circle in which she was destined to move. She had been educated for the closet, not the court.

I, on the contrary, was early suffered to let the higher and more precious powers of my intellect run entirely to waste. As regarded that species of knowledge which the old moralist declared to be "better than houses or land," I was profoundly ignorant. I had laid up no store for the winter of life. But then its sweet spring, and its blooming summer! There, indeed, I was unapproachable. I was already of the world, worldly. What though I might be deficient alike in self-knowledge and in knowledge of my fellow mortals, I was not the less a proficient in the *argot* of the drawing-room, and the affectations of fashionable society. I was preëminently handsome, perfectly self-possessed; I could take my position, like

finished woman of the world; and as for all that lay deeper, all that was buried beneath the surface, and which must be dug for before it could be reached—*cui bono?* Once satisfied of my superiority, I resolved to give less way to the feelings which had surprised me on our first meeting. My affection had been flung back upon me; I had not been understood. Here again I was conscious that I took high ground, and I determined to maintain it. I had too long been accustomed to admiration and applause to quail before a course of dry reading and antiquated knowledge. The result may be imagined. Poor Lady O'Halloran had taken too much for granted when she asserted that time and propinquity would necessarily produce affection. They did quite the contrary. Neither Adela nor I would bend. We were like two young forest trees which had each followed a transverse direction; and the admonitions of the kind-hearted matron produced only the same effect upon us as an occasional gust of wind may be supposed to have produced upon the said saplings; they ruffled for a moment the fresh leaves of our self-love, even bowed us toward each other for an instant, as though attracted by a new instinct; and then rebounded the more sturdily to compel us to reassume our original position.

Before Lady O'Halloran left Rooksley, she reminded me of the promise which I had made to spend another day at the Hall before the close of the month, and I joyfully renewed the pledge. I felt that I had much to tell her in private, much to discuss, and, perhaps, something to justify. How was my gratification blighted, however, when I heard her extend the invitation to my sister—to Adela, of whom she knew absolutely nothing! I felt wronged, grievously wronged. That could no longer be esteemed a privilege which was so freely offered to a stranger. My heart leapt with indignation. I had passed months at Rooksley, abandoned, if not to the sole fellowship of servants —for from that degradation my own sense of propriety and natural pride of character had preserved me—at least to their unbroken contact; and no Lady O'Halloran had terminated my enforced solitude until urged to do so by my father; while, even before I had been allowed time and opportunity to feel that I had won the regard of my self-constituted friend, the same measure of civility was unhesitatingly meted out to my stranger sister!

It was a bitter moment. I felt as though I were deeply injured; and the more readily that Adela rather acquiesced in the arrangement than responded to the courtesy. To her the proposition and its result were evidently matters of equal indifference. She even made a stipulation that she would accompany me only in the event of an improvement in Lady Flora's health. The reservation was met by a smiling rejoinder, and thus the affair was definitely arranged.

Lady O'Halloran's pony-carriage was announced; and I entreated her to put on her bonnet and mantle in my dressing-room. She consented; and at length we were alone. I considered myself too seriously aggrieved to lose a moment in telling her precisely what I felt.

"Thank you, my dear Eveleen," she said, affectionately, as she seated herself upon the sofa, and drew me to her side, "for this natural and unaffected proof of your confidence and regard. My most earnest wish is, that I may win your love; yet, remember that I do not ask it *all;* I shall be content with just so much as you may be able to grant to me, without wronging those who have a *right* to claim affection from you. And now let us quietly discuss the subject of your complaint. Am I to understand that you have an objection to visiting in company with your sister?"

"No, my dear Lady O'Halloran: in that point of view, it is a matter of perfect indifference whether I am or am not accompanied by Adela; but, as regards yourself, I *had* hoped that you would have made some distinction between us, and that I should have been your most frequent guest."

"And wherefore?"

"Because I have learnt to love you, and I flattered myself that you would not overlook the fact."

"And it is in order to win also the affection of your sister that I wish to see as much as possible of her. She is an extraordinary girl, Eveleen—a very extraordinary girl; and I foresee that she will never steer a middle course through life—she will either be the victim of society or its tyrant. Hers is no common character, but she is, as yet, far too young for self-guidance. Would you envy her the possession of a sincere and disinterested friend?"

I turned away my head, and made no reply.

"Consider," continued my monitress, "how necessary such a resource cannot fail to be at her early age. The responsibility of depriving her of so essential a support would be a terrible one! Long estranged from her family, suddenly separated from the lady who had hitherto acted toward her the part of a mother as well as that of an instructress, plunged into new scenes, surrounded by new faces,—can you not imagine somewhat of the desolation of her young heart? Can you not believe that it yearns for companionship and kindness?"

"I am also an alien from my mother's hearth," I said moodily.

"Nay, nay, I admit no parallel in the two positions," persisted Lady O'Halloran. "Again, I entreat of you to recall the past to memory. While Adela was an exile whose very name was never uttered in her natural home, you were the petted child of luxury and indulgence; and yet she had the same claim upon her parents as yourself. You were a beauty, and as such you were cherished; your sister was declared to be plain and unattractive, and she was, according to the same parity of reasoning, put forth, and when such was possible, forgotten. But do you not see and feel how completely nature has revenged her? Do you not perceive under that calm and undemonstrative deportment, a gracefulness and self-possession as remarkable as they are charming! Neglected, as I am compelled to admit, even to you, that she has been, you ought to—"

"I am bound by no obligation which can regard Miss Adela Tilden, madam," I said, warmly; "it is from no fault of mine that she has suffered the evils which you have enumerated."

"Nor do I blame you for the errors of those over whom you can exercise no control," was the quiet rejoinder. "Had it been otherwise, and that you had even lent yourself to such injustice from motives of jealousy and selfishness, I should have despised you too heartily to evince the least interest or exertion in your fate. But surely this very negative and meritless fact of your non-interference does not exonerate you from the duty of endeavoring to make the present existence of your sister a bright and happy contrast from the past? Surely it does not place you beyond the pale of blotting out by your affection the mortifications which have hitherto been heaped upon her?"

"*My* affection!" I exclaimed, with strong emphasis; "believe me when I assure you, my dear Lady O'Halloran, that such a privilege is not reserved for me. I have already probed my sister's spirit to its depths; the only feeling which I have aroused in her heart is avoidance—aversion were, perhaps, the fitter word: she has been taught to dislike me, and she has been an apt pupil."

"Eveleen, beware!" said Lady O'Halloran coldly, as she rose from her seat, and folded her mantle about her; "reflect ere it be too late. Wide as is the world, the children of the same parents must inevitably sometimes meet in its paths. Strive then that neither of you may have cause to shrink from those meetings. Consider the old age of your father, when his daughters must be his prop and stay. Kneel and pray that you may be delivered from the prejudices by which you are enslaved. Let me see you soon at the Hall, happy in each other's affection. And now—good night!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Lest my reader should tire of Rooksley, and above all, of myself, I will at once transport him, or her, to Grosvenor Square, and relate what had occurred in Lady Madelaine's immediate circle before the arrival of my sister in England. The Putney villa was declared perfect. My mother, who had carried out all her projects most triumphantly, was in high beauty and spirits, and at the very acmé of her popularity. Very few persons had ever seen the tall daughter of whom she had found it expedient to rid herself for a year or two, and still fewer cared to remember her. Lady Madelaine, at very infrequent intervals, made some vague allusion to "the children"—always a safe and indefinite species of phraseology as to age, like the *garçon* of France, and the post-boy of our own country—but she risked nothing beyond a bare mention of their existence, considering it both impertinent and unnecessary to do more.

Miss Alexander had eloped with a French marquis, very poor and very proud; and (as French marquises were, during my girlhood, most interestingly scarce) she returned to town after her marriage, quite satisfied to have bartered her five hundred a year for the title of *madame la marquise*. Poor Caroline was still constant to her truant admirer; who, when he was not worshiping the bright eyes of my mother, was dreaming beside Lady Devereux, who, in her turn, was daily losing in beauty what she gained in *exigence*. Emily Vernon had dismissed Mr. De Clifford; she was still living, or rather existing, in a fool's paradise; she was still struggling to believe that Otterford loved her, for he lost no opportunity of telling her so whenever they chanced to meet in private; and although his actions continued to belie his words, how could she doubt him, when she was only too conscious that her happiness and her life alike depended upon his truth? Alas! for the woman who gives away her heart, where she receives only asseveration in return! Alas! for the faith that builds up its strength upon the honor of a *roué*, which, like the pine-tree, produces neither blossom nor fruit.

And what of Otterford himself? I may have seemed to deal harshly toward him; for, hitherto, my readers will have discovered no symptom of profligacy in him; and those of his own sex will have readily forgiven the little duplicity of which I have shown him to be guilty. Women, according to the creed of the said sex masculine, are infinitely too credulous; they should be more cautious before they yield to feelings too powerful to be combated by creatures so weak of mind and so fragile of frame. It is a happy argument, and a safe one, for they are not likely themselves to test its truth. Ay, truly: women who were created to be chosen, not to choose, should be born suspicious, calculating,. and selfish: the will which is after marriage to be as pliant as the stem of the osier, should be previously firm and immutable, until reason and interest have convinced it of the safety and expediency of abandoning its perpendicular, and yielding to the force of circumstances.

There may be some slight inconsistency in such an argument; perhaps, also, a little want of generosity; but it has long been decided that such *ought* to be the case; and there is little probability that an opinion so acceptable to the more lordly portion of the community will ever be rescinded.

Unfortunately for her, poor Emily was strangely deficient in this species of world-wisdom. Lord Otterford had told her that he loved her; he had even sworn it upon his knees: he was young, earnest, handsome, and attractive. She saw him welcomed in every circle, even where he appeared the least anxious to please. He had assured her that, however trammeled by the exacting vanity of Lady Madelaine, he loved her only. Simple-hearted, affectionate, and grateful, she had believed him—she had no alternative. Blame her not, however, ye who have shared a brighter fortune: for she was expiating, fearfully expiating her error, by her failing health and her breaking heart.

Revenons à notre loup. Otterford was becoming weary of the constraint in which he had so long lived. He was consistent even in his vices. He had not been the slave of Lady Madelaine's caprice simply *pour l'amour de ses beaux yeux*; he had no such weakness; the triumph was inadequate, and Otterford was a militarian in his way. Time and opportunity were the capital upon which he trafficked, and he had already made great sacrifices to obtain a very inconsequent return. And yet—nothing

could seem more promising. He was *l'ami de la maison*: the favored cavalier of its lovely mistress; and she was, in her turn, if not a forsaken, at least a *délaissée* wife: whether by her own agency or the will of her husband signified little. The fact itself sufficed. Otterford argued calmly, and the rather that he was perfectly aware of the ten thousand a-year which my father had settled upon his high-born bride. It is pleasant for a man of fashion to win a fine woman who can never become *à charge*; indeed, 't is doubtful that, had he been ignorant of this small chapter of Lady Madelaine's private history, he would have so long pursued his project. Be that as it may, however, he had begun to think that the probation had endured long enough; and that, as Mr. Tilden had appeared to be thoroughly blind, and Lady Madelaine perfectly self-centered and fearless, it was quite time that the catastrophe of the drama should be played out.

That my mother had never contemplated such a finale to her innocent and amusing flirtation, and was satisfied that her smiles must overpay all the adoration which she so blandly and quietly accepted, I am quite convinced; for the egotism of her vanity would scarcely permit her to form any other conclusion; and she was consequently not at all likely to suspect the abstruse calculations of her most devoted slave. She might as well have been expected to nurse a presentiment of his declared passion for Emily; Lady Madelaine, all woman of fashion as she was, could not be considered (regarding the expression in its just sense) as a woman of the world. True, she was acquainted with its elegances, its conventionalities, its caprices, its shallow faith, and even its hollowness; but of its actual vices she was nearly ignorant. Of its systematic sentiment, commencing in mawkish affectation, adopted as a resource against *ennui*, leading to folly and imprudence, and terminating in dishonor, she had, of course, heard more than once; but always as of something extraneous and antipodean, with which she could, individually, have no possible interest or connection. Such matters were to her the mere *on-dits* of the day; the food which nourished the bitter *persiflage* of polished society; and happy indeed are those whose rare and enviable fate it is to live and die without further enlightenment upon so ungrateful and ungraceful a subject. Such, however, was not to be my mother's destiny.

It was a mild, bland morning—one of those delicious intervals, which, extraordinary as it appears to those who ever speculate upon the several degrees of comparison which exist between causes and effects, sometimes induce even the pleasure-worn and selfish votaries of fashion to believe that there may exist something for which it is not altogether impossible that it might be really worth while to live even beyond the confines of the metropolis—a lingering, sickly, ill-nurtured remnant of original purity and nature, which the hot and fetid breath of dissipation and idleness cannot always contrive to destroy, try it as it may. Every one who has run the gauntlet through half a dozen seasons in London is well aware of the description of morning to which I allude; just before the close of spring; I mean *really* spring, when the race of social extravagance and folly is at its height; when the mignonette in the balconies, forced into premature bloom in order to "meet the demand" six weeks before it was intended to blossom under the more genial sunshine of unassisted nature, is beginning to turn golden under its coat of dust and soot; when the grass of the parks is bald in patches, and grimy as a whole; when milliners grow consequential, and fine lady-customers conciliating, affable, and persuasive. Such was the precise moment at which occurred the morning in question; and, as my mother was undergoing the subtle penance of Mademoiselle Félicie's taste in the selection of half a dozen new head-dresses for the campaign of the ensuing week, she chanced, on one occasion, most accidentally to glance towards the garden of the square instead of into her toilet-glass; and although the turf wore a sickly tint as though the soil beneath could afford but grudging nurture, and the trees bore a great resemblance to the "stock in trade" of an umbrella and cane merchant, which had been suddenly induced to sprout by some occult influence, they nevertheless reminded her of the beauty of the season; and forthwith she remembered Putney, and the shrub-belted lawn which stretched down to the Thames. The moment was propitious; she was free until the hour of dinner—she had neither made a new friend whom it was necessary to see at least once during the twenty-four hours, nor had she discovered an old intimate whom it was necessary to hate; and she had, consequently, nothing of importance on her hands; while, fortunately, all the half-dozen *coiffures* were so unbecoming, that everything like indecision was out of the question, and therefore they created no delay.

"Take away all those horrors, Félicie, and order the open carriage for Putney," she said, suddenly; "giving strict charge that it come round instantly."

The *soubrette* disappeared.

"I slept wretchedly last night," yawned Lady Madelaine when her waiting-woman re-entered; "I shall go alone; the fresh air from the river will refresh me."

"But miladi will be *ennuiée en route*," suggested Félicie in some surprise.

"No—I shall endeavor to sleep. Desire that the paper which contains Mr. Tilden's last speech may be put into the landeau. Jervis will know which I mean. It is on impressment, or colonization, or the bread bill, or something of that sort. She will find it in one of the morning rooms."

The waiting-woman rang for her deputy; and having, in all probability, a project of her own which the absence of her lady would by no means tend to mar, very speedily arranged the new costume which had so suddenly become necessary; and my mother then descended to the library to await the appearance of her equipage.

There was something very delicate and touching in Lady Madelaine's idea of making the eloquent speech of her husband the companion of her suburban excursion. It was wifely and womanly. But, alas! we have it upon record that the Princess Talleyrand, being

desirous on one occasion to do homage to the talent of Denon, by affecting an acquaintance with his writings, and unhappily confusing his name with that of Defoe, whose Robinson Crusoe was one of the few books that she had ever really read, inquired, during a pause in the dinner at which he was an honored guest whom the prince was anxious to conciliate, "What had become of his man Friday?" and I am greatly afraid that, had any one been indiscreet enough to ask Lady Madelaine, in her opera-box that evening, the actual subject of the aforesaid burst of eloquence with which my father had electrified the Commons, and which shared her drive to Putney, they must have contented themselves with an equally lucid description as that with which Felicie had previously been favored.

The little impromptu excursion was delightful. The atmosphere, when once the close streets were left behind, was redolent of sweetness. The breeze came lovingly to the cheek and brow of my mother; and she sank luxuriously upon her padded silk damask, and slept quietly; while Psyche, her favorite and petted spaniel, amused its *ennui* by tearing to pieces the printed record of my father's parliamentary prowess. Suddenly, however, both were startled by the rapid galloping of a horseman who appeared to be endeavoring to overtake the carriage; and the noise of whose approach rendered the high-bred bays who drew it somewhat unmanageable. Their uneasy movements dispelled Lady Madelaine's slumber; and, as she looked up suddenly, the first object upon which her eyes rested, was the scrupulously well-gloved hand of Lord Otterford, resting upon the side of the landeau. For the only time, perhaps, since they had been acquainted, my mother blushed instead of smiling her welcome; for, unaccountable as it may seem, she had really wished to be alone for two or three hours; and, as it was a wholesome inclination which might have produced a good result, the more beneficial from its novelty, it was provoking enough that she was fated to disappointment.

"You are doubtlessly bound Putneyward, my dear Lady Madelaine, since I find you here?" he commenced, as he lifted his hat. "Nothing was surely ever so pleasantly devised. I caught a glimpse of your equipage as I turned an angle of the road; and here I am ready to protect you in your rural reveries; and to prevent your running the chance of losing yourself so far from St. James's, and becoming a novel specimen of a *demoiselle errante*, without her knight."

"I am not quite sure that I shall admit of your attendance," was the languid reply; "the day is so lovely, and I am so *desœuvrée* and exhausted that I really want rest—added to which I wished to say something civil to Mr. Tilden concerning his Wednesday night's speech, which every one who meets me is perpetually complimenting me upon, and of which I have not read a word; and I intended to skim it over in one of the lawn chairs; though that part of my plan is, I see, rendered abortive, Psyche having disposed of the paper in a manner more consonant to her own ideas of its value."

"And do you actually intend to be so cruel as to refuse me the pleasant office of *remplaçant* to a torn gazette?"

"I have, at all events, no seat to offer you here. Pysche must not have her airing spoilt by your presuming caprices."

"I submit. Haroun will walk quietly beside your triumphal car," said Otterford laughingly, as he bent low over the neck of his beautiful Arabian, which made a mute reply to his caresses. "Only promise that when you alight, you will not issue orders to your seneschal to shut the gates upon me as I gain the boundary of Eden."

My mother, half-pleased and half-annoyed, smiled again; and then, throwing herself back in the corner of the carriage, closed her eyes, and affected to renew her reverie. She had nevertheless, not only no fear, but not even the most vague suspicion of Otterford's real principles; but she was proud. She believed, in her heart of hearts, that she had never been degraded by the most idle breath of calumny. She felt satisfied that she was perfectly irreproachable. How could it be otherwise? She was constantly in a crowd. She admitted no *tête-à-tête*, and, therefore, if men of fashion chose to *afficher* themselves as her admirers under the eyes of the public, the fault was wholly their own, and she had nothing whatever to do with it. She was, herself, perpetually *en évidence*; made no mysteries; encouraged no *penchants*; maintained her own dignity; never uttered a word of which her husband might not have been an auditor; and—consequently—she defied the world!

It is to be supposed that my mother did not probe her conscience too deeply. All operations are irksome and painful; a self-inflicted smart is never a favorite amusement with any of us. How then could it be imagined that a young and flattered beauty would submit to writhe beneath such unprofitable and uninviting penance? And yet—as she remembered that she was on the brink of a lengthened *tête-à-tête* with Otterford amid the solitude of her suburban villa, visions of a score of Mrs. Grundys, with mob-caps and ruffles, sharp eyes, and shrill voices, rose upon her mental perception with appalling distinctness. But in the next instant she felt a contempt for her own weakness. Was she to suffer the idle and ignorant gossipry of a few ill-natured and (what was worse still) ill-bred women, to control her movements, and to decide upon her motives. She replied to her own question by a laugh of mockery.

And in five minutes more they reached the villa.

"Never was there a more charming device than this marble basin filled with lilac lotus, Lady Madelaine," said Otterford, when he had handed my mother from the carriage, and, arm in arm, they had reached the river-front of the house: "to me, a lawn like a green baize cloth, without ornament or relief of any kind, is as insipid as a water *suchet*, or your dear friend Devereux's wife."

"H-u-m!" intonated my mother; "I cannot quite agree to the position. A handsome lawn is always an agreeable object, and perfectly harmless, at all events."

"I stand corrected," said the gentleman.

with mock gravity; "and beg to rescind my secon' comparison; for, according to your more correct view of the case, it does not by any means apply."

"Which object did it involve?" asked my mother, laughingly; "the fish or the lady?"

"I am compelled to confess to the *bella e cara*."

"Surely you do not attempt to imply that Lady Devereux—"

"Is a woman, and a withering beauty? Yes, I do. And did you, fair lady, ever know one such fraction of society who was not a viper? If you can conscientiously lay your hand upon your heart and say 'Yes,' then will I tell you, what, before such an avowal, I believe to be an utter impossibility, and—"

"And that is—?"

"That you can really be in error as well as the rest of your sex."

The lady blushed, and said "Pshaw!" but she nevertheless accepted the compliment very calmly; and as she seated herself under a willow, and motioned her companion to a chair beside her, she remarked quietly—"I cannot account for the fact, but it is certain that you never did like poor Lady Devereux."

"Do *you* consider it remarkable that such should have been the case?" asked the gentleman, gathering up half a dozen loose stones from the gravel, and throwing them at regular and slow intervals into the water.

"Most assuredly I do. She is so generally a favorite."

"There was a time when that circumstance alone would have sufficed to make me detest a woman," was the incorrigible reply.

"How truly absurd!"

"Shall I tell you to whom I am indebted for having cured me of the said absurdity?"

"You had better not, if it be a secret. You know the proverb, '*Se il segreto è confidato, non è più segreto.*'"

"Ha, indeed! is that your creed?" demanded the gentleman, somewhat maliciously; "I must in that case answer you by another; "'*Chi ben serra, ben apre.*'"

"I do not understand you."

"No! and yet it is as fair Italian as your own."

My mother bit her lip, and turned aside. She felt displeased, although she scarcely knew wherefore.

"Then you do not care to learn my mystery?" pursued her companion.

"It can be matter of interest only to yourself," was the chilling reply.

"True, very true," said Otterford, bitterly; "I was to blame to imagine that it could be subject of concern to any other person; and I should also have remembered that I am now too old to play the coxcomb gracefully."

Lady Madelaine was no whit appeased. On the contrary, she became more irritable and uneasy than before.

"And yet, it is just possible," continued Otterford. "Do not mistake me, Lady Madelaine; I simply say it is just possible—that, in the present instance, you may not have altogether pronounced an absolute verity. Indeed, I venture to affirm that, in this particular case, you have assuredly not done so; for it is to yourself that I am indebted for emancipation from this unjust and ungenerous prejudice."

"To me, my lord! You surely jest."

"By no means. At a moment like the present, when all my words are taken *au grand sérieux*, I want courage to presume so far."

"You are actually childish," said my mother, forcing a smile.

"I trust that childhood is too happy an age to know the miserable feeling with which I last spoke."

"Again I repeat, Otterford," said Lady Madelaine, hurriedly, but less coldly, "that I do not understand you."

"I begin to fear that you have never done so."

"You are really inexplicable to-day—a perfect sphinx. You profess to love the country, while you make, in truth, a miserable Celadon."

"Is that my fault?"

"Most decidedly. Am I to blame for this, also?"

"I adopt your own words—most decidedly."

"You really put me beyond my patience."

"You have long tried the same experiment upon me."

Lady Madelaine gasped for breath. What could this mean? She felt that she was crimson; something told her that she ought to be displeased; and she was intuitively conscious that she should at once terminate so singular a dialogue. She did not hesitate for a moment. She had, unfortunately, ordered luncheon as she alighted; and she saw at once that she had no plausible pretext for leaving the house without partaking of it; for she shrank from the idea that Otterford should suspect her alarm; and accordingly she rose as he ceased speaking, and complaining that the river-breeze had affected her head, proposed that they should return to take some refreshment, and order the carriage.

The gentleman obeyed without uttering a syllable; and, gravely offering his arm, they passed through the French doors into the dining-room, in utter silence.

The movement of my mother was as natural as it was ill-judged. In her anxiety to escape from a continuance of so inauspicious a dialogue, she forgot that the seat upon which she had originally placed herself partially protected her: she could only be verbally annoyed, overlooked as was the lawn from the river on one side, and by the windows of the villa on the other; whereas, by entering the house, she rendered the solitude of her position infinitely more decided. If she were blinded to this fact by her increasing agitation, it is not, however, to be supposed that her companion was so completely a novice as to be so likewise. He did not attempt to controvert the abruptness of her resolution, for which mark of consideration toward her she felt grateful; and she almost began to doubt if she had not been deceived by her own fears. She accordingly seated herself at the table with more calmness and self-possession than she had expected; and during the attendance of the servants, sustained a desultory conversation with her chance-guest with very commendable indifference. This was, however, fated to be somewhat shaken by the

intelligence that her coachman had discovered a loose shoe upon one of the horses, which it was necessary to secure before her return to town. Instinctively, in her first vexation, she glanced toward Otterford; but he did not appear to have even heard the *sotto voce* communication of the servant. He was busily employed in arranging a number of bread-crumbs which had been scattered beside his plate into a variety of miniature ramparts, extremely ingenious and imaginative.

This, at least, was consoling; and Lady Madelaine, having desired that all possible haste might be made, saw the man depart without any visible feeling of misgiving. She nevertheless retained her seat at the table, and for a moment remained silent; but, conscious of the awkwardness of such a silence at such a time, she suddenly affected great interest in the elaborate invention of the impromptu professor of fortification.

"I was not aware," she said, hurriedly, anxious only to break the stillness, "that you were so skilful a master of the art of defence."

"It has long been necessary for me to encourage the study," replied Otterford, raising his large, earnest eyes to her face; "for during the last—I was about to say, fifteen years, but I dare not, as it would involve others beside myself—I have constantly been called upon to defend myself against misconstructions, disappointments, cold hearts, and malicious tongues."

"You really make me smile," said Lady Madelaine, forcing a poor attempt at raillery. "You who are so thoroughly the *enfant gâté* of the world—that were it not for half a dozen individuals, who have evinced sufficient moral courage to doubt your perfectibility, you would at this moment be little better than unbearable."

"I am greatly indebted to their very kindly exertions," was the retort; "and am possibly the most so to your ladyship for the formation of so notable a *clique* of critics."

"By no means. I only joined their ranks."

"From some well-reasoned conviction, I have no doubt; and perhaps with more cause than many who have enrolled themselves."

"I complain of nothing very heinous."

"And yet, upon consideration, you might have done so."

"I wished to be a generous opponent, and the more so, that I was conscious of being in a minority."

"I would much rather that you had shown resentment than cowardice."

"Resentment?"

"Even so. Do you remember, Lady Madelaine, that I have known you for seventeen years?"

"Perfectly. Can no modern philosopher discover a means of staying the progress of time?"

"Can you recall the period," pursued the gentleman, regardless of the question, "when you made your first appearance in society under the guardianship of that paragon of chaperones, Lady Sinclair, with a face and form which set competition at defiance, and a heart as proud as it was pure? You may have forgotten it, but I never shall."

"And am I to resent your having known me at that happy time?"

"Yes, and no: in one respect you dare not hold me in displeasure, for you are well aware that I no sooner saw you than I became your devoted slave."

"A romantic appellation, truly, for the partner of a drawing-room flirtation!"

"You are not ingenuous, Lady Madelaine Tilden; did your clever and careful aunt permit such 'drawing-room flirtations,' save where she thoroughly approved the possible results? I think not. Thus far I have, I trust, proved that I was worthy of your notice—of your friendship—of your companionship—for I was fully conscious of the value of the privilege which had been accorded to me; but although I enjoyed it long and intimately, and although I had not hesitated to *afficher* myself as the devoted slave (for I persist in maintaining my *personage*) of the new idol; still, on the death of Lady Sinclair, Reginald Otterford went on the Continent—a bachelor; and the *Marguerite des Marguerites* returned to the Highlands—Lady Madelaine Glenfillan."

"My lord, you astonish me!" said my mother, haughtily.

"Nay, nay; believe me that you mistake the term; I only *remind* you, nor should you take offence at the frank confession which I am making of my sins. Look you; I have leveled one of my outworks in token of a first defeat. You had every reason and every right to expect an explanation at my hands."

"I am at a loss to know to what climax such a conversation, or almost, I might say, such a monologue as the present, is to tend?"

"Simply to my own self-justification."

"It is perfectly needless, my lord. Nothing had ever passed your lips by which I was entitled to believe that you considered yourself compromised; nor had I ever given you the slightest reason to infer that you were otherwise than perfectly indifferent to myself."

Her companion quietly shook his head, as he again, with great composure, fixed his eyes upon hers, which were flaming with insulted pride; and there was a strangely withering intonation in his voice, as he said—"You do not do yourself justice by such an assertion. Custom has placed a padlock upon the lips of women, of which society keeps the key; but custom and convention, and even policy itself, can do no more than this, while human beings possess eyes, and hearts, and preferences. Either I was then beloved, or you were not the pure being before whom I poured out my worship; and this I will not think. No, no—you could not at that early age have been a callous, cold, and calculating coquet—one of those heartless and selfish triflers with the happiness of others, who have studied to a nicety how far they may make a traffic of a man's feelings with safety to themselves. I would not overthrow the bright and beautiful visions of seventeen years, to embrace so foul a creed for all my future hopes in life. You loved me, then, or there is no truth in nature!"

My mother silently laid her hand upon a silver bell beside her. She could not trust herself to speak. The summons was instantly answered, and her inquiry for the carriage met by the information that the horse had not yet returned from the village forge. Poor Lady Madelaine

was not aware that the groom of Lord Otterford always obeyed the directions of his noble master to the letter, and that he had accordingly subdued all symptoms of undue impatience on the part of her ladyship's coachman in a way which did him honor.

They were once more alone; and then, and not till then, the gentleman resumed the thread of his discourse.

"This point conceded, then—for, in order to cast the responsibility of this cold parting wholly upon me, it is necessary that it should be so—may I not, in extenuation of my self-abnegatory offence, explain the cause which induced me to silence, where inclination, tenderness, and honor appeared to exact an explanation?"

"It were worse than idle to impose so ungracious a task upon you," said my mother, bitterly. "It was my want of fortune."

"Say rather that it was my own," interposed Otterford, "that it was my poverty—my debts—which closed my lips, and only left me the more keenly susceptible of my own uncalculating and egregious folly! Still, something whispered me that we should meet again, and I fled from London in order to retrench, and give myself room for hope when that meeting came. We did meet again," and a disdainful smile played for an instant round his proud lips; "but how!"

"Surely, my lord," gasped my mother, "you have forgotten that I am a wife!"

"Forgotten it!" exclaimed Otterford, as he started from his chair, and began to pace the room, with hasty and uneven steps. "Can I forget my own vitality? Can I forget that I have flung the whole tide of my affections on the thirsty sands! I pray you not mock me by such a supposition!"

"What am I to reply to rhapsodies like these?" faltered my mother. "You take an ungenerous advantage of our momentary seclusion, of which I have ever hitherto believed you incapable. Once more let me enjoin you to remember that I am a wife."

"You are," said her companion, pausing immediately beside her; "you are: the haughty and high-born daughter of Lord Glenfillan—the star of fashion—the beloved of all—the fair prize which so many were eager to win and wear—had woven out a new and erratic destiny for herself before our second meeting came. The peer's daughter had become the wife of an obscure and nameless (for he was nameless then at least)—of an obscure and nameless commoner—the bright star had shot downward through the heavens—the idol had overthrown her own shrine—the prize had been awarded, none could understand wherefore, until the name of Lady Madelaine Tilden was to be seen written in diamonds and gold-dust in every resort of luxury and fashion. And yet—although I knew this—although I was compelled to admit it to my own heart, still—" and, as he suffered the apparent mortification of his disappointment to carry him along by its impetuous violence, he possessed himself of my mother's hand: "still was I fated to remain the victim of my blighted and unlucky passion. And now—now—when I have suffered the long martyrdom of years—when I have, if not patiently, at least guardedly, lived within the spell of your resistless influence, with all my old hopes and aspirations still clinging closely about my spirit—even now, will you not acquit me of either word, or look, or action, calculated to pain you?"

"I could have done so this morning."

"And have you not pronounced your own condemnation by thus acquitting me? Can you venture to assert that you feel no self-reproach at having permitted the perpetual worship of a devoted heart without one quickening pulse?—without one grateful feeling? It cannot be—it shall not be!" and still retaining the captive hand, he flung himself on his knees before his quailing and speechless victim. "By heaven! you have long known and understood the impulse upon which I acted: you offered no resistance to the exclusiveness of my attentions—either your heart or your vanity has spoken loudly for me, and I will not believe that it could be so pitiful an influence as the last, upon which you coldly saw fit to hinge my destiny. Why, then, noble and high-hearted woman, do you thus, year after year, persist in playing the tyrant and the pride, when—"

"Enough, sir, enough!" exclaimed my mother, in a shrill whisper, and with quivering lips, as white as the hand which she proudly withdrew from his clasp; "you have said more than enough. I am sufficiently humbled. I have mistaken both you and myself. I will utter no reproach—I can find none which would suffice for so cruel and cowardly an attack. We meet henceforth as strangers; and I now spurn you as I would cast a foul reptile from the folds of my veil."

As she ceased speaking, Lady Madelaine prepared to pass into the garden, a movement which her companion sprang from his knee to prevent; and as she was in the act of placing her foot on the gravel, he seized her arm, exclaiming—"Do not hope it, madam, we part not thus!"

"Fie—for shame, my lord," said the lady, as she paused, and looked upon him with an eye as cold as stone, and a contemptuous smile, which made his pulses beat with liquid fire; "have you *no* mercy upon an unprotected woman? Am I to be subjected also to violence under my own roof?"

There was a majesty in the magnificent beauty and suppressed indignation of my mother, which did not fail in its effect even upon her dissolute companion. Without another effort to detain her, he removed his grasp; and, bowing stiffly, followed her to the water's edge, where they stood for a few instants side by side in perfect silence, and it was, probably, no slight relief to either when Lady Madelaine's carriage was announced. Lord Otterford assisted her to enter it with as much care and courtesy as he had shown on all former occasions; and then, haughtily raising his hat, he vaulted into the saddle, and galloped off in the direction of London, while my mother, burying herself as much as possible among her cushions, gave free way to her pent-up feelings, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XVIII

It is really curious, in after-life, to look back upon the various incidents by which our past

existence has been diversified, and even governed in its great outline, or by which its interests have been involved so inextricably as to have operated even upon our most sacred and secret relations; and then to weave their antecedents and their results into its checkered web, with the aid of time and experience. Episodes, incomprehensible at the moment of their introduction, fall quite naturally into their places during these reminiscent reveries, although they appeared at the instant of their occurrence alike extraneous and impertinent; and events, once considered as extraordinary and altogether gratuitous, prove to have been only the natural result of a certain line of conduct, and a certain succession of ideas, and to form no more than a regular link in the great chain of calculation and expediency.

But enough of such reflections as these, which only serve to sadden the writer and to weary the reader, without making either the one or the other a jot the wiser. They might be all very well in the time of our great-grandfathers, when people had much more leisure—when gentlemen made their wills before journeying from York to London, and dispatched bulletins of health to their anxious families at the close of every longer stage than usual—when ladies made one piece of tapestrywork extend over a whole life—and young men served, like Jacob, seven years for their wives. Then, indeed, a grave thought or a serious apothegm might have been welcome, *pour passer le temps*; but it is not so with us; we, who are incessantly running after him, to hold him back, and seldom clutching even a single feather for our pains. Such being the case, I will at once resume my narrative.

By the way, this allusion to the said narrative reminds me that I ought to congratulate myself upon my original resolve to declare myself guiltless of all design to perpetrate a novel. I never had any such intention. I could not have done it if I would. I have attempted nothing beyond my own personal history—and surely, fair ladies and formidable critics, I have a right to do that as I please! Nevertheless, I will pledge my faith willingly to be as veracious as a traveler, as conscientious as a moneylender, as self-denying as an alderman, and as prudent as a newly emancipated heir: and having volunteered thus much, let the ladies and the critics quarrel with me—if they can.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that I knew nothing of the adventure related in the last chapter for years after its occurrence; and I was comparatively astonished by the receipt of a letter from my mother, which followed closely upon that of Mr. Tilden, to announce her intention of being his companion to Rooksley; in order, as she said, to welcome the new-comers, and to judge by her own observation, in how far I had myself profited by the salutary solitude to which she had found it necessary to subject me, with a view to the correction of my unfortunately imperious and overbearing temper. Had I been aware at the time of the actual cause of Lady Madelaine's sudden solicitude, and her anxiety to absent herself from town, it is probable that I should have been very differently affected.

"Here is a letter from our mother," I said carelessly, as I laid it, open as it was, beside my sister. "Read it; you will doubtlessly find it amusing; and it will also gratify you to ascertain how perfectly your own quiet and reserved temperament will suit her. I quite prophesy already an alliance, both offensive and defensive. Only," I added, as I turned to leave the room, "I have one serious counsel to give you—be careful not to grow any taller!" And with these words, uttered with a laugh which expressed far more bitterness than pleasantry, I disappeared.

Lady Madelaine had adopted any other than a judicious mode of improving my natural disposition. She had commenced upon a wrong system, and she had persevered in her error year after year with a tenacious fidelity, as little creditable to herself as it was mortifying to me. I was determined to show her this: and I could discover no method more effectual of so doing than that of exhibiting her letter to whomsoever might be supposed to take any interest in its contents. It was too late for me to be browbeaten into reformation. She had herself made a woman of the child, and the work of her own hands could not now be undone.

In about half an hour, Adela returned the letter through the hands of my maid, carefully inclosed in an envelope, which I immediately redirected and dispatched to Lady Flora, as a solace to her sick-room: it was a becoming attention on my part; and as it was the first which I had found occasion to offer her, I had no doubt whatever of its being properly appreciated. On her return from her mission, charged with the acknowledgments of the interesting invalid, Joséphine made me her compliment on the happy intelligence contained in the letter of *miladi*. I inquired upon what premises she presumed that its contents were so hyperagreeable, when she *naïvely* replied that she had inferred as much from the eagerness with which Lady Flora had possessed herself of the packet, and the pleasure which beamed in the eyes of Mademoiselle Adèle, *qui gagnoit étonnantement à cette petite mine éveillée*.

For a moment I had a sore struggle with myself. There could be no doubt of the correctness of Joséphine's report, simply because she could have no motive in the present instance to suspect that my sister was triumphing in what she supposed to be my mortification; and for a few instants I *was* mortified; less at the ungenerous amusement of so near a relative, than at the idea that Lady Flora Glenfillan, the object of my supreme contempt and dislike, was the partner of her pastime. I was at first tempted to regret my mode of proceeding, and to blame myself for not having simply announced the approaching advent of my mother, without ampliation or comment of any kind; but this was a mere transitory weakness, which my pride soon enabled me to conquer. I had a higher aim than that of striving to shine in the eyes of a Lady Flora. She was to be my companion for months—perhaps for years. The trial for mastery between us had commenced on the very evening of her arrival. I felt, moreover, that I must brave the combat alone; while she had a stanch and a subtile ally in my sister, and might, for aught that I could determine, soon find a second in my own friend, Lady O'Hallo

ran, whose leaning toward Adela had already become palpable; but, although it may be true enough, as a general principle, that *il pesce grossa divora il piccolo*, still I was conscious of a power within myself which would in every case preserve me from the risk of becoming so very small a fish as to move among my adversaries without troubling the water.

All these thoughts swept rapidly through my brain, and my resolutions were instantly taken. I at once felt that I must be consistent or my cause was lost; and accordingly I again dispatched my *soubrette* to Lady Flora's apartment, to request the restoration of the letter, which I was anxious to forward, without loss of time, to Lady O'Halloran, lest the expected visit of my mother should interfere with any of her arrangements. As I had foreseen, my message created what is, in the present day, denominated a "great sensation." The invalid insisted that Josephine had committed some grand mistake. "It was no' that possible," she declared, "that the lassie could purpose to do onything sae awfu'! Why, it was a clean shaming o' her own proudfu' nature—and she would advise her—"

What the valuable counsel would have been, and in what degree it might have operated upon my determination, it is impossible to decide, as the hand of my sister, pressed heavily upon the arm of the eager orator, arrested her utterance at the critical moment; while, in a calm and low tone, she said quietly, "Forgive me, my dear aunt; but had Eveleen believed that she required advice upon this extraordinary occasion, she would, in all probability, have asked it of yourself. She has not done so: and believe me, that it is far too good to be flung away, as it most decidedly would be, in this case."

"A' weel, a' weel," replied the aunt; "'wilfu' woman maun ha' her way,' as the poet says. Give the lass the letter, and gude luck go wi' it! It's a rampaging scrawl, to say the best of it."

In five minutes it was on its way to the Hall.

The morrow was the day appointed for my own visit to the kind-hearted widow, but I had ceased to look forward to it with pleasure. Like the skeleton of the Egyptian banquets, the presence of my incomprehensible sister would suffice, as I well knew, to poison my enjoyment. It was to me like the coupling of the dead man and the living one in the German story; and the simile was the more perfect that Adela appeared wholly heedless or unconscious of the annoyance of our compulsatory union; while to myself it was hateful. Had I possessed one feeling or sentiment in common with my sister, I might have looked forward to brighter and better times; but, unhappily, the solitary sympathy which had ever existed between us had served only to sunder us in heart and spirit. We had each been brought up to despise the other—our earliest jealousies had taken the same direction, and had been quickened and nourished until they had become as bitter as the waters of Marah, and as numerous as the sands of the African desert. In my own case, other feelings no less hostile had blended themselves with this first principle of future hate. My sister had always been described to me by the autocrats of the nursery and the school-room in negatives. She was not handsome; she was not accomplished; she was not fashionable; she was a mere wild, sunfreckled, ignorant child of the hills, without either *tournure* or pretensions.

At first I was shocked, and even sorry for the poor neglected girl; then I proceeded to hope that she would remain at Glenfillan all her life, lest by approaching town, and undergoing the inspection of my mother's "set," she should disgrace not only herself, but me. And why could she not remain there? Glenfillan might also be considered her birth-place. At all events, it was her home, and it would be so easy for her to marry *there!* With her name, and her fortune, she could assuredly captivate some Highland chief, with a kilt, and a cock's feather in his bonnet, who would forgive her want of beauty in consideration of the "siller;" and never be aware of her want of education. Decidedly she had no business in England. This was the second phase of my vision; but the third was not slow in its succession. Adela might have no partiality for kilts and cock's feathers; and, as she grew older, might be inconsiderate enough to assert her rights; and, as in dear, righteous old England, there are no convents for the reception of refractory young ladies, the claim could not ultimately be neglected. In this case, she *must* appear in the world—she *must* share at once both my aristocratic home and my brilliant destiny—that is, in as far as, under all her disadvantages, the world would permit her to do so; and this reflection was to me insufferable.

CHAPTER XIX.

Accustomed even from my babyhood to be the toy of the saloon and the tyrant of the school-room—to be caressed and flattered, indulged and petted, I was indebted only to the occasional caprices of Lady Madelaine for remembering from time to time that I was mortal; and for the last two years even the whims alluded to had considerably augmented my self-esteem, for I had discovered the valuable secret of my mother's jealousy — of her dread of rivalry from her own daughter; and this knowledge was not calculated to teach me humility.

That I easily imbibed the belief that Lady Madelaine was not alarmed altogether causelessly, I have already shown. I knew that she had passed her thirtieth year; and to a girl of fifteen, she seemed indeed to be growing old enough to abdicate her throne. To whom, then, could she more fitly resign it than to her own daughter? Her discourtesies, therefore, as I readily decided, grew out of a weak vanity, which it was my duty to pity rather than to despise; and I gave it my commiseration accordingly, and only appreciated myself the more highly for my generosity. It was, probably, very difficult for a *ci-devant* beauty, and an acknowledged leader of fashion, to grow old gracefully. There *must* be something revolting in "the first gray hair" and the first incipient wrinkle; all this I was quite capable of feeling; and I had not met my mother for so long a period that I actually felt nervous when I re-

flected on the effect which might be produced upon her when we once more stood face to face, scanning the traces left by time on either side during our separation. Poor Lady Madelaine! I knew beyond a doubt that I no longer wanted more than a couple of inches to be precisely the same height as herself. I had placed this point beyond dispute, by making Joséphine, on the first day of every month, mark my exact measurement upon the wall of my room with a penciled line. I was equally aware that I had also improved in beauty, and that, even if not yet quite so handsome as my mother, I was at least *fifteen years younger;* while the very time which was daily paling her roses would only serve to shower their leaves upon me.

All these were pleasant thoughts, and peculiarly characteristic of my nature. I was born with a loving heart; but my affections had either been trifled with, or repulsed—and yet not altogether so, for to two persons, at least, I had been dear—my father and Emily Vernon; but of the first I had seen far too little to be enabled to return or to appreciate his tenderness, while the considerate kindness of poor Emily had been circumscribed by the tyranny of my mother. Under these circumstances, my best and holiest feelings had been flung back upon me; and, profiting by the example continually before my eyes, young as I was, I had taken refuge in coquetry; and my reader is already aware that I trifled with this new pastime until I subjected myself to severe mortification; and became, moreover, conscious that it had left behind it a deeper feeling of regret and tenderness in my own bosom than I could easily shake off, even had I endeavored to overcome it, which was far from being the case. I have said nothing for a long time of Devereux; but it must not be supposed that I had forgotten him. It was the only romantic page in the little volume of my life; and I dwelt upon it unceasingly.

Poor commonplace probability waged but unequal war against my girlish vanity; I would not believe it possible that he had forgotten me. I must some day be released from my present state of exile, and produced in the world. My mother and Lady Devereux were still inseparable; and it was consequently evident that our renewed meeting could not be prevented forever. It was a subject of unceasing regret to me that I had no one to whom I could speak of him, and to whom I could explain all the energy and constancy of my feelings. I was too proud to make a confidant of Joséphine; I dared not venture to trust the sympathy of Lady O'Halloran, for she would, in all probability, have made a jest of my anxiety, and even considered it her duty to lay the matter before my father. I was utterly and hopelessly alone with my secret; and it weighed the more heavily upon my heart in consequence.

My sister? Ay, there indeed I might have found a friend, a counselor, a confidant, had she been any other than Miss Adela Tilden; but, under the present circumstances, there was no prospect of such a solace.

Never was gray-haired matron more impracticable than my sister; cold, silent, and self-centered, there was not a grain of romance in her composition. She had never, since her arrival, displaced a single novel on the shelves; her conversation was a string of axioms and aphorisms; Pygmalion might have worn out all his tools upon her, and she never would have breathed, though his impious daring had wrapped the world in flames.

Still, despite these reflections and convictions, the idea continued to haunt me. Adela was so young, and a young heart is naturally so prone to take an interest in every history of affection. Nay, who could say that such a confidence as this might not lessen the distance between us? Thus argued my eager inclination to ease my overburdened heart, by sharing its load with another; and accordingly I began to watch my sister closely, in order to encourage every glimmering manifestation of feeling or interest on her part; but I might as soon have awaited light and fire from the piled-up ashes of an extinguished conflagration. Sometimes I became angry with myself for being so weak as to anticipate such a result—at others I pitied her impassibility, and felt that no lute could sound until its cords were struck; and this, in Adela's case, was clearly impossible.

In this wavering mood of mind I was prepared to sacrifice my own feelings and ideas during our visit to the Hall, to which I have already alluded; and I so far succeeded in at least accomplishing their concealment, that on our departure thence, Lady O'Halloran drew me apart, and warmly congratulated me upon the victory which I had obtained over myself in my altered and less authoritative manner toward my sister.

"Depend upon it, my dear child," she said, warmly, "you are working out your own happiness as well as hers. How shall I rejoice the affectionate and anxious feelings of your father by this joyful intelligence! Your heart is good, Eveleen; it must suffer from your errors, for I am perfectly convinced that you are quite conscious of them, even at the very moment of their committal; you owe them rather to your age, and to your peculiar education, than to your nature. In order to be all for which you were originally intended, my love, let me now entreat you to make a yet mightier effort over yourself than you have even done within these last few weeks; abjure, and not only abjure, but repair them all. Open up the treasures of your really loving heart to Adela. You will one day learn how precious a treasure is the affection of an only sister. Yours has a thousand good qualities; but, even if she had a thousand faults, so that they were merely involuntary, and that she regretted them when committed, you should consider yourself only the more compelled to sustain and comfort her. Come, my dear Eveleen, and promise me, here in my arms, and upon my heart, that you will use all your most tender influence to make her happy. From what you tell me, and from what I had myself ascertained, her guardian aunt is ill-calculated to be either an appropriate companion or a judicious guide. You have it in your power to be both. Be to her then a fond sister and a firm friend. You will do this, will you not?"

"Alas! you seek to compel me to a Herculean task," I said, sadly; "would she only meet me half-way, I should have courage to make the attempt."

"In that case it would require none," insisted my warm-hearted monitress; "but you expect success too soon. Redouble your attempts to overcome her coldness, and your merit will only be the greater when it is conquered: that she will resist it resolutely for a time assure yourself, for you must feel that the poor child has much to forgive."

"But not to forgive me, Lady O'Halloran?"

"You are in error, Eveleen. Are not all the preferences—all the outlay—all the cares which have been so profusely lavished upon yourself, and so grudgingly bestowed upon her—all the superiority which you have assumed—are these not wrongs in which you have, voluntarily as well as involuntarily, borne a part? and are not these likely to fester in a young, fresh heart, unconscious of evil? I have no doubt she has made you feel that she has not borne them all without a pang. Such conduct would have been sublime, and who would dare to expect sublimity from a girl of thirteen years of age? I am equally convinced that she will be long, very long, before she can overcome their withering effects, or cease to show you that they still rankle in her mind; but this should only stimulate you to greater concessions; and remember that it is the province of the happy to heal the wounds of those who suffer, and that the sufferer should be met by kindness, forbearance, and the most delicate demonstrations of affection."

As she ceased speaking, Lady O'Halloran embraced me affectionately, while I wept from a mingled feeling which I did not seek to analyze. This judicious friend affected to mistake the motive of my emotion; she congratulated me upon my worthy sympathy in the past sorrows of my sister, and my evident intention to terminate them; and then hastily but clearly explained to me the line of conduct which she would advise me to pursue. I whispered out my determination to follow it up to the letter upon her bosom, making but one reservation.

"Permit me only, my friend," I said hurriedly, "to leave everything in its present state and to make no demonstration, until after the visit of our parents. When we are again alone, I will apply myself resolutely to this formidable, and, I fear, hopeless undertaking."

"I can admit of no such moral cowardice, my Eveleen," was her calm reply; "every hour of supineness is an hour lost, which you may, hereafter, bitterly regret. I will not give you a day's respite—not an hour's. The ascendency which you will have gained over yourself and your own egotism, before the arrival of Lady Madelaine and Mr. Tilden, will strengthen you to recommence a trial, which will be no longer in its first infancy. Their visit may be delayed, even deferred; in short, trust not to circumstances in so holy a duty, but to yourself."

Her firmness, aided by my own secret wish, determined me at once. I was, moreover, greatly agitated at the moment; nor could I bear to let her feel that I was less generous than she had believed. I accordingly withdrew my opposition, and promised all she wished.

My first attempts at conciliation and friendship were not, however, successful. Adela was too far-sighted to believe for an instant that I had so suddenly changed my nature. She suspected a snare, or at least imagined a weakness and inconsistency of character which irritated her, and put her upon the defensive. Every look of kindness which I turned upon her she studiously avoided; my most conciliatory words were unanswered, or only induced a reply so cold, and dry, and formal, that it froze me to the soul; while, by a strange coincidence, I became in my turn embarrassed and timid in her presence, and divested myself unconsciously of my natural arrogance. However much I might gain in the opinion of a third person by this extraordinary transformation, it never produced even a momentary effect upon Adela, while it made me absolutely unhappy. I did not know myself. I had not even the consolation of feeling that I was doing right, for I was burdened with the everlasting consciousness that my present conduct sprang from no impulse, was actuated by no principle of my own; but that I was a mere puppet, and that the wires by which I was moved were in the hands of another. I was nothing more than an awkward and inexperienced actress, saying what was "set down for me," and constrained at every instance to sacrifice myself to the part which I represented.

Often did I indulge in bitter reveries on my extraordinary and irksome position. Often did I repeat to myself that *ogni medaglia ha il suo rovescio.* I was undergoing this moral misery, to reclaim the heart of Adela. But would it consent to be reclaimed? Would it ever exchange its haughty indifference for the thraldom of a sister's regard? And, alas! seldom, very seldom, could I compel myself to answer "yes." Why, then, should I any longer tamely undergo this martyrdom, which made me a stranger even in my home? I can scarcely answer the question. Suffice it, that I remembered my promise to Lady O'Halloran, and also that I had never yet compelled myself to any measure in which my pride had suffered me to fail through my own weakness.

This remark reminds me, that the letter of Lady Madelaine, which I had forwarded to the Hall, had been received by its mistress with a full appreciation of the feeling which had induced me to send it. She well knew my haughty disposition, and that I would rather brave the little world about me than shun its blame. She first chided me jestingly, but took an after-opportunity of pointing out the danger and impolicy of such a proceeding, and earnestly entreated me never to repeat it.

Had I only possessed such a friend a few years earlier! But, alas! this is an implied excuse for my past faults, which at the present day I should be too proud and too just to make. Let me rather remember in my old age, that, whatever may have been the errors of those around me, I was, nevertheless, my own worst enemy. It is so easy to imitate when both egotism and vanity are gratified by the mimicry.

But, to recur for a moment to my new state of existence, I can, upon looking back, frankly declare my conviction, that either my health or my will must have yielded before the stoicism of my sister and my own internal struggle, had it been fated to endure much longer. It was not—it was fearfully and fatally abridged!

CHAPTER XX.

TIME, meanwhile, continued its heavy course. Day after day sank into night. Lady Flora had declared herself, at last, to be convalescent; and descended to the drawing-room, closely enveloped in the Glenfillan tartan, to the great amusement of that portion of the establishment whom she dignified by the appellation of "the flunkies." Nor had she made her second appearance without a firm resolution to assert her privileges as the temporary mistress of the mansion. Her orders and her lectures, ere long, became infinite. For a time I ventured to oppose her distasteful and ungentlewomanly innovations, but she met me with the glance of a vixen, and the accents of a shrew, and against these I could not condescend to contend. I then ventured upon expostulation, but my failure was signal; and after these efforts to save the respectability of poor Rooksley, I abstained from all comment or expostulation, to the great astonishment and manifest disappointment of Lady Flora, who had evidently anticipated a long and exciting course of domestic warfare.

Before the arrival of Lady Madelaine's Scotch connection I had been constantly annoyed by intimations from the housekeeper that the underservants were, one and all, threatening to leave my father's service, unless they were allowed at stated periods to replace those in town—the quiet uniformity of Rooksley not suiting either their volatile spirits or their social habits. These terrible announcements had, as will be believed, never disturbed my equanimity for a moment. My universal reply was expressive of the necessity of their communicating their discontents to Mr. Tilden; and for a time I had heard no more of the kitchen rebellions. Now, however, the case was indeed changed—there was no more stagnation in the house. Lady Flora commenced by papering and bagging up every remain of ornamental furniture left in Rooksley. She even invaded the apartments of my father; but I no sooner discovered this, than causing every remnant of rag and paper with which she had desecrated them to be instantly removed, I turned the master-key which gave admittance to the whole suite, and never again suffered it to pass from my own possession.

So far, the Rooksley servants cared little for the innovations of Lady Fora, who now appeared to be really in her element; the only person who was annoyed and inconvenienced being myself; for Adela sat by, perfectly unmoved, like one accustomed to similar proceedings, and for whom they possessed neither interest nor hindrance. But when, having made everything about her wear as wretched an appearance as it was capable of assuming, the thrifty Scotch lady condescended to descend to the servants' hall, to commence her reformation in that privileged department, matters at once became desperate. She had already once or twice been heard to mutter between her teeth at the dinner-table something about "awfu' extravagance;" and consequently the whole establishment, each being interested in the question, were fully prepared for the assault. Lady Flora talked loud, but the housekeeper talked still louder, and precisely at the same moment, and consequently no one heard a syllable of the noble maiden's harangue. When she sought to enter the butler's sanctum, he accidentally let a basket of plate fall upon her right foot, which, from some cause or other, was peculiarly susceptible to contact with any hard substance; and, while she was leaning against the wall, and writhing with pain, he quickly locked the door of the room, and, putting the key in his pocket, walked away.

When the victim of his obstinacy had in some degree recovered from the shock she had received, she next attempted an inroad upon the kitchen, where she was received by the cook bearing a greasy spit, with which, as she crossed the floor, she brushed violently against her unwelcome visitor; but the Glenfillan tartan was proof against all such unctuous contact; and the resolute spinster stood her ground, until men and maids rushed in a phalanx through the open door; and the unfortunate reformer was so unmercifully hustled, jostled, and run over, that she was glad to make good her retreat to her legitimate sphere of action.

I shall never forget her when she reentered. I dare not venture to describe her appearance. Suffice it that I burst into an involuntary fit of laughter, so undisguised and so genuine, that I believe it obtained for me her life-long hatred. My sister looked at her for a moment without the movement of a muscle, and then calmly continued her work.

Habit is assuredly all-powerful, or I am convinced that Adela, stoic as she seemed, must have laughed as I did at the comical effects of Lady Flora's foray.

Baffled, but not defeated, the resolute lady returned on the morrow to the charge; but, as she had, on the first onslaught, encountered such bitter perils, she saw fit, on her second essay, to remember that "discretion is the better part of valor;" and feeling, no doubt, that the pantries and sculleries were hopelessly closed against her, she assumed a more dignified position, and summoned the delinquent housekeeper to the breakfast-room, where she was duly apprised that Lady Flora would, in future, herself regulate the supplies of both the upper and lower tables; and that Mrs. Locksley must be responsible for all additional outlay which might occur from her want of obedience to the mandate issued for her observance. The worthy soul looked absolutely petrified with horror and mortification for a few seconds, but she soon rallied sufficiently to say that she was not sure that she had understood her ladyship, for she did not speak Scotch; nor, indeed, for that matter, did any servant in the house; but she was sure, from the orders she had received from her own lady, that Lady Madelaine Tilden had never entertained an idea that her ladyship would demean herself by meddling with the housekeeping.

This perfectly respectful, but stinging rejoinder, told in two ways, and I saw a burning spot of red mount to the brow of Lady Flora, while her lips turned blue with suppressed rage. She struggled resolutely against it, however; and contented herself by remarking that she expected obedience, and not argument.

"But, Miss Tilden—Miss Eveleen"—commenced the excited guardian of the keys.

I merely waved my hand to silence all reference to myself. My disgust was too great for me to venture any attempt at utterance.

"But pray, my dear young lady, for my sake, for all our sakes, do remember that when my honored lady is absent, you are the mistress of the house—" persisted Mrs. Locksley.

I was still silent; but not so the thrifty daughter of Glenfillan. In words infinitely more energetic than eloquent, the dismayed and deposed functionary was ordered to leave the room on the instant; and she obeyed with most undignified alacrity, evidently more from bewilderment of mind than from any intention of acquiescence to the will of her new tyrant. Throughout the whole scene I had suffered bitterly. Wounded pride, suppressed indignation, and withering contempt, had each, in turn, swelled my heart almost to bursting. I felt that Rooksley and its inhabitants would become the fable of the neighborhood. The world, ever ready to seize the malicious side of every question, would reluctantly admit the possibility that any guest, however closely connected with the mistress of the house, could permit herself to interfere with its domestic economy. It would, therefore, be believed that all the steps so authoritatively and unceremoniously taken by the new inmate, had been suggested by my mother herself; and the haughty Lady Madelaine, who had borne herself so proudly towards the first families in the county, would be mixed up in legends of famished housekeepers, and exasperated underlings. I was, in short, so thoroughly excited by Lady Flora's presumption, exhibited as it was, moreover, with the coarsest vulgarity, that, as I chanced to glance toward the unmoved and immovable Adela, who, flung back in an armchair, was calmly amusing herself with a volume of Florian's Pastorals, I could have torn the book from her hand, and hurled it to the other extremity of the apartment.

My reader may possibly feel some surprise that, suffering so acutely as I did from what was passing before my eyes, I did not retire to my own room, and shut out so painful a spectacle. It would have been contrary to my nature to have made so undeniable a demonstration of cowardice. There was something in the self-gratulatory and magnificent deportment of the lady who now ruled Rooksley, which convinced me that the despicable drama was not yet played out; and I resolved to remain, in order to ascertain how far the disgrace of my parents was to extend. I remarked that the keen gray eye of Lady Flora had been several times turned earnestly towards me since the exit of Mrs. Locksley, and I felt convinced that she was anxious to see it succeeded by my own. Brave matters as she might, she could not conceal that I was *de trop*; and I was glad of it. I accordingly seated myself more commodiously in my chair, and took up a daily paper which was lying on the table beside me. She saw at once that there was no hope of my disappearance; and lost not a moment in asserting her supposed power over myself in consequence.

"Ring the bell, Eve-leen," she said abruptly.

I neither moved nor looked up.

"Do ye no' hear me, Miss Tilden!"

"Yes, madam," I answered, in a calm voice, as I deposited the paper once more upon the table, and looked her demurely and steadily in the face.

"Then, why did ye no' ring the bell when I desired ye!"

"Because I only obey the orders of those who have a right to give them. Had you made a request, madam, I might possibly have complied with it."

"The Lord be gude unto me!" exclaimed the irate lady; "things are come to a pretty pass, indeed, when a set-up miss will no' obey her own aunt!"

"You are not my aunt, Lady Flora Glenfillan," I replied haughtily; "I have already, upon a former occasion, explicitly made this known to you. None of the blood of the Macspleuchans runs in *my* veins."

"And ye obstinately refuse to do as I desire ye? Ye will no' ring the bell?"

"I absolutely refuse—I will *not*."

Lady Flora groaned aloud; and then, abruptly reverting to my slighting remark on her family, she said, with a sneer which appeared to be the most natural expression of her countenance, so instantly and easily did it settle itself upon her shrewish features, "Ye'll be telling us soon, I suppose, Miss Eve-leen Tilden, that the young lady opposite is no' your sister."

"I never amuse myself by useless fallacies, and far less by direct untruths, madam; and I am well aware that, by the accident of birth, Adela and myself bear the relationship you mention. I am aware that we are the children of the same parents, and consequently as I have just remarked—by birth at least—sisters."

I had emphasized my reply as markedly as I could; and I detected a quick glance and a nervous movement in Adela, which, for an instant, led me to hope that I had provoked a rejoinder; but I deceived myself. In the next moment she sat calm and still, with her eyes once more riveted on the Pastorals.

"Hech, sirs! here's wonderfu' condescension," ejaculated the worsted enemy, grasping the leathern arms of her chair and lifting herself half out of it, only to regain her seat with a sudden jerk mightily unpoetical in sound. "An earl's daughter is no' grand enough for the up start queans o' the present day; and me looke up to at my own place as a leader! It's wise like that, o' my conscience."

Then, after a momentary silence which I ha felt no inclination to break, she exclaimed, wit a startling vehemence which made me sprin in my chair—

"Ring the bell, Adela."

"Yes—aunt," said the young lady thus gentl apostrophized; and having complied with th command, she demurely resumed her seat.

A servant instantly appeared.

"I wish to speak with Mr. Bottlemore—i stantly," said the prima-donna.

The man bowed, and withdrew; but not be fore I had detected a roguish smile playin about his lips.

The precise and polite butler made his a pearance within five minutes, during whic time no word had been spoken in the breakfas room.

Lady Flora leaned forward in her chair, ar

returned his punctilious salutation with an elongatory motion of her chin. She evidently felt herself at that moment in a very responsible and dignified position. Not another moment was lost. In the same masterly style in which she had discussed with poor, discomfited Mrs. Locksley, the peculiarly agreeable and well-chosen subject of cookery,

"——all the way
From soup to *fondu* and *soufflé*;"

although, to quote once more the same witty poet, the busy lady could

"——scarcely tell
A *Salmi* from a *Bechamelle*,"

and bewildered my mother's good and clever housekeeper quite as much in her turn, by talking of "bannocks," and "griddlecakes," and other delicacies of her highland table, not omitting the popular "stirabout," which she had been preeminently anxious to introduce into the Rooksley kitchen—even after the same fashion did she proceed to question, and to direct staid Mr. Bottlemore, my father's especial favorite.

"Nothing but port and sherry at the upper table, did I understand your ladyship to say?" asked the demure voice; "even in the event of guests."

"Do I no' speak plain, sir?" was the counter-question.

"Most assuredly, my lady; your ladyship's voice is very distinctly audible; a trifle of difficulty there may be, perhaps, in the expression of your ladyship's meaning occasionally; but with patience and attention on my part, that may, without doubt, be overcome."

Lady Flora looked delightfully mystified. With all his polite placidity of countenance and demeanor, she evidently had a suspicion that Mr. Bottlemore was laughing at her. As for me, I could have knighted him on the spot, had I been a sovereign, and worn a sword. Under my actual circumstances, I was obliged to content myself by sitting silent, and playing with the poker.

Let her impression have been what it might, however, before she next spoke, the great agitator had made up her mind to pacific measures for the moment; and when the sly old man inquired, with a profound inclination, whether her ladyship had any further orders for him before he withdrew, she put the finishing stroke to her financial arrangements by strictly forbidding all wine, of whatever description, at the housekeeper's table.

Bottlemore smiled quietly, as he remarked that perhaps her ladyship was not aware that, in all large establishments, this privilege was a matter of course at the tables of the upper servants.

"Then the sooner ye're all unprivileged the better," angrily exclaimed my mother's representative; "a pack o' lazy looons that are na' worth your saut! Set ye up, forsooth, with wine! It shan't be done, I say, while I am mistress here. Gude save us a'! wine, indeed! Why, my sister maun be distraught. Ye have my last word, Mr. Butler—no more wine shall ye have, to sit guzzling o'er below there, instead o' minding to do your business."

"I fear, my lady, that I must disobey your ladyship's commands on this subject," said the placid individual she addressed; "and not only disobey them myself, but also assist Mrs. Locksley and the ladies' maids to do the same. The wine, my lady, is in our agreements."

Again the dark, red spot rose to the forehead of Lady Flora; Bottlemore's last assertion was not to be overruled; yet still, with an obstinacy which spoke volumes for her nerve, she determined not to be entirely baffled; and accordingly, assuming an air of majestic authority, which, the subject considered, made her look at the moment exceedingly like the superannuated Siddons of a barn-tragedy, she thundered out, in a voice which would have made itself audible amid the very "fury of the elements,"

"Then, sir, ye maun drink Cape!"

Poor Bottlemore! I think I see him once more before me. He, whose fastidious master declared him to be the best judge of wine with whom he had ever come into contact—never shall I forget his look of blank amazement. He was several minutes before he recovered the shock; but he had no sooner done so than, in an accent of indignation which almost revenged the injured dignity of Rooksley, he exclaimed boldly:—

"I am proud to say, madam, that the cellars of Mr. Tilden, since I have had control over them, have never been disgraced by the filthy compound it has pleased your ladyship to mention. Mr. Tilden, madam, drinks wine, not drugs; and so do all who have the honor to belong to him. I regret to seem wanting in respect to your ladyship; but this I solemnly declare, that I will neither be art nor part in the purchase of any such poison, nor will I be held responsible for any such proceeding."

"Hout, tout, man, gie us nane o' your din!" vehemently broke in Lady Flora; "I'm just deafened wi' it. Can I no' buy the wine mysel?"

"Certainly, madam, if your ladyship also purposes to drink it after it *is* bought," said the butler, sturdily; "but this much, my lady, I most respectfully inform you, that not a single cork shall be drawn in Mrs. Locksley's room; nor shall a drop be forced down the throat of my dear young lady here." Then, approaching me with the greatest deference, he asked, in a low and well-bred tone—"What description of wine shall I supply for your use, madam, under the new regulation of the family?"

"I leave it entirely to yourself, my good Bottlemore," I said smilingly; "only, pray do not allow me to be poisoned. I am too young to be envious of such a fate."

He bowed, and at once left the room, without any further impediment from his tormenter; and when I had allowed him sufficient time to traverse the gallery, I rose from my chair, and pausing for a moment before the chagrined and disappointed author of my present mortification, I said, slowly and coldly, "I have borne all the hideous scene of this morning, madam, in silence; but I can bear no more; and I now leave you to the pleasant triumph which you must necessarily feel after your well-bred contention with my father's menials. I have but one remark to make, one piece of advice to offer you, and I do it emphatically. Suffer the disgrace which you have this day wilfully brought upon your sister to suffice; believe

me, is already more than sufficient; and do not venture, for your own sake, to drive to the county-town with the Tilden liveries, to make purchases which will render *my* family the common laughing-stock of the neighborhood. You do not understand my father, or you would not have dared the impertinences of this morning."

I had no opportunity of ascertaining the effect of my words; for, when I ceased to utter them I left the room; and, shutting myself into my own chamber, gave free vent to the bitter feelings which I had so long suppressed.

CHAPTER XXI.

On the following morning, immediately that I had left the breakfast-room, and was awaiting in the saloon—the wretched-looking, desolate apartment which, during my mother's residence at Rooksley, had always been a scene of light and movement—the arrival of one of my masters, I was in my turn honored with a deputation from the servants' hall. I sickened as I saw them enter, but there was no remedy; and, accordingly, when I beheld Mrs. Locksley and Mr. Bottlemore respectfully approach me, while the remainder of the party paused deferentially just within the door, which they closed carefully after them, I threw myself into a seat, and abandoned myself to my fate.

I was not left long in suspense as to their purpose. Complaints, loud and long; expostulations, logical and earnest; and entreaties, anxious and emphatic, were poured out before me. "Her Scotch ladyship" was declared to be more than they could bear up against; she had not left her room more than three or four hours before their peculiar territories were invaded, and their ears assailed by unsavory epithets, which to them appeared even more obnoxious from their not being able to understand half their meaning; and now their supplies were to be cut off, and the garrison to be starved out, unless it pleased "their young lady" to come to the rescue.

"Only imagine, Miss Tilden," sobbed out the housekeeper, when the general grievances had been laid before me; "only imagine, ma'am, the disgrace to *my* situation and *my* time of life, to be followed up and scolded at, like a common kitchen-maid! I couldn't live through it. I'm sure, it would break my heart. And then the bill of fare every day for *both* tables, Miss Eveleen!—we shall all be starved before the year's at an end. Sheep's heads, with the wool on, ma'am, and cakes made of oats. The coachman was the first to declare that he would leave if they were set before him; for he should be afraid his own horses would run over him out of pure spite, if he was guilty even of tasting them. And if such a prospect frightened Jones, Miss Eveleen, who is not a man to be easily daunted, only think of their being served up to you."

"But, if that were all," broke in the modulated tones of the butler, "it might be got over, madam, for it would be a mere case of 'take it or leave it;' but the wine, Miss Eveleen, is a more serious matter. I have already declared my mind on the subject to her ladyship, who, it seems to me (if I may say so without disrespect to the family), doesn't appear to understand clearly what she's about, and has undertaken more than she can manage; but I can't endure to live in this state of open rebellion under the roof of so kind and honored a master; and therefore, madam—therefore, Miss Tilden"—and here he paused a moment in order to clear his throat, and render the utterance of what he still had to say less difficult—"therefore, I have consented, in the name of all the establishment (including the out-door servants), to wait upon you for the purpose of entreating your interference; or, in the event of your refusing it, to inform you of our intention to quit Mr. Tilden's service, although we are all grateful for the past, and shall at all times be happy to acknowledge that we shall never find a better than it *was*."

Here the phalanx of men and maids upon the threshold performed divers shamefaced and awkward salutations.

"As for myself," continued the spokesman, at the close of this pantomime, "I never thought to have had to look for another home. I hoped to live and die in the family. But to be told to lay in a stock of Cape wine at the chief town of the very county for which my master sits in Parliament, and where he has always spent his money like a prince, as indeed he is in his heart, it's more than I *can* do! To go and disgrace both him and myself before a parcel of backbiting people, that have always looked up to us!—it can't be done with any consistency; and so, my dear young lady, as I said before, I'd rather go than be guilty of it."

Here the worthy man brushed his handkerchief across his eyes, and shook his head so portentously that he made the powder fly in all directions.

"My complaint is altogether the same, ma'am," said the lachrymose housekeeper, as she thrust her hand into her capacious pocket in search of a similar piece of drapery.

"Indeed! my trusty Locksley," I said, with a smile, "and were *you* also commanded to drive to the county town for a stock of Cape?"

"No ma'am—no, Miss Eveleen," was the plaintive reply, as the tears rolled down her smooth and comely cheeks; "mine was even worse, far worse—sheep's heads, with the wool on, twice a week. It would ruin us all in the village; and, like Mr. Bottlemore, I'd rather go."

"My good people," I said, as I rose from the sofa, divided between amusement and annoyance, "you must all be well aware that I am still too young for the exercise of such an act of authority as that of changing the whole establishment of my father's house. You know, also, that I am now daily expecting his arrival; and I am quite sure that your wrongs will only require to be known to him, to be at once redressed. Is not this reasonable?"

An affirmative salutation was the reply.

"So far well," I continued; "but to thus much I pledge myself, that should his visit be by any chance delayed, I will myself write and inform him of all the circumstances of the case."

A murmur of approbation greeted this promise.

"This is not the first time, you are aware, Mrs. Locksley," I pursued, "that I have been

mformed of similar intentions, although never before of a general intention of leaving Rooksley, on the part of some of your subordinates; and the plea was, on those occasions, if I remember rightly, the dull monotony and perpetual quiet of the place, under a mistress of fifteen, who had not the power to give it greater animation. Do not believe that I am insensible to your present annoyance, when I remind you of a fable with which you must be familiar; and in which, tired of the ease and liberty of a commonwealth, the frogs petitioned Jupiter for a king, who in pity of their ignorance cast a log of wood into the lake, and bade them receive their sovereign. For a time, the sight of the huge mass floating upon the surface of the water sufficed to amuse them—they had the semblance of a monarch, and were content; but, ere long, as they experienced no interference from his placid majesty, and that his possession had left them in precisely the same condition of ease and freedom as formerly, they complained that Jove had jested with them, and renewed their supplications. This time they had their wish—King Stork appeared upon the borders of the lake, and so assiduously devoured such of his living subjects as chanced o fall into his way, that the diminished remainder were afraid to put their noses above water, and such as did contrive to escape during the brief intervals when his majesty had overgorged himself, hastened to emigrate to another sheet of water, where they might regain the quiet they had lost."

At this moment some one knocked at the door, and a groom extended to the footman, by whom it was opened, a letter, which had just arrived, for me, and which was superscribed, "Immediate."

I lost not a moment in breaking the seal, and the servants had not yet quitted the room, when, with a piercing scream, I fell senseless to the floor.

When I recovered consciousness I found myself lying upon a sofa, and tended by the housekeeper and Joséphine. My first movement was to motion them to close the blinds—I could not bear the light; and then I again sank back in an agony of grief, and buried my face among the cushions.

"*Pour l'amour de la Sainte Vierge!* mademoiselle, tell us what is the matter!" exclaimed the kneeling Joséphine.

"For pity's sake, let us know the worst!" entreated Mrs. Locksley.

"Read!" I exclaimed, suddenly raising my head, and pointing to the fatal letter, which still remained where it had fallen from my hand, "read, and aloud, that my heart may break at once!" I was obeyed. It was written by my father's body-servant, and its contents were these:—

"Grosvenor Square, Thursday.

"MADAM,—

"By desire of her ladyship, I write to inform you of the dreadful calamity which has taken place in the family; and I have instructions to request that you will immediately communicate the mournful tidings to Miss Adela Tilden and the Lady Flora Glenfillan. We are all in a state of the greatest grief, and seem to feel more every hour the value of him that we have lost. My honored master is no more! After speaking for upwards of an hour in the House, which was very close and crowded, Mr. Tilden, in order to refresh himself after his exertion, dismissed the carriage, and determined to walk home. He took cold; but, as the question in which he felt so much interest was still before the House, he could not be prevailed upon to absent himself; and so, from bad he rapidly became worse, and died on the fifth day (yesterday) of pleurisy. The deceased is to be interred in ten days after that of his demise; and I am sure it will be a great consolation to you, madam, to know that the premier, and nearly all his majesty's ministers, will attend the funeral; and as regards the nobility, we have already sixty carriages upon our list. This, madam, as you may believe, is very comforting to her ladyship, who is as well as can be expected, but has neither time nor spirits to write herself as yet. My lady instructs me to say, that directly the last honors are paid to my poor master she shall set off post for Rooksley, where she desires that Mrs. Locksley will have Mr. Tilden's private sitting-room hung with black before Sunday next; it is to be done precisely after the plan of which I have the honor to inclose a sketch, and which was approved by her ladyship for the principal drawing-room in Grosvenor Square. I have no further instructions, and therefore subscribe myself,

Madam,

"Your most obedient humble servant,

"JOHN DALE."

And this was all! My father, my fond but ill-requited father, was dead—was in a few brief days to be carried to his grave—and I knew no more! I cannot describe the agony of my grief, the anguish of my remorse. Every detail of the past rose up before me; and the hopes which I had almost unconsciously formed for the future, and in which the figure of my father had been ever prominent, mingled with the bitterness of my soul. I ceased to weep. A deeper and sterner feeling took possession of me. I should be henceforth alone. My mother had ceased to love me—my sister had never done so; even my last-acquired friend—even Lady O'Halloran herself—although delegated, by that very father whom I had now lost, to cherish and protect me, and who had taught me to love and to cling to him as I had never before done—she had already given symptoms of preferring a stranger to myself. I was bewildered by the extent of my misfortune. I thought with contemptuous pity of the poor and futile distinctions to the dead, which had already helped to afford consolation to Lady Madelaine—to his widow—whom he had surrounded with opulence and honor; and then I remembered, as if in contrast to these, the fresh flowers with which I had each morning, since his expected arrival, fondly decorated his room, in order that he might breathe their welcome upon his very entrance—a welcome which he was never more to experience beneath his own roof.

Profound and heartfelt grief lingers willingly over details like these; they are the stones which the spirit piles upon the cairns of the departed. For all other sorrows there is consolation—in all other trials there is hope; but on this earth there is none for death. It comes

coldly, suddenly before us, and defies all remedy. I had heard more, I had spoken more, and, above all, I had thought more of my father during the last few months than I had ever before done. I had striven to bring his image before me incessantly. I had treasured up every evidence of his taste, every shade of his character, in order to form my own after that model. I had made his favorite apartment my refuge, when vexation and annoyance had wounded my spirit; I had accustomed myself in its genial solitude to review the folly, the coldness of my ungrateful girlhood to the only being who really loved me for myself; and there had I shed those regretful but soothing tears which, summoned by sorrow for the past, inspire better resolutions for the future. And all had been too late! I had sought strength only of myself; I had never learned that without higher and holier assistance I was powerless. Nor did I feel it even now. My sole sensation was one of grief and wrong. Others, many others were beloved by scores of tender relatives and friends; I had but one, and even he was taken from me—taken, too, just at the moment when I was prepared to pour out before him the long-hoarded treasure of my filial affection; I had no consolation—none!

Let no one imagine this description of my first grief to be exaggerated. Let them rather search into human nature, and admit its truth. As I now look back, I cannot contemplate it with the same complacency as I did even in the earlier period of my sorrowing. I had learned to love my father with a fervor which bordered on romance—to feel proud alike of his talents and of his virtues—to experience gratitude for the neglected tenderness which he had lavished on me in my childhood, and to form hearty resolutions of returning it tenfold in the time to come. But, alas! I now see what I did not then even suspect. All the tears which I so passionately shed did not embalm the memory of my father. Many, too many of them were an offering to SELF. My projects were overthrown—my future was blighted—my scheme of life was rendered, by this one blow, vain and impossible. The earth had crumbled away beneath my feet; and as, for weeks after that blow was struck, I wandered, sad and solitary, through the silent apartments which were once *his*, I found a proud satisfaction in murmuring to myself—"None mourn him as I do!" No warning voice whispered into my ear the humiliating truth.

Lady Flora made a decent endeavor to appear afflicted; but it was too shallow to deceive even for a moment. She had never divested herself of the delusion that she had been the first object of Mr. Tilden's preference; and that his ultimate selection of her beautiful young sister was the mere effect of some unaccountable caprice. She was utterly unable to sympathize with the feelings of such a man, and therefore she feared him; while it is needless to do more than to remark, that in weak and ignorant natures, fear is always coupled with dislike. There can be no doubt, under all these circumstances, that Lady Flora had dreaded the hour in which she should be compelled to present herself before him as his guest; and from this terror she was now fatally relieved. This was her view of an event so terrible and so sudden; and it is not to be supposed that she suffered greatly from the shock.

The feelings of Adela were more extraordinary and inexplicable. There were moments when her depression was so great, that she could not endure any companionship; and would rush abruptly from the presence of every one, and shut herself into her room for hours. On her reappearance, there was no mistaking the agony in which the interval had been passed: her eyes were swollen with weeping, and her cheeks pale and sunken; and yet, at times, she rallied so wonderfully as to display more bodily and mental energy than I had ever before believed her to possess. She produced upon me the effect of a person who had suddenly flung off a heavy weight, and who experienced some great and hidden relief.

The first occasion upon which we had ever spoken together with the confidence and affection of relatives—I dare not say of sisters—was on the evening of the day when the fatal news reached us. I had desired that no one should disturb me; and hour after hour had passed, as I lay silent and almost motionless upon my sofa, sunk in those sad and bitter thoughts which I have endeavored to describe. The sun had set unheeded; the twilight had faded into darkness; and, to me, there had seemed no change. I was absorbed in my own anguish, when I distinctly heard a light stroke upon the door, but I was too listless in my misery to heed it. A moment subsequently it opened, and Adela slowly approached me. She was as pale as death; her hair was in disorder, and hung in rich disheveled masses upon her shoulders; and her eyes were encircled by a dark ring, as though the tears that would not fall had congealed the blood around their orbs. In one hand she held the letter which had been the messenger of grief, and in the other a small lamp, which she deposited in silence upon a table. As she approached me I instinctively raised myself upon my elbow, and I saw a faint, sad smile quiver over her lips. Many sisters would have sprung into each other's arms, and wept out their anguish upon each other's necks: Adela and I mutually extended our hands, and held them clasped for a few seconds, after which she drew a chair close to the cushion of the sofa upon which I was lying, and sat down. Still I did not speak. I felt as though the first word which I sought to utter must suffocate me; but Adela did not seem to interpret my silence unkindly.

"Poor Eveleen!" she murmured, in her low, musical voice, which sounded sweet and sad in that vast and half-dismantled apartment—"this is *your* first sorrow, and it is, indeed, a bitter one."

I glanced at her in surprise.

"I would not, even now, have intruded upon your grief," she continued; "but there are certain duties delegated to us which we must perform. Our father's room—"

"He will never, never occupy it more!" I exclaimed, in a fresh paroxysm of grief—"Adela, Adela, we have lost our best friend!"

"I know it—I feel it," replied my sister, in the same low and firm tone as she had hitherto spoken; "perhaps our only one. But it is not

in order to aggravate your regrets that I am here. You have the key that is needed, Eveleen; there was no means of ingress without an application to yourself. There are strangers in the house, who — who" — she struggled with her emotion, as a convulsive shudder made me tremble in every limb; and then added, hastily, as though she feared that she could not much longer restrain her tears— "and Lady Flora is already with them, and will superintend everything, if you will send her the key."

"I thank you, Adela," I said, with a sudden calmness for which I could not account even to myself; "there are, indeed, duties delegated to us. You know how carefully, how reverently, I have hitherto guarded that, to me, sacred spot from the pollution of a stranger's curiosity. I will do so still. You have, indeed, performed a sister's part toward me to-night—complete it now. Withdraw Lady Flora from the gallery; her services are not needed, nor can they be either accepted or permitted. I would rather not meet her yet—nor *there*."

Adela looked steadily at me for a moment, and then, taking up her lamp, left the room. I required a few moments to compose myself, and to prepare for the dismal and trying duty which I had refused to transfer to another; and, ere I had well succeeded, Joséphine appeared with a light, which she placed upon a console near the door, and instantly withdrew. I walked slowly toward it, lifted it, and stood quietly until I found that I could carry it with a steady clasp; and then, having steeped my hands and face in Hungary water, I passed out into the gallery.

A confused murmur of hoarse whisperings fell on my ear as I advanced, and I soon stood opposite the impatient group who were to drape the apartment of my father in its lugubrious trappings. As I stopped before them, all the servants, whom curiosity or interest had attracted to the spot, silently retired, save the butler; who, drowned in tears, had not yet perceived my arrival.

"Bottlemore," I said, firmly, "where is the inclosure of Lady Madelaine's letter?"

He tendered it silently, and without raising his eyes.

"Here, gentlemen, is the task which you have to perform. Can it be accomplished to-night?"

"I fear it's impossible, miss," said he, who appeared to be the leader, and who was exhausting himself in reverences, each lower than the last, amid bales and packages all rolled in black wrappers, and looking like a group of coffins waiting for interment, as they lay huddled together in the dusky light; "unless, indeed, we worked till morning; but then, nightwork is double pay."

"Let it be done," said I, as I drew out the key and opened the door; "such a scene would be difficult to bear twice."

My foot was already on the threshold, when I suddenly started back with a slight scream, and clung to Bottlemore, who was following closely behind me.

"Madam, dear Miss Eveleen, what have you seen?" inquired the faithful old man, as he strove to look over my shoulder, while the sable-clad functionaries in his rear endeavored, in vain, to discover the cause of my panic; for the second battant of the door was still unopened, and the butler and myself had filled the vacant space.

In an instant I recovered myself. I was ashamed of my folly, although I still trembled from its effects. As I before stated, I had taken no heed of time, and was not aware that it had progressed so rapidly. The moon, then at its full, was pouring a flood of light over the room; and, as the door gave way under my hand, a stream of cold air swept like an icy breath across my face, while the draperies of the curtains flapped heavily, with a dull and smothered sound. In my excited state of mind, it was not wonderful that I was startled; but my surprise was still further increased, when, on entering the room, and advancing towards the marble table which occupied the centre of the floor, I saw the magnificent exotic flowers, which I had collected from the conservatories only that morning, lying scattered and withering beside the overturned vase which had contained them. As I was about to utter an exclamation, something suddenly rose from the floor beside me, and, with a rushing noise, made for the moonlighted window, and beat itself heavily against the glass. All was instantly explained. It was a wood-pigeon, which, probably pursued by a hawk, had found an entrance, by some means, into the apartment. But how? That enigma, also, was soon solved, by one of the workmen discovering a broken pane of glass in the centre window.

All these trifling facts, simple as they seemed nevertheless perplexed me greatly. That no accident of the sort had taken place until long past noon, I was well aware; for, after having completed my floral offering to my father, I had remained, for several hours, reading and musing in his apartment. I felt that, weak as it seemed, my nerves were now too much shaken to admit of my following up the trying duty which I had been about to perform; and when I saw the cold and business-like proceedings of the callous men about me, and beheld the floor and furniture heaped with sable masses, which appeared, to my excited senses, to have a death-scent hanging about them, I could contend no longer; but hurriedly desiring Bottlemore to take the whole direction upon himself; not to suffer a soul, save my sister Adela, no matter whom, to enter, except the workmen; and to bring me the key, which I would await in my dressing-room, the instant they had departed, I hurriedly retired. I felt the necessity of once more being alone; and, as I closed the door of my chamber behind me, I again flung myself into a seat, to mourn in bitterness, and, if possible, to weep.

CHAPTER XXII.

The workmen employed in my father's apartment were so little fastidious in their movements, that I distinctly heard the dull blows of the hammer, and the sound of many footsteps; but I scarcely regretted that it was so; I had attained to that degree of wretchedness which almost finds relief in every accession of dis-

comfort. It seemed only fitting and consistent that, in a house deprived of its head, all should be changed; and that the deep quiet, to which its inmates had been so long accustomed, should be dispelled, like the dreams of hope and affection in which they might hitherto have enfolded the future. I even listened, that I might judge of the progress which was making in the lugubrious work; and more than once I felt tempted to exert my energies and to renew my intention of superintending their labors. I abstained, however; for, in the holiness of my first grief, I shrank from all unnecessary communication with strangers; and thus I sat, hour after hour, nursing my sad and bitter thoughts; now weeping over my sudden and irreparable loss, now asking myself what would be my future fate under the guidance and authority of such a mother as Lady Madelaine.

Daylight came creeping, dull and cheerless, through the windows of my room; in the confusion consequent upon the fatal event which had occurred, the curtains had been left undrawn; and, as I had refused all attendance, the omission had escaped notice. I saw, therefore, for the first time, the dreary contest between light and darkness which ever precedes a new day. I involuntarily rose and looked out, for the scene was consonant to my then state of feeling. Poets have sung brightly of the birth of day, and they are well borne out by the glories of a rising sun; but, before the roseate and golden splendor of this fair vision can be enjoyed, the watcher must first undergo the saddening and dreary spectacle of the morning twilight; and it was upon this that I stood and gazed at that melancholy moment. As the night broke, a cold shiver crept over my frame, and I drew my shawl more closely about me; everything upon which I looked partook of the same chilling character; a mass of wreathing mists overhung the surface of the lake, and dispersed slowly and sullenly, as if reluctant to disclose its limpid beauties. The dew hung heavily upon the trees, and at intervals fell in large drops to the earth, like tears wrung from a suffering spirit. The flowers were still closed; the sky was louring and leaden; and even the wind, as it swept by, moaned, as though it bewailed the comfortless aspect of the objects by which it was surrounded. The light, in cold and quivering streaks, looking in their dull setting like lances of polished steel, by slow degrees pierced through the dark vapors; and, lengthening and broadening into warmer beauty, eventually took a glow and a glory which foretold the coming of the mighty orb that was about to flood the earth with warmth and radiance.

I instinctively closed my eyes. My sympathies were no longer with the scene before me. The sun was again rising to gladden the earth —my hope was still buried. There was no longer anything in common between us; and I was in the act of letting fall the heavy curtains, in order once more to shroud myself in darkness, when I heard the sound of footsteps approaching my room, and immediately afterward a cautious stroke upon the door. As I replied to the signal for admission, Bottlemore opened it quietly, and moved toward me.

"Is all completed?" I asked.

"Not yet, madam," he replied, in a suppressed voice: "though everything is in active progress, and exactly according to the instructions; but this, my dear young lady, is not my errand. I have thought it my duty—" Here he paused—looked embarrassed, and then glanced from me to a small parcel which he held in his hand.

"Whatever it may be, if you feel that your duty requires it of you, do it fearlessly," I said, totally indifferent to every subject save that by which I was absorbed.

"I have discovered the cause of the broken window," resumed the butler, still evidently ill at ease; "I have brought it to you, madam; it is indeed addressed to you."

"To me!" I exclaimed, as I extended my hand tremblingly to receive it. "What can this mean, Bottlemore?"

The man shook his head. He had probably asked himself the same question more than once since the mysterious missile came into his possession.

The parcel, although small, was heavy; and as I eagerly carried it to the window, where the light had become sufficiently strong to enable me easily to trace the superscription, I found that it was, as he had said, directed to myself. I became much agitated; and as I tore it open, the curtain which I had hitherto held back with my hand fell behind me, and thus screened me from the observation of the attendant. The contents of the parcel were a large pebble, and a letter, addressed, as the envelope had been, to me. A letter! From whom could it come! I had never in my life received any written communication, save from my parents. I became fevered from anxiety, and my legs shook under me as I stood. I was glad, I knew not wherefore, that no one was by to observe me. I broke the seal, and glanced at the signature. It bore the name of Devereux. It was with difficulty that I suppressed an exclamation. Read the letter I could not, while I was conscious of the near neighborhood of the zealous servant who was awaiting my orders. I felt that I could not; and I instinctively struggled for composure, and emerged from my friendly concealment.

"'Tis a poor jest, good Bottlemore," I said, striving to force a smile, and, at the same time, giving into his hand the pebble and the paper in which it was inclosed. "From wherever it may have come, let it no longer intrude upon your time and thoughts, which are both required for more solemn duties at present. Hereafter, perhaps—" and I paused, for I knew not how to complete the sentence.

"A disrespectful and an unworthy jest," said the butler, turning over the pebble in his palm; "and at such a moment, too! But you say rightly, my dear young lady; we have now no time for fooleries like these. Before long, perhaps—" and he paused as I had done, made a low bow, and retired. If he felt any suspicion that he had been mystified, he, at least, looked none.

And now I was again alone. The blood was burning over brow and bosom. I remained motionless—undetermined—with my gaze fastened upon the curtain, behind which lay the letter that I had flung down when I emerged to dismiss Bottlemore. For the moment I had

forgotten all—my dead father, the approaching arrival of my mother—the clouds which had gathered around my future destiny. I remembered nothing save myself and Devereux—the Devereux whom I had loved, and by whom I had been beloved in my turn. He was here, then—breathing the same air—looking upon the same light. *Here!* but at what a moment! Deep shame came upon me. The remembrance of my loss—a loss yet known to me only a few hours—made me recoil with disgust from my own selfishness; but the feeling did not last long—it could not. The very memory that I had no longer a father—that I should hereafter be the tool, and, perhaps, the victim, of the unloving rule of an estranged and careless mother—that I was, morally at least, an orphan—and that, without other support, I was helpless, soon reconciled me with myself. Moreover, there was a tinge of romance in the whole affair, which, doubtlessly, although I was at the moment unconscious of its influence, served not a little to silence my self-accusations.

The time went by so rapidly during this mental conflict, that, before I had decided on reading the letter, and ascertaining its purpose, Bottlemore was once more at my door to intimate that the funeral furniture of my father's apartment was completed; and to urge me respectfully to visit it in his presence, in order that he might, after gaining my sanction, dismiss the workmen. I extended my hand for the key, but declined the invitation. "Dismiss them on your own responsibility," I said; "I know that I can trust you. I dare not trust myself *yet*. I have undergone much, too much within the last few hours. I need rest before I can venture upon such a visit."

"But will you really take the rest that you require, my dear young lady?" asked the worthy old man. "You are indeed beaten down by your grief; and no wonder, Miss Eveleen, no wonder! Ah, we shall all soon better understand what we have lost. We never made enough of him when he was here, but we shall have time enough to mourn him—time enough and cause enough, from the highest to the lowest."

Subdued as I previously was by conflicting emotions, this generous and impulsive burst of sorrow completely overcame me. It unlocked my tears, and once again I found relief.

"Leave me, my worthy friend," I sobbed with difficulty; and, all my haughtiness leveled for the moment by this common demonstration of a common grief, I extended my hand to the faithful favorite of my father, who pressed his lips reverentially upon it, and then silently disappeared.

No! I had said rightly; I could not accompany him to the death-chamber—I dared not. It would have seemed to me like sacrilege to have intruded there, when I had so recently loosened my grasp of Devereux's letter, with feelings all absorbed in its receipt. No—this I could not do. There was a short interval of tumult in the gallery. The strangers were departing. I then heard the crushing sound of wheels upon the gravel; this soon died away also, and then all was silence both without and within the house. I flung open a window—it was not that beneath which the letter lay—and the sweet, soft air of the early morning came upon me like incense. All upon which I looked was glowing with freshness and beauty. The lake-ripple danced with its silver feet joyously in the sunshine, to the music of the fresh breeze that bore it company; the flowers had all opened their cups, and the bees and butterflies were sipping their morning-draughts from the jeweled chalices; while the birds, heaven's own chosen choir, were singing their matins in notes which seemed to invite all nature to join in their hallelujahs. A change had come over the whole earth, yet I shrank from it no longer. I was still in tears—still sorrowing—but a sun had risen in my heart, which had wrought its own change also.

And still the letter lay where I had cast it down.

I do not remember the course of my thoughts during the hours that I sat, silent and motionless, beside that open window. I believe that at intervals I could not strictly be said to think at all. My brain whirled from over-exertion, and induced that physical apathy which makes us shrink from further efforts; and in this way, also, do I account for the length of time which I suffered to elapse before I determined on the perusal of Devereux's letter. I knew that it lay near me; that I could possess myself of it in an instant; and I was satisfied with this conviction. He had not forgotten me; that was enough for the present moment. Like the crater of a volcano, which trembles for a time after the violence of the explosion is past, so did I suffer from the shock of the blow I had experienced, and helplessly yield myself up to its latent effects. Yet, despite the intensity of my first anguish, a feeling of calm had stolen over me, which had soothed me into quietude; and, for awhile, this alone was almost happiness. There was no jarring influence either within or about me. I was dreaming a waking dream, in which, occasionally, I was so mentally annihilated that I was unconscious even of my own existence.

But this state of things could not last forever. The new day brings its claims and its duties to all classes of society. I was recalled to myself by passing footsteps and answering voices. With some difficulty I overcame my reluctance to terminate my solitude, and to return, as it appeared at the moment, into life; but I knew that I had no alternative; so, gathering up the long-neglected letter, I locked it away carefully in my desk, without hazarding one glance at its contents, and rang for Joséphine.

CHAPTER XXIII.

It was not until I began to exert myself, and had gone through the weariness of another toilet, that I discovered the extent of my fatigue. As I glanced into the dressing-glass, I scarcely knew myself; my eyes were dull and heavy, my cheeks and lips colorless, and my whole countenance swollen and disfigured. "And this is then the work of grief," I murmured to myself; "this is all the opposition which youth and beauty can offer to the sorrows and trials of the world." My vanity was humbled by the conviction. I had never understood, until

became myself the proof, that a few hours could have wrought such havoc in early life.

I swallowed, with considerable effort, a few spoonfuls of chocolate; dismissed Joséphine as hastily as possible; and resolved at once to examine the letter of Devereux, which would, in all probability—thus did I argue as an apology to myself for giving to it the precedence of nearer and higher duties—enable me to endure with more composure the trials of the day.

Hurriedly I drew it from its concealment. I felt like a guilty thing, and moved away from the window, as though to prevent the very sunshine from penetrating my secret. My breath came thick, my hands trembled, and the room and all the objects which it contained appeared to revolve about me. Nevertheless, I persisted; and as I read I became less agitated. These were the contents of the letter:—

My own Eveleen!—

"Yes, so I will call you until your own lips forbid it—I address you in an awful and melancholy moment. I have just learnt your fatal loss. In another hour I shall have left town for Rooksley. Do not misjudge me for urging my own interests in the very midst of your first great sorrow: it is because I trust to mitigate your grief by my assurances of sympathy and tenderness that I feel urged to do so. I am aware that in losing your admirable father you have also lost your best and surest hope for the future. I know that the rule of your mother will be one of cold-heartedness and caprice. It is, therefore, at this hour that you need a friend. I shall trust to the fortune which generally favors those who love, for the opportunity of seeing, or, at least, of hearing from you. I dread everything from the violence of your grief: but remember, you once assured me that you loved me; you received my vows in return; you are consequently mine—my own—and you must learn to be comforted for my sake. Hitherto I have been passive, because I felt that time must do much for us, and I was anxious not to mar its beneficial effects by any premature imprudence; now, however, I hold myself bound by our common affection to be near you, even although I may not be enabled to see you beneath your paternal roof; for, cruel as this deprivation will necessarily prove to both of us, it is one to which I feel, my Eveleen, that we must be resigned. We are not yet at an age when we can emancipate ourselves from authority; but I have been too long an utter stranger to all your movements. Your name has been studiously avoided both by your mother and my own. There can be no doubt that, at the termination of her mourning, Lady Madelaine will introduce you into the world: you are young, beautiful, and attractive; and I tremble when I remember how little we yet know of each other; when I reflect upon the homage and adulation by which you will be immediately surrounded. It is true, that I have already mixed with that same world, and that I have found nothing there which could for a moment divert my heart from you; but how can I be mad enough to hope that such would be *your* case! Suffer me, then, I implore you, by any means which we can mutually adopt, to secure a deeper and a more tender interest in your affections. Let me be at once a brother and a lover.

"—— I am interrupted. Adieu—till I reach Rooksley. When I have ascertained how I can best communicate with you, I will add a postscript. Till then—good angels guard you!

"Herbert Devereux.

"P. S. I am here, my own Eveleen; here, at the little inn near the park gate—how happy, I need not add, when I tell you that I have seen you. I could not have sought a fairer vision for my dreams! I have seen you, Eveleen, standing near a window, arranging flowers in a porcelain vase, and thus have I discovered your apartment. So far, destiny has been propitious to me! I have prowled like a poacher through the Rooksley woods since daylight. I am now about to make a cold, senseless stone my envied messenger. My only terror is lest I should alarm you by the rude method which I am compelled to adopt to insure the safe and secret receipt of my letter—lest I should scare you from your soft rest, and awaken you from some sleeping vision in which, perchance, my image may have found a place. But, no; your dreams, my poor Eveleen, your rest is too precious to me; and both will be so soon and sadly clouded, that I will forbear until I feel convinced that you have left your chamber. I find that they are still ignorant in the village of the fatal event which has occurred, and consequently the tidings cannot yet have reached Rooksley. Sleep on, then, my stricken love, sleep on in peace, while such slumber may still be yours. In a few hours you may welcome me as a comforter. H. D."

"I do—I do!" I exclaimed, mentally, as I pressed the paper to my lips and bosom; "generous, confiding Devereux! you have, indeed, spoken peace, where all was wretchedness and dread." I was for a moment steeped in happiness; my tears were stayed, or, if they continued to fall, it was from a feeling which rendered me unconscious of the fact. A rainbow had burst through the storm-clouds by which I had been so lately enveloped. I might not see him; but all my doubts, all my misgivings, were now over—Devereux still loved me! Nor need the reader wonder at my temporary exaltation. I have already shown how fondly, yet how fearfully, I had long accustomed myself to dwell upon his image; nor will any one, who knows aught of human nature, doubt how much my boy-lover had gained by these retrospective reveries.

My first burst of gratified vanity and satisfied affection over, however, darkness once more gathered about my spirit. My sorrows were not removed, although they were mitigated, by this selfish joy. Alas! they admitted of no present remedy. I closed the letter slowly and sadly, for I felt that I could have dwelt upon it for hours; I replaced it in my desk, and was in the act of turning the key which was to conceal my treasure from all eyes save my own, when the door of my apartment softly opened, and Adela stood before me. I felt the blood leap to my brow. One instant sooner, and my secret might have been discovered! It was evident that she mistook the cause of my emotion: for, stopping abruptly in the centre of the

floor, she said hastily, as a slight flush rose to her own cheek:

"Forgive me, Eveleen, not only that I have intruded upon you unsought, but also for the unceremonious manner in which I entered. I forbore to make any noise, in the hope that you were endeavoring to obtain a little rest; and I ventured here to ascertain if it indeed were so, having learnt from Josephine that you had watched all night."

"I thank you, Adela," I said in surprise, as I extended my hand; "I have sought sleep in vain. The evil has come too suddenly—I had so much to regret—so much to repent."

"We have, indeed, learnt our dark lesson early," replied my sister, with a sigh; "should life continue to seem to me what both the present and the past have hitherto made it, regret and repentance must, I should think, be the inseparable companions to which we are all fated."

"Yet the world looks upon us both as objects of envy, Adela," I said bitterly.

"Upon us?—say, rather, upon yourself, Eveleen. Young, beautiful, rich, idolized—well might you inspire the feeling. But of me the world knows nothing, and recks less; the banished daughter, the outcast alien, the discarded exile, the helpless girl, who for years—and those the years when all the purest affections are ready to gush forth on all around, and the awakening intellect takes note of every deprivation, both of heart and spirit—was banished and forgotten, or else, I say, that world of which you speak, would perchance have turned an eye less misjudging upon me."

I was startled, almost affrighted, by the deep and concentrated passion with which this young girl, not yet fifteen years of age, gave utterance, in these burning words, to the indignation of her soul. In themselves they were calculated only to excite sympathy, and to awaken tenderness and pity; but the expression of her flashing eye, the withering bitterness of her quivering lip, the haughty defiance which appeared to dilate her whole form, were beyond all written description. Tullia must have worn such a look when she drove her chariot-wheels over the dead body of her father. My sister could never again be to me the silent and supine being to whom I had become accustomed, and whom I had despised in the haughty independence of my own nature. I felt awed by the excess of an emotion of which I had never believed her capable, and before which I involuntarily recoiled. I was at once conscious that, in my hasty judgment of her character, I had made a dangerous mistake. I now saw that she did not, like myself, fritter away her powers of mind and body, or betray the inward workings of her spirit, upon every petty provocation; but that she had already learned the secret of burying her thoughts too deeply to expose them to the scrutiny of every idle observer.

We were more estranged in heart from that moment than ever. I felt that my sister was an enemy to be feared; and a strange, shapeless, phantom-like conviction came suddenly upon me that she was destined to be MY enemy. Nevertheless, I approached her; I even extended my hand, but she affected not to perceive it.

"I pray you, Adela, do not yield to feelings so painful at such a moment as this," I said with difficulty.

"I thank you for the counsel," she replied coldly and placidly, already restored to perfect calm; "the error was involuntary—I blush to have discovered so much weakness. The stricken deer should hide itself to weep, not call the hunters round it."

"Nay, speak less bitterly, Adela," I rejoined; "you know not how grateful I should be for your confidence at another moment."

"I have no secrets to confide. I have just laid bare my whole history before you; not that this communication was necessary, but simply that you might not again confuse my past career and your own in your memory. Enough, however, of myself; as you have just reminded me—this is not the moment."

"Do not believe that I intended to imply a rebuke by the remark."

"I had no such suspicion. It was right that you, who had just spent so many hours in one deep, unbroken chain of agonizing grief—in one long flood of ceaseless and inconsolable tears, without indulging in a single thought of self, should shrink with almost loathing from any less demonstrative exhibition of filial regret."

Adela had stabbed me to the quick. My head sank upon my breast; I was crushed. And she stood there before me, calm, and cold, and placid, as though no storm of passion had ever swept across her brow, and that she was an alien from all the frailties and weaknesses of humanity. After a moment's pause, my awakening pride lent me words.

"You are mistaken, Adela," I said steadily; "mine was no such devoted vigil. That I wept and sorrowed for my dead father is indeed true; wept, as the repentant and the bereaved alone *can* weep—wept, as perchance I never may again in this world. But there were many, many intervals when I sorrowed alone for myself—for you."

"The last was needless," interposed my listener with a bitter smile; "tears are not so strange to my eyelids that another should shed them for me; nor am I, even young as I am, so unacquainted with sorrow as to be unable to bear my own burden."

"Do you refuse my sympathy?"

"I do. It comes too late. I have mastered the lesson of self-dependence. I ask sympathy from no one."

"Yet, from an only sister—"

"Rather say, only a sister—from a friend I might perchance be brought to endure it."

"Why should we not be friends?"

"Have you ever believed it possible? I could give you a hundred reasons to the contrary; but it were idle to do so when you can read them in your own heart—in your own struggles to affect the mere semblance of friendship for the forsaken daughter and the despised sister. Let us abjure such mockery, Eveleen. I am content to await your affection, until, like my prototype Cinderella, I have fitted on the slipper of high fortune. There is a moral in that little tale."

I was sick at heart. Overwhelmed by this new and sudden development of my sister's character, my thoughts once more turned back

to Devereux. He was the one star in my horizon of darkness. I felt that without his love and the consciousness of his proximity, I should have fallen into a state of apathy and despair. In my own home I had now nothing to hope. And was this to be the termination, this the climax of my brilliant girlhood? Again the image of Devereux rose upon my mental vision, and rebuked me for the thought. My sister had left the room as she ceased speaking, nor did I make one effort to detain her. I was glad to be for a time alone with my secret. At that moment I felt no inclination to confide to her the anxiety by which I was overwhelmed. Perhaps, had she evinced some evidence of sisterly sympathy and feeling, it might have been otherwise; for nothing so thoroughly opens the heart as sorrow; but this was not to be, and we parted even more coldly than we had met.

Solitude, nevertheless, brought me little comfort. for reflection had become painful, and she had added to its bitterness. I wrung my hands in despair. Conscious as I was that I had already lived through a long life of emotion and mental experience, I was painfully aware that those about me still affected to consider me as a child, and I revolted at the injustice, I felt degraded by the position in which I was placed. The memory of Lady Madelaine could not have been so utterly blunted but that she must have thoroughly comprehended the nature and extent of the mortification to which the companionship of a Lady Flora Glenfillan must naturally subject me, as well as that of an estranged and unloving sister. In my father I might indeed have found encouragement and support; and, in a few short days, he would be in his grave. Even in the persevering affection of Devereux there was bitterness; for he did not dare to seek me openly, as an avowed and permitted suitor, but was condemned to prowl surreptitiously about the house which I inhabited, subject to constant surprise and perpetual insult from my mother's menials.

This last reflection brought with it another which touched me nearly. He was still mistaken as to the identity of my apartment; and might, by this error, be led into a second imprudence similar to that by which I had become possessed of his letter. And how was this danger to be avoided? I could not condescend to make a confidant of one of my own attendants. I could not invite their suspicions or their sarcasms by avowing my acquaintance with his presence in the village; nor did the whole course of my desultory reading furnish me with any other alternative. I knew not how to proceed.

I had so long accustomed myself to indulge my melancholy musings in the study of my father, that rather from instinct than reason, at this period of my reverie, I rose from my seat, and, drawing the key from my pocket, bent my way slowly thither, utterly thoughtless or regardless of the change which had been wrought in its appearance since I last left it. Great was indeed that change. The walls, the floors, the windows, all wore one solemn livery. There was a mockery of magnificence throughout the elaborate arrangement of the whole apartment. The garb and trappings of death had been distorted into vanity; and my soul sickened as I entered, and closed the door behind me. The draperies of dull and heavy velvet, with their tasseled cords, shut out the beams of the mid day sun, and left within a dim, ghastly twilight The care of a kindly hand had indeed replaced the vase of flowers which I had left overthrown and scattered, and it formed the only point of life in the solemn picture, for the books and mirrors were alike veiled from sight.

I felt as though I were an intruder; and I threw myself down in agony upon a sofa draped with a deeply-fringed pall, to weep afresh over my bereavement. After a while I became oppressed by the weight of the atmosphere, and flung open one of the windows, even suffering the light and warmth from without to pass for a moment into the apartment. The effect of the change was cheering; and I was about once more with regret to let fall the drapery, when my eye rested on the figure of a man stealthily emerging from the nearest shrubbery. My heart bounded as I watched him. He was tall and slight, and dressed in deep mourning. Suddenly he raised his head, and glanced hurriedly over the house. I could not be mistaken. It was Devereux!

In extreme agitation I withdrew from the window; and, in another instant, I heard his step beneath it. The black curtains had evidently startled him into doubt, for during several seconds no result followed. He was apparently communing with himself. At the end of that period, however, a similar missive to that which he had first employed struck against the curtain, and then fell heavily to the floor. Then, and then only, I ventured for one moment to the window, and looked down upon him. As he saw me, he stood for an instant motionless, and was about to speak, when, motioning him to silence, I pointed to the funereal draperies, and shaking my head, indicated by my outstretched finger, as I leant for a brief minute from the casement, the window of my own apartment. That done, I drew back hurriedly; and, letting fall the curtain, listened from behind it to his light and hasty steps as he departed; and then, snatching up the new letter of which he had been the bearer, I hurried tremblingly to my own room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The deed was done. I had now sanctioned his intrusion; had permitted his clandestine correspondence; and had virtually acknowledged his claim; yet I felt no remorse. What, I mentally asked himself, could there be blamable in my case, in such a concession? He alone remained on earth to love me. Was it not natural that I should cling to his affection? I did not allow myself the hesitation of a moment. With eager hands I tore away the covering of the letter; and, having pressed it to my lips, read it throughout with all the eagerness of strong emotion. It was replete with tenderness; and my heart beat joyfully as I ascertained that, fearful of discovery for my sake, he had resolved never again to repeat the dangerous experiment of approaching the house, and had accordingly sought and discovered a place of concealment for his letters in the hollow trunk of a willow overhanging the lake,

which he indicated with a care that rendered mistake on my part impossible, and where he besought me to deposit my replies.

At a happier moment the romance of such an arrangement would have enchanted me; and even in that hour of sorrow and perplexity, I derived consolation from the promise which it held out of a lengthened communion. I wiped away my tears, pressed back the hair that had fallen over my face, and resolved, assisted by this new and momentary energy, to brave the meeting with Lady Flora from which I had hitherto shrunk. I was evidently unexpected in the drawing-room. Adela was drowned in tears, and appeared to have resigned herself to a paroxysm of silent grief; while Lady Flora sat behind her tapestry frame, on which a white handkerchief was ceremoniously displayed, deep in the mysteries of her laborious idleness.

My stay in the apartment was cold and brief. I listened, with all the patience I could command, to the maudling and lip-deep condolements which were poured forth before me; but for the speculations which had grown out of the recent bereavement, I had no ear; and I accordingly broke in upon them by a stately courtesy, and eseaped from the room. I had not yet cast off my shawl, so, folding it closely round me, I passed through the conservatory, and soon found myself beside the willow of the lake. I sat down beneath its pendent branches. I felt as though I had there found a new home and a new hope. All was bright and beautiful about me; I was young. I believed myself to be beloved. I tried to remember that every sorrow, however deep and heartfelt, must have its term; and to feel that I alone should not be excluded from this, the great and blessed privilege of time. No philosophy can be more welcome or more easy to a sanguine spirit than this—how then could I fail to be comforted by such a train of thought? I did not. I was still sad, still remorseful, but I no longer despaired. I ceased to feel terror as the image of my mother rose up before me—the tears which I continued to give to the memory of my father lost their bitterness; I no longer suffered myself to be troubled by visions of the hatred of Lady Flora and my sister; in one word, I was reconciled *to myself;* I was no longer an outcast and an alien from every heart.—Devereux had burst through the dark spell; and—I was beloved!

When I rose to return to the house, I was a new being—my hope and energy were alike enewed. I hastened to replace the faded flowers in my father's apartment, and then closed the window which I had opened some hours previously. But I did not linger in the room; its solemn gloom appalled me; I wanted light and air. I wanted action and physical exertion; and the latter I could not find in the solitude of my own apartment. I had, consequently, only one miserable resource, and, *faute de mieux*, I sought it at the dinner-table, over which, with her white handkerchief still ostentatiously displayed, Lady Flora presided. The meal was gloomy enough; the very servants moved mechanically about like automata, while an almost unbroken silence prevailed among ourselves.

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The same cold and decent countenance was maintained throughout the whole period which elapsed until the day of the funeral. Had an unsuspected spectator seen us, as we sat hour after hour with our work or our books, we should have inevitably been cited as models of duty and propriety; but what was the fact? Lady Flora was rejoicing in her heart of hearts, as her needle passed slowly and monotonously through the eternal canvas upon which she was employed, at her unlooked-for emancipation from a dreaded thrall; Adela preserved her usual mask of sullen self-command; or, if she ever wept, she did so only when my eye was not upon her; while I myself, who but a few days before had believed that my father's death was to me the seal of wretchedness which I must forever bear upon my brow, even I found time, at stated intervals, to visit the border of the lake, and to receive or reply to letters breathing only affection and hope. There existed, moreover, a feeling of repulsion among our party, as well understood by each of us as though we had put it frankly and boldly into words; and thus neither felt an inclination to dispel the silence, nor to lessen the estrangement.

On the funeral morning, this social monotony was painfully broken by the sight of the deep mourning garments in which we were mutually attired. The effect produced upon myself I shall never forget. The dream-like feeling which had hitherto possessed me was dispelled at once; and the full conviction of all that I had lost forced itself glaringly upon me. It is so difficult at first to comprehend the reality of death by your own side, at your own hearth, invading your very circle, and gliding closely by you as you wander beneath your paternal roof. Seeing about you, on every hand, a thousand trifling and apparently frail objects, the property of the departed, it seems impossible that such toys, such very nothings, can have survived their owner; but the crape, the bombazeen, the banded hair, and all the conventionalities of the garb of grief, put to flight at once the flattering delusion. You bear the symbols of death upon you, and you can deceive yourself no longer.

Three days afterward, Lady Madelaine arrived at Rooksley. She looked surpassingly beautiful in her widow's dress, which was not at that period the slight and elegantly-varied costume which it has become in these days. Her splendid hair was entirely hidden; not a glimpse of her swan-like throat was visible; and thus the triumph of her loveliness was complete. She appeared conscious of the fact, and was evidently pleased by the look of astonished admiration with which I met her. I have already stated that she had never loved my father, even in the first days of their marriage; nor did she now assume a demeanor of deep grief, or affect any excess of sorrow. She was calm, composed, and courteous; although it was easy to perceive that she shrank painfully from the denuded aspect of everything about her, and received the greeting of her half-sister with a thrill of disgust. She examined Adela with more curiosity than interest; and there was indifference as well as coldness in the solitary kiss which she imprinted on her fore

mead. Chilling as it was, however, it evidently sufficed to satisfy her daughter, who, after this brief welcome to her maternal home, silently and placidly resumed her seat.

To me her manner, although betraying no vestige of affection, was nevertheless more cordial. She even smiled, as she scrutinized my appearance; and then, throwing herself back listlessly in her chair, she abandoned herself to thought. No one presumed to intrude upon her reverie. With all her self-command and mechanism of feeling, it was impossible that she could remain unmoved at the sight of the once splendid and still noble home which a fond and hopeful husband had provided for her in the first blaze of her youth and beauty.

At such a moment, human nature will assert itself even in the coldest hearts. It is true that this home was still hers; but he who had so proudly made her its mistress could welcome her there no more. There might long have ceased to be even the semblance of affection between them, but mutual admiration and esteem must have continued to the last. Moreover, the force of habit is powerful with us all; more powerful than we are willing to believe until we are compelled to test its truth. I felt glad to see that my mother was not altogether beyond its influence; and to me that deep, and silent, and motionless reverie appeared almost holy.

On the morrow, I was suddenly summoned to her dressing-room, just as I had returned from a hurried visit to the lake, and was engaged in reading a letter from Devereux, in which he informed me that, having learnt the arrival of Lady Madelaine, he could no longer risk remaining in the village, conscious as he was that the discovery of his presence there would inevitably ruin our hopes. He said much also to console me for his temporary absence, for which he had before prepared me; and, finally, entreated me to believe that no change either of time or place could for one moment operate upon his affection. I had shed many and bitter tears over this letter, which terminated with an entreaty that I would deposit my reply in the course of the day at the accustomed spot; and give him an assurance of my acquiescence in his plans, and my own resolution to bear with hope and patience the trials which might possibly await me until we again met.

I was ill prepared to meet my mother at such a moment; for, aware of the indignation with which she would visit my clandestine correspondence with a man whom she had driven from her house, and treated with a contempt and contumely which he was never likely to forgive; conscious, too, that some accident might have betrayed my secret, in which case the whole weight of her displeasure must necessarily fall upon myself, at a moment when I had no one near to mitigate its bitterness, or to support me under its infliction, I had scarcely power to obey her bidding. There was, however, no alternative; so, hastily bathing my eyes in cold water, and throwing off my bonnet, I proceeded with a slow and uncertain step to her apartment.

"Why do you approach me like a criminal, Eveleen?" she asked, hastily, as she extended her hand on my entrance; "have you forgotten that I am now your only parent, and that I have a right to expect a friend in my daughter? You are no longer a child: in another month you will be sixteen years of age;" and she sighed as she said it. "Draw a chair to my side. It is now time that we should understand each other. I shall, in all probability, pass some months here, and I can only look to you for companionship. But first, tell me, have you caused the orders which I sent down through Dale to be obeyed? I allude to the room of—"

"All has been done precisely as you directed," I replied, considerably relieved to find that the summons of Lady Madelaine bore no relation to my treasured secret; "and as you will, perhaps, wish to visit it," I continued, drawing the key from my pocket, "you will require this."

My mother waved it back with her hand. "As you assure me that all proper respect has been paid to Mr. Tilden in the eyes of the establishment, I am satisfied with that assurance. I cannot volunteer an additional and useless trial of my nerves. But why is this key in your possession? Have you closed the room?"

"I have," was my confused reply.

"And wherefore?"

"I entreat you to pardon me if I have done amiss," I said, tremblingly; "but there is now one inmate at Rooksley, whose cold and dictatorial comments I could not brook in this case, although in all others I have submitted to them with what patience I could assume, out of respect for yourself."

"You allude to Lady Flora?"

"I do."

"She is, then, obnoxious to you?"

"Detestable!"

"A strong term for a lady's lips, Miss Tilden; but I fear, from the brief experience of last evening, too easily to be excused. It is strange how time softens down the different objects which make up the picture of the past! I fancied that Lady Flora was, at least, endurable, and that, although not a person whom I should be anxious to present in public, I might with safety contemplate her companionship during a period of retirement. It would appear, however, that I have deceived myself, and that, when I shuddered at the memory of Miss Margery Macspleuchan, I might have included her niece in the emotion."

"Whatever cause of offence toward yourself you had discovered in me previously to our last parting," I said, somewhat haughtily, "your ladyship was amply revenged from the moment that Lady Flora Glenfillan became an inmate of Rooksley."

"Poor Eveleen!" said my mother, with a low mocking laugh, "you have, then, been punished bitterly! It is by no means to be deplored, however: you required a check-rein, and I had neither time nor talent to apply it. But what of your sister?"

"I know nothing of her."

"Your answer is singular! Have you not lived under the same roof for months! How, then, can you make so absurd a reply?"

"Simply, because I speak the truth; and,

moreover, I would decline to express even the inferences which I may have formed of her character."

"I can fully understand that she is both shy and ignorant. I must get her off my hands as I best can, which, thanks to her fortune, I am sure to do at last."

I felt that I smiled, for I had a firm conviction that Miss Adela Tilden was not a person to be "got off the hands" even of a Lady Madelaine, should she not herself so will it.

"She is very plain and awkward," pursued my mother, as she glanced at her own lovely reflection in the cheval glass which was placed before her sofa; "I know not who she resembles."

"She has fine eyes."

"Indeed! Well, that is something in her favor; but she is *gauche*, and ill at ease."

"As regards the latter feeling I can say nothing; but I must venture to differ from your ladyship respecting the *gaucherie*. At your first meeting Adela may have been agitated, and, consequently, have appeared to disadvantage; but, generally speaking, her great charm lies in her gracefulness."

"I wish that you may, in a year or two, be able to persuade the men of all this, for you seem to be quite *engouée* of Lady Flora's pupil; but I confess that I despair of effecting any such result. I see nothing in your sister but a plain, gawky, overgrown girl, shy in her manner and sullen in her deportment. I detest such still life."

For the second time I could have laughed outright, but I restrained the impulse; for, not only was I too proud to prejudice Lady Madelaine still more against my sister (had it been possible), but also, however gracious she might be at the moment, my memory fell back upon other scenes, which I had not yet either forgotten or forgiven; and I resolved to let her purchase her experience of Adela's real nature as I had done. I therefore weighed every word before I uttered it; nor did I add to the evident disgust of my mother toward the wayward but unfortunate girl by one syllable of comment upon the hatred which she nourished to all who now bore the name of Tilden.

As yet Lady Madelaine had been unable to observe the great change which had been wrought in the domestic arrangements of the establishment, for she had taken both her supper of the previous evening and her morning chocolate in her dressing-room. Great as was the resistance made by the household, they had not ventured to defy the authority of Lady Flora Glenfillan altogether; she had, moreover, profited by the period of consternation and depression which had elapsed since my father's death, to enforce her authority more stringently than before; and the appointments, as well as the supplies of the first repast at which my mother assisted *en famille*, consequently filled her with indignation and disgust.

"Is this a meditated insult, sir?" she asked, as, after glancing over the table, she rose from her seat and turned haughtily toward poor Bottlemore, who was about to commence his duties; "did you imagine that, in becoming a widow, I also became a pauper? Was it not enough that you have denuded, or enveloped with paltry coverings and contrivances, every room at Rooksley; but must I, moreover, be expected to preside at a repast to which I would not condemn my own servants?"

"The orders of my Lady Flora have been strictly obeyed, my lady," replied the butler, in a tone which savored strongly of triumph; "her ladyship has been peremptory on the subject of the bill of fare, and I could do no more, consistently with my respect for your ladyship's sister, than remonstrate, which I have done in vain."

"Enough, Mr. Bottlemore," said my mother, as she turned with a stately gesture to leave the room. "I will retire to my own apartments until Mrs. Locksley has caused the saloon to be made habitable, which you will instruct her to do forthwith; and let another dinner be served two hours hence for which I shall not need to blush before my own daughters."

Bottlemore bowed low, and held the door open during a few seconds, in order that his lady might pass; but, as she suddenly paused in the centre of the floor when she ceased speaking, after satisfying himself of the fact, he silently withdrew, followed by his subordinates.

"One word more bearing upon the same disgraceful subject," pursued Lady Madelaine, when the door was again closed: "I expect, also, that those with whom I am to sit down to table will appear as gentlewomen, and never presume, in my house, to affect a costume suited only to the servants' offices, and that my entrance-hall may not be degraded into a depository for filthy woolen garments, as it was this morning when I passed through from the grounds."

"Filthy woolen garments, my Lady Madelaine!" almost shrieked the crestfallen Lady Flora, while the red spot burnt upon her brow; "sure it's uncanny in your father's child to ca' it by sic' a name. Why, woman, you's the Glenfillan tartan!"

"I would advise you, in that case, to send it home," said my mother, with cool and withering contempt; "or, should you prefer to do so, *wear* it home, unless you have also provided yourself with a Macspleuchan plaid, as a more consistent covering."

The dragon was fairly silenced, for she felt no inclination to sacrifice the luxuries of Rooksley to a sarcasm, and five minutes afterward we had all quitted the dining-room. Lady Flora's reign was over.

CHAPTER XXV.

One only interruption broke in upon our hermit-like retirement, and that one was the apparition of Lady O'Halloran, who was so coldly received that she never repeated her visit. The fastidiousness of my mother was so deeply wounded by the ignorance and vulgarity of her relative, that she could not brook an appearance in her society. This was not, however, the only cause of her discourtesy to her husband's friend. I had mentioned to her the interest and kindness which both Adela and myself had experienced from Lady O'Halloran, and she had listened with complacency, if not with utter indifference; but I had no sooner

added that a letter from my father had induced it, than I saw a cloud gather upon her brow. Mr. Tilden had thwarted her wishes—nay, he had even incited one who to her was comparatively a stranger to infringe her express commands, and thenceforth she looked upon the well-meaning and warm-hearted woman with a feeling of distrust and avoidance. *Au reste*, half the county families left their cards at the lodges, but contented themselves with that ceremonious demonstration; Lady Madelaine had never been more to them than the wife of Mr. Tilden, and with his death terminated all their interest in Rooksley.

Five lines will suffice to assure the reader that my mother could not long endure such a state of things as this; and, accordingly, a very few weeks had elapsed since her arrival before she began to exhibit weariness of her daughters, and of everything about her. She had paraded the dull luxury of her mourning equipage and liveries through the county-town, already astir with the preparations for a new election. She had exchanged visiting-tickets with all her acquaintance; she had, in short, exhausted her own resources and those of the neighborhood; and she no longer knew how to dispose of her existence. Her temper suffered greatly under these circumstances; and I began to marvel how long I should be enabled to endure its exactions, when one morning, unexpectedly to all, save Lady Madelaine herself, Sir James Dornton was announced. No event could have been more welcome, for we were all literally wasting our lives in lethargy and discomfort. Our party was not only ill-assorted, but actually antipathetical; and we lived on, in the perfect consciousness that time only widened the moral breach between us.

My mother's welcome to this new guest was cordial, frank, and unaffected; while she alluded to her expectation of seeing him with an easy, unembarrassed manner which was an earnest of the continued friendship that existed between them; it nevertheless struck me as extraordinary, that Sir James did not meet her calm and dignified courtesy in the same spirit. He appeared restless, absent, and nervous; nor was his manner toward myself less peculiar. When, after having exchanged a few sentences with Lady Madelaine, he turned to greet me in my turn, he glanced rapidly in my face, and then dropped his eyes, still retaining the hand which I had extended to him, for a moment; after which he released it suddenly and abruptly, and having received, to my intense surprise, the "How are ye, Sir James?" of Lady Flora, and a quiet courtesy of recognition from Adela, he once more turned toward my mother; and, seating himself by her side, they were soon deeply engaged in conversation. Once or twice Lady Madelaine, apparently compelled thereto by the subject discussed, made some distant allusion to her recent loss; but it met with no response from her companion, who seemed studiously to avoid its mention.

At first I felt indignant with both parties for their evident avoidance of so natural a topic; but after a time, wearied by a thousand useless conjectures of the how and where Lady Flora and my sister had previously met him, I became interested in spite of myself by the dialogue which they maintained. I heard again the names of persons who had once been known to me; and of a world with which I had long panted to make my acquaintance. Sir James was caustic and brilliant; and his quiet sarcasm, biting though it was, lent a zest and a raciness to all he said. My mother was once more in her proper element. She felt that she was to her own set as a lost pleiad of brilliancy and fashion; and that her return to the great world would be hailed with gladness. Dornton was most assiduous in strengthening this belief; and, with a tact which spoke volumes for his *savoir vivre*, he contrived to speak far more of herself than of any of those whom he passed under review. Lady Flora, meanwhile, worked on in silence, or occasionally addressed a few words in an undertone to Adela; who, since the entrance of our new guest, had scarcely raised her eyes from the floor.

Despite my own interest in the conversation, I confess that I felt somewhat piqued at the marked neglect which I experienced from this *preux chevalier* of fashion, who, two years before, had condescended to exert his powers for my sole amusement; and who now had neither word nor look for any one save my mother.

All the dignity of my sixteen years revolted against this inconsistency: and the consciousness of possessing both grace and beauty added bitterness to the mortification. I never thought him less attractive. I had, moreover, ample time for all my reflections, for no change took place throughout the evening, nor did either himself or Lady Madelaine move from their seats, until he rose, announcing that he had secured an apartment at the Tilden Arms in the village; and would, with her ladyship's permission, join our breakfast-table in the morning.

I was employed until I fell asleep that night, in marveling at the acquaintanceship which existed between Sir James Dornton and my relatives. Where they could have met baffled all my conjectures. That his name had never been mentioned by either of them was less surprising, for we exchanged little conversation and less confidence. Still, I felt that the circumstance was in itself singular: and the habits and haunts of Dornton considered, altogether inexplicable. Then flashed across me new matter of marvel. Since Lady Madelaine saw fit to receive male guests at Rooksley so early in her widowhood, how chanced it that Lord Otterford was not her first visitor!

I knew nothing of the scene at the Putney villa; and I could not reconcile the present with the past, otherwise than by presuming that the extreme intimacy which had existed between my mother and the latter rendered her scrupulous in receiving him during her first period of mourning.

Sir James remained at Rooksley four days, on the last of which he was closeted with Lady Madelaine for a considerable time. When they rejoined the family, there was a faint flush on the cheek of my mother, and a bright light in her eye, which gave her a look of unusual animation; while Sir James was comparatively silent and depressed. The evening passed heavily enough, although Lady Madelaine exerted herself most unwontedly to enliven it.

To me she was unusually gracious; indeed, at times almost affectionate; yet I fancied that all her gaiety was assumed. It was, at all events, very evident that something extraordinary had taken place between the friends, but what that something might be I was not destined to discover; as, after the departure of Sir James, she made no allusion whatever to the circumstance, contenting herself with quiet comments on his fashion and high-breeding, and his great conversational powers.

Two months subsequently, Lady Madelaine declared that her health and spirits were both giving way under the dull monotony of Rooksley, where no object of interest presented itself to divert her mind from the painful memory of the past, but where, on the contrary, everything tended to remind her of her husband. Neither, she asserted, could she longer brook the society of Lady Flora; and therefore, in self-defence, she must make some other arrangement.

The day after this decision, she dispatched a long letter to Lady Devereux. My heart beat quick as I read the superscription. What had I not both to hope and to fear, should she have volunteered a visit to the mother of Herbert! And then I asked myself, would she go alone? would she forget, during how many long months I had been subjected to the very companionship from which she was herself about to escape! Was I still, at the age of sixteen, to be immured in the solitude of Rooksley, far from the delightful world which I was prepared to worship? Surely not—Lady Madelaine could have no such design; and there could be no doubt that I should bear her company. The image of my young lover presided over all these speculations. Under his mother's roof we could not fail to meet; and I felt satisfied that Lady Devereux, when she saw me improved in beauty, and admired, as I never doubted that I must be, would gladly welcome such a wife for her son. Of my fortune I never thought, nor did I even suspect that others would do so: I was like the heroines of romance, to be loved for myself alone.

I cradled myself so readily and so softly in these pleasant fancies, that my disappointment was indescribable when my mother at last announced, after a lively correspondence with her favorite friend, that on the morrow she should leave Rooksley for a time, desiring that all the necessary arrangements might be immediately commenced.

"Does your ladyship go alone?" I inquired, imprudently.

"Certainly not, Miss Tilden. I am not in the habit of traveling without proper attendance. Dale, who accompanied me from town, will also attend me to Lady Devereux's. My appearance in Grosvenor Square, or at Putney, is, of course, at this moment out of the question; and I shall consequently remain at her place in retirement, until the first year of my mourning has expired, unless I feel sufficient courage to venture once to return here. At all events, you will be informed of my movements when it becomes necessary; and meanwhile, Eveleen, I have to beg that you will be assiduous in improving yourself in every way. You do not do yourself justice; and remember that you cannot live all your life at Rooksley, nor is it possible that I should present any child of mine in the world, unless she is prepared to do me credit. You expose yourself too much to the sun and wind, and I have remarked that you frequently take off your gloves, when there is no perceptible necessity for your doing so. These are plebeian habits, and must be conquered. Do not let me have to repeat my caution."

This was the moral lesson with which my mother took leave of me, at an age when the imagination is stronger than the reason, and the unoccupied fancy roves wildly through a future which is only dimly guessed at. I was to cultivate my beauty; to sacrifice everything, even my most innocent pleasure, that of enjoying nature in all her various moods and phases, to the one great end of making a figure in that world from which I was so coldly shut out, at an age when, as I thoroughly believed, I was the best able to appreciate its delights. My old suspicion came back upon me with renewed strength. Lady Madelaine was jealous of my attractions! There was triumph in the conviction, whatever annoyance there might be in the result. Not one word of admonition had she uttered to Adela. It was plain that she considered *que le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle*. Only, indeed, upon one solitary occasion had she appeared to take the slightest interest in her younger daughter, and it was even then exhibited in a cold and business-like manner, which, courageously as she struggled to conceal the feeling, evidently aroused all the harsher emotions of my sister.

"I suppose you are delighted with Rooksley, Adela; it must have appeared a charming contrast from Glenfillan. How do you amuse yourself?"

"I read and work, madam."

"You are a good musician, of course?"

"By no means."

"A cool answer truly, child! How do you expect to pass through the world without so necessary an accomplishment?"

Adela only replied by raising her head, with one of her peculiar smiles—a smile which might mean much or nothing.

"You draw, at least?"

"Scarcely; but sufficiently to occupy me when I am driven to do so, as a resource against idleness."

"Better and better," exclaimed Lady Madelaine in a tone of irritation; "and do you suppose that it was to produce such a result as this that I permitted you to have a governess? May I venture to inquire what the lady in question *did* succeed in teaching you?"

"To read, and to think, madam," answered Adela with a cold emphasis.

"The training of a Sunday-school girl!" exclaimed Lady Madelaine contemptuously; "I am glad that at least we now perfectly understand each other."

And thus ended this catechetical dialogue My mother had unhesitatingly received the evidence of Adela as conclusive, and gave herself no trouble to test its truth.

My disappointment and mortification on finding myself once more abandoned to the monotony of Rooksley, when I had argued myself

into the belief that Lady Madelaine would profit by her peculiar position to accustom me by degrees to the world, by that *vie du château* which is in itself a miniature of fashionable life and manners, were so great that I could not endure them in silence. My woman-dignity was wounded; and, still worse, my heart was wrung. All my happy dreams had melted away. I was like Apollo cast out of Olympus. Lady O'Halloran, probably uninformed of my mother's departure, had not made her appearance at Rooksley; I shrank from putting myself into the power of Adela; for, since our last interview in my chamber, I had learnt to fear her. Such, nevertheless, was finally my fate; for I continued silent so long, that my health gave way under the violence of my emotions. On the second day of my non-appearance in the drawing-room, I received a cold and ceremonious request from my sister, through Josephine, that I would allow her to visit me. I had already become so weary of myself and of my own thoughts, that gladly welcomed the proposal; and in five minutes, my sister made her appearance! She assumed no semblance of affection—she affected no tone of sympathy. There was, on the contrary, an irritation and bitterness about her which it was difficult to brook.

"Something has disturbed you, Adela," I said, in order to terminate the long and uncomfortable silence which succeeded our first civil greetings; "is it in my power to remove the annoyance?"

"You are wrong, Eveleen," was the reply; "and have not taken time to reflect, that the sameness of our existence here scarcely admits of any annoyance, to which it would not be a weakness to yield; while I cannot, like yourself, have any external anxiety to trouble me."

"External anxiety!" I repeated in alarm.

"Even so. You have already lived in the world. You were fourteen years of age when you were deprived of the pleasures of your childhood. You were a genius and a beauty, an *enfant monstre*; attracting all eyes, and trained to profit by your advantages. You can scarcely have escaped bringing some regret with you into retirement."

I looked at her in astonishment. Did she suspect my secret? or, could it be that this little mountain recluse, this shy, unformed girl, already knew more of human nature than myself!

"I was, at least, young enough to have escaped all serious homage, I should suppose," I answered.

"Perhaps," said Adela, doubtingly; "yet at such an age all homage is considered serious."

I became more and more bewildered.

"Do you speak from experience?" I asked sarcastically.

"Draw your own conclusions, after you have reasoned the probabilities," was her quiet reply; "but I did not come here to talk of myself. I judge merely by analogy."

"By analogy?"

"Certainly. If books be no tutors, why should we waste our lives in studying their pages?"

"You are right, Adela," I exclaimed abruptly; "why should I refuse to acknowledge that you are right! I have—I did bring to my retirement a deep—a gnawing regret. It is true, that the little I yet know of life I learnt under this same roof; but Rooksley is no longer what it was. To me the transition was like that of the disembodied soul passing from earth to Hades. Had it been a mere idle, girlish caprice, undiscovered and unreturned, my pride would have enabled me to conquer it at once, for I should have scorned myself; but with me it was—it is—far otherwise."

As I spoke I looked toward my sister for sympathy, and I was astonished to perceive that a burning blush had risen to her forehead. She was silent, and, as it seemed to me, unable to reply. I began to reconsider my words, but I could discover nothing in them to induce this extraordinary demonstration. Adela was a mere child when she first came to Rooksley; Glenfillan was, I well knew, a hermitage as regarded the world; for herself, therefore, it was impossible that she should blush. I knew not what inference to draw. I became restless and uneasy: and still she sat silently beside my bed, buried in thought, with the blood crimsoning her brow.

"You are ungrateful to repine, Eveleen," she said at length abruptly, as though no pause had taken place in our conversation; "for, if you feel, not only that you have loved, but that you have been beloved in your turn, with you happiness is a mere question of time; and Sir James Dornton may well afford to wait for a while, when conscious of success at last."

My share in the dialogue seemed fated to be merely ejaculatory.

"Sir James Dornton!" I echoed vehemently, as by a sudden movement I raised myself from my recumbent position.

"Are you not to be his wife?"

"I would rather die ten thousand deaths!"

"And yet you joined in all the laudatory comments uttered by Lady Madelaine after he left Rooksley."

"I did so with sincerity. He has truly the good qualities for which she gave him credit; but I could never love him."

"Do not assume too much. Habit and perseverance may induce you to feel differently."

"Never!"

"And yet, he is handsome, fashionable, and attractive."

"It may be so—it is," I conceded, overcome by the subtile tactics of a mere girl, and resolved to pour out my whole heart before her; "yet still I persist in my declaration, that I could never love Sir James Dornton."

"But should the indomitable will of our mother so order it?"

"It would only lead to a vain struggle on her part. I would concede nothing."

"Eveleen, you deceive yourself," said my sister eagerly; "you do not possess the strength of character for which you would fain give yourself credit; you have not the moral courage to stand alone in such an unequal contest."

"I shall not stand alone," I answered proudly.

"Then, indeed, have I hopes of you," said Adela, with increased energy; "for all is easy where you are convinced of being beloved."

Every trial that does not touch the one you love, is light, and may be borne bravely; external griefs cease to terrify and subdue, and graze but little the surface of a heart which is filled by one image, while they have no power to pierce it."

"How know you this?" I inquired in my surprise.

"I feel that it must be so. Such a fact requires no teaching. Trust me, Eveleen, I am conscious from my privation that it must be so."

"Adela, I shall never understand you."

"I believe it."

"Never did I expect such sentiments from your lips. You, a mere girl, secluded from your earliest years—without knowledge of the world—without experience—"

"What do you understand by experience? by knowledge of the world? They may be good safeguards, as I construe the words, against deception, dissimulation, and wrong; but the heart alone is needed in the subject which we are now discussing; and, consequently, the heart which has been self-formed in solitude will be more capable of a deep and lasting affection than that which has been fashioned by the qualities to which you attach so high a value. We shall, perhaps, in after-life, ourselves afford an illustration of what I advance."

"And how?"

"Simply by the disparity of our tastes and habits. You will love your husband, I doubt not; but you will also love many other things; pleasure, and dissipation, and the admiration of the world; from all of which I should shrink with loathing, because they would tend to divert my thoughts from the one great object of my devotion."

"It is easy to see, my poor Adela," I said with a smile of pity, "that your love is, so far, all theory. You would soon descend from your pedestal, had you once tasted the delights of all that you now affect to despise; or you would become the most miserable woman upon earth. With your whole soul wrapt up in one object (prettily as the phrase sounds), his absence would infallibly destroy you. Had you suffered what I have already done, you would ere now have ceased to exist."

"Not if I were assured that I was really loved—and this has brought us back to the commencement of our argument—I should then have strength to meet any trial."

"Even the opposition of our mother?"

"Yes; for I could wait until it was overcome."

"All your life perhaps?"

"Scarcely, for I should know that there must come a period when the law would liberate me from the thrall of Lady Madelaine; for the present, I would say, until the proper time arrives, my best text is—patience."

"Very prudent and proper," said I disdainfully; "but who shall protect you in the meanwhile from some other marriage of Lady Madelaine's own devising? While you are exercising your minority in this new kind of philosophy, she may compel you to become the wife of a man whose very name you may consider odious.'

"Compel me, did you say? You do indeed not understand me. I am younger than yourself, Eveleen, in years; but my mind and heart were educated amid the grand and wild scenes of nature, amid an almost unbroken solitude, and under unkindness and neglect; not in a drawing-room, where every toy distracts the thoughts and disturbs the fancy. Mine was a stern tutorage, but it did its work. You have been the pupil of the world, which has done its work also. You have been warned to hide yourself from both sun and wind—I have stood beneath a shelf of rock, and braved the thunder-storm. And do you think that when the whole happiness of my life may be poised upon one point, that I shall hesitate to secure it? Believe me, that there can be little moral energy, little delicacy, and still less good sense, in throwing yourself away, at the will of another—nor is it honest to utter vows which are sure to be broken by so weak and unstable a nature; and to pledge yourself to form the happiness of a husband, when you are not even able to assure your own."

I was at once bewildered and silent. Could this indeed be Adela? I felt as if under the influence of magic. I remembered her usual cold, abstracted indifference—I recalled her bitter energy during our last *tête-à-tête*—and I could not reconcile the discrepancies of her character. I was, however, painfully conscious of her mental superiority. I felt the insufficiency of my eldership; I was mastered by a stronger spirit than my own. I could have wept with mortification. I had talked bravely: but it was because the sound of my own words lent me courage for the moment: for I well knew that cowardice was still at the bottom of my heart; I had never reduced my feelings to reason; I could not, as she did, make a principle of my conduct, and experience a sense of self-respect to sustain my actions; when once my pride failed, my strength was exhausted.

I was of a weak and yielding disposition, and constantly required support, and my sister had now assumed an attitude which led me to seek it at her hands. That she felt no affection for me, she had been too frank to conceal; but I tremblingly confessed to myself that if I could secure her friendship, I should save myself, in all probability, from a dangerous enemy. Adela already possessed a glimpse of my secret, and I easily convinced myself that its safety could be hereafter secured only by an unlimited confidence. Full of this feeling, I therefore gave free course to my communication. I told her of Devereux's first appearance at Rooksley; of the irritation of Lady Madelaine, who, after having for a time made a jest of our growing inclination, ultimately saw fit to resent it with a vehemence which led her to forbid the entrance of the house to the son of her own friend; and then, but with considerably less fluency, I admitted the fact of our late correspondence; and avowed my firm faith in Devereux's attachment and perseverance.

CHAPTER XXVI.

I DERIVED no assistance from my auditor throughout the narrative, either in word or look. She listened attentively, absorbedly, but she uttered no comment, she made no gesture of

surprise or interest: it was only when, with a flushed brow and quickened breath, I had reached the termination of my story, that she spoke; and not even then until, after the pause of a moment, she had convinced herself that I had indeed no more to tell.

"Poor Eveleen!" she exclaimed at last; "you have truly profited by an education based on flattery, and perfected by novel-writers, to have thus succeeded in weaving out a romance for yourself amid the seclusion of Rooksley. I cannot sufficiently admire your skill! It was a wonderful achievement to contemplate at fourteen. But are you sure that Herbert Devereux was, and is, the hero of this history?"

"What can you mean to imply, Adela?"

"Nothing; my words convey no implication. I asked a plain and simple question; and I moreover request of you to answer it frankly and truthfully."

"I have told you nothing but the truth."

"I am bound to believe your assertion; and the rather that such a confidence as you have just made unasked would be a useless and idle weakness on your part, if you still sought to deceive me. Do you now ask my advice or my assistance?"

"I am ready to listen to your advice; and may, perhaps, ere long be under the necessity of requesting your assistance; but what I now desire is simply your opinion."

"Upon what point?"

"Upon every one connected with the entanglement."

"Entanglement! You do not then, yourself, consider the affair as serious?"

"You are mistaken. I am, on my side, perfectly serious; nor have I any reason to believe that Mr. Devereux is less so."

"We had better then, under those circumstances, call it an engagement."

"Call it what you please."

"Then my opinion is that, so far as it has gone, it is remarkably romantic."

"But what think you," I asked with some irritation, "of the inconsistency of our mother, who, after having jestingly encouraged our mutual liking, should suddenly find in it a cause of wrath and resentment?"

"I confess that an accusation of inconsistency, when brought against Lady Madelaine, somewhat startles me. I had not hitherto believed that feminine failing to be one of her peculiarities. I never made the experience myself, for, in my own case, her conduct has ever been uniform in all respects; nor do I think that, in this occurrence, she can rightly be accused of it. The miniature flirtation of two comparative children amused her and diverted her friends. Dancing dogs and quack doctors are never, as you are well aware, admitted beyond the lodges of Rooksley; and people of taste and fashion must be provided with entertainment of some description. But when it became apparent that the boy and girl considered themselves and each other as man and woman—then, indeed, the affair assumed a very different aspect. Did you expect that Lady Madelaine Tilden had any ambition to be a grandmother before she was five and thirty?"

I was stung to the very quick. This was not the tone in which I had expected my sister to reply to the confidence I had reposed in her. I shrank before the ridicule which lurked in her tone and words.

"I care not to speculate upon our mother's feelings," I said pettishly: "I wished to know your opinion of my own position."

"I do not think that you need to disturb yourself on that head," was the rejoinder; "after Mr. Devereux saw and admired you, he probably transferred his gaze and his admiration to the scarlet coat which succeeded you. Nothing could be more natural at his age."

"How then," I asked with offended dignity, "do you account for his appearance here, and the correspondence which ensued?"

"A love of the new and the mysterious, perhaps; or restlessness, and weariness of town, for the season was just about to close."

"You think then that I am to be made a dupe?"

"You must yourself decide that point. Your fate is in your own hands in this case, at least."

"But you believe that he never really loved me?"

"I am merely inclined to imagine that, at such an age, and under such circumstances, a mutual inclination like yours would scarcely admit a name."

"I am nevertheless convinced of his affection."

"In that conviction you cannot do better than encourage a renewal of his intentions. You must be sure of success now, when time can only have increased your talent in winning hearts."

The bitterness of this epigram made me furious; but I was too proud to discover to my sister the extent of her triumph; and I remained perfectly silent, until she rose from her chair, when, as she prepared to leave the room, she said calmly: "End as it may, your secret is safe with me, Eveleen; and as I before said, do not let it distress you. It is a marriage that Lady Madelaine will never allow. She has other and more ambitious views for you. If I can be of service in the mean time, while this love still struggles and exists, make use of me; you may depend upon my sincerity." And before I could utter a word in reply, she was gone.

How heartily did I then regret that I had placed myself so thoroughly in her power! Not one expression of sympathy, not one sentence of affection, had escaped her. I had forfeited my independence. I had wilfully woven the thrall about me: nor was Adela a likely person to allow me to overlook the fact. From the day on which this conversation took place, our relative position was altogether changed. I ceased to contend. I adopted her ideas, coincided in her opinions, and deferred to her tastes. She, on her side, tacitly accepted my concessions, and no longer avoided my society; talking to me continually, whenever we were *tête-à-tête*, of Devereux; and cleverly increasing, by apparently unconscious comments, the extent of the regard which she constantly affected to discourage. As I have, I believe, said more than once already, she was incomprehensible. Nevertheless, there was, from this very line of conduct, a fascination in her companionship which I

was unable to resist. She never spoke of herself. She had displayed no answering trust in me. She seemed anxious to forget her own identity. And thus, we talked incessantly upon the one engrossing subject of Devereux's attachment.

"Where is he now?" she asked one morning, as we were strolling in the grounds. "In order to secure a prize for which all the world are destined to contend, he should be no laggard. He must be well aware that Lady Madelaine is not at Rooksley; he must have seen her at his mother's. How is it then that he does not profit by so favorable an opportunity of renewing his suit?"

As she spoke we were approaching one of the lodges, which was just then under repair; but, as the early dinner-bell had rung, the workmen were all absent; and we consequently continued our walk without hesitation. The building was known as the wood-lodge, from the circumstance of its standing on the edge of an extensive plantation of ornamental timber, and was, in itself, an extremely pretty object. Adela had been silent more than a minute, but I attempted no reply, for just at the instant my eye caught the figure of a tall man crouching among the underwood.—He wore a blue gabardine, a glazed hat with a wide border pulled low upon his forehead, and carried in his hand a formidable bludgeon; but what rendered his appearance more singular, and less alarming than it would otherwise have been, was the fact that at the precise moment in which he caught my attention, he raised a telescope to his eye, and appeared to be taking an earnest view of the windows of the house. As he dropt it, his gaze was riveted upon me, and I saw him start with surprise and make a step towards me; when suddenly becoming aware of the presence of a second person, he stopped as abruptly as he had been about to approach.

A sudden tremor took possession of me. I dared not believe that my suspicion was correct. I could only murmur out: "How like, and yet it cannot be!"

"What cannot be?" asked my sister.

"That man—that peasant—do you see him, Adela? Do my eyes cheat me, or is it really Devereux?"

Taught by these words that my companion knew all our secret, the intruder hesitated no longer.

"Yes; it is indeed Devereux," he answered, springing towards me, while I stood transfixed with terror and astonishment. "It is indeed myself. Have I not earned the right to make this attempt by the weeks and months of wretchedness that I have lately passed? Does it seem so strange to your heart, Eveleen, that it refuses to welcome me?"

"You wrong me, Herbert."

"I must believe so; for I cannot afford to fritter away one brief interval of happiness in doubt. But why these tears? why this violent emotion? Compose yourself, I beseech of you, and listen to me calmly, for a few moments must decide both my fate and your own. In an hour I must be once more on my way to town, where I shall only arrive in time to join my regiment before it marches to Dublin. I do not ask you to write to me; I dare not. The hazard of discovery would be too great, and I am not selfish enough to involve you in unnecessary risk for my own gratification. Nor will I write myself. A letter intercepted by Lady Madelaine must inevitably expose you to her resentment; but I swear, by all that I most revere on earth, never to become the husband of any other woman than yourself. You have already given me the same pledge, but it was only in writing, Eveleen—I saw it, but I did not hear it; and it is to do this, to hear the same vow uttered by your lips, that I am now here. The sounds will dwell in my ear forever, and be the solace of my absence. Surely you will not refuse me this? Surely you will not shrink at such a moment from the ratification of your own generous and voluntary pledge?" And he looked earnestly and tenderly into my face, as he raised my hand with ardor to his lips.

I was silent.

"Have you not the courage to repeat your promise?" he asked somewhat impatiently. "Was the vow traced by your pen not intended to be irrevocable? Have you hitherto been merely sporting with a passion which you professed to share? Eveleen, I will not believe you so unworthy!"

"I am helpless," I at length murmured out as I evaded his fixed and searching gaze.

"Helpless!" echoed Devereux, indignantly "show me the being, either of your sex or c mine, who is not helpless, if unwilling to exe that moral courage which makes its own strength and creates its own freedom! Do no be self-deceived, Eveleen; do not, willully o weakly close your eyes before you give me a final answer, to the trials to which, as my affianced wife, you will undoubtedly be exposed ere long. Do not conceal from yourself the difficulties with which you will have to contend in order to secure the inviolability of your plighted word. I am too unselfish to inflict upon you the necessity of either falsehood on the one hand, or repentance on the other. If there must be a victim, I am prepared to become the sacrifice—my own misery will be enough, without the addition of yours."

I only wept.

"When my departure from town has taken place," pursued Herbert, "and your mother's year of mourning has expired, she will, beyond doubt, desire your society, and you will be launched into the ocean of a London life, where nothing will be left undone to seduce your fancy, and to intimidate your will. Lady Madelaine will, probably, employ both menace and authority; she may even condemn you once more, for a time, to the seclusion of Rooksley—she may endeavor to pervert your truth by flattering your vanity or your ambition. You see how fully, how earnestly I have calculated all these contingencies—not coldly, Eveleen; of that you cannot suspect me, but with a burning brow and a throbbing pulse.—All this may—*must*, I fear, be the consequence of your truth to me—but surely, my own love, I can at least offer you the recompense of your noble sacrifice! No care, no tenderness, no devotion shall be spared when you are indeed my wife, my love shall make you forget even the price a

which it was purchased. My gratitude shall be undying, like my affection. Your happiness shall be the one great effort and ambition of my whole life. Speak—I have been frank and honest, though it has cost me a bitter pang. I have done my duty; and now my fate is in your hands. You know that you have been the first and only vision of my soul. Speak—and make me at once the happiest or the most wretched of my sex!"

Again his eyes were fastened eagerly upon me. I felt his arm about my waist: I was faint and giddy. My cowardice was upon me. I had no longer a will nor a wish. I riveted my gaze upon the earth. I gasped out I knew not what of the pain which his want of confidence had given me. He eagerly pressed me to be frank; to be just alike to him and to myself; and I felt inclined to promise all he asked, but my fear was greater than my passion.

"Speak for me, Miss Tilden!" he exclaimed, turning vehemently towards my sister; "if I have, indeed, so soon and so utterly lost all my influence over Eveleen, perhaps you, her friend, her confidante, may still possess it. This strange, cold indecision maddens me. I cannot endure it much longer. Let me, at least, hear through your medium what is to be the recompense of my deep and uncompromising affection."

Adela, who had hitherto been standing a few paces apart, on hearing this appeal, moved to my side, and was about to speak, when the shrill voice of Lady Flora, evidently approaching the lodge, was distinctly audible. I rushed from the clasp of Devereux. "Fly!" I cried impetuously; "I am lost if she discovers you—"

"What have you to fear, Eveleen?" he asked sadly, and almost reproachfully; "none here know me save yourself."

"Nevertheless I beseech you to be gone. My agitation will betray me.—Farewell. Do not doubt my affection. The grave would be more welcome to me than another engagement. Calculate fearlessly upon my constancy—upon my truth. I will be only yours—but fly—leave me—leave me, or I shall die upon the spot."

"Alas, Eveleen; this weakness gives but poor earnest of the future!"

"Devereux, I implore you to be gone, or you will be my ruin."

"Farewell, then, since such is indeed your will. All uncertainty is now over for me. I am to be the sacrifice of a childish terror. Heaven bless you, Eveleen! You are yet young. You will soon love again. May he who wins you cherish you as fondly as he whom you discard!"

He was about to turn away, when Adela held him back.

"It is too late," she said calmly; "you have been seen, and your retreat at this moment would be even more suspicious than your presence."

"Alas! alas!" I gasped out, as I wrung my hands in agony. "What is to be done? We are both lost."

My sister smiled. "You need not feign indisposition, Eveleen; you are safe, for you have no part to play. You, sir, will perhaps have the kindness to assist me in supporting her. The drama will suffice for the audience."

Devereux had scarcely extended his arms to sustain my trembling frame, and began to murmur his reproachful tenderness into my ear, when Adela called loudly upon Lady Flora to hasten her approach with Bottlemore, who was following close behind her. They had no sooner joined the group than my sister turned with a civil courtesy to Devereux, and, thanking him for his timely aid, dismissed him. I gave one last look in the direction which he had taken, and saw him disappear behind the scaffolding of the lodge.

Once assured that he was indeed gone, ceased to struggle with the weakness which had overcome me. I closed my eyes and fainted.

CHAPTER XXVII.

When I recovered from my swoon, I found myself stretched upon my bed, and Joséphine busily employed in laving my temples with Hungary water. I looked anxiously for my sister, but she was not beside me.

"*Mademoiselle Adèle s'est retirée depuis un moment*," said my attendant, without subjecting me to the exertion of an inquiry. I was relieved by her consideration, and once more closing my eyes, I fell into one of those dreamy reveries which partake both of waking thought and sleeping uncertainty; where the soul and the fancy appear to have disenthralled themselves in some degree from the weight of reality and life; and yet not to have altogether freed their wings from the clogging soil of mortality. The scene of the wood lodge passed circumstantially before me. I verily believe that I heard in my heart the echo of every sentence that had been spoken, as accurately as it was originally uttered; yet, nevertheless, I doubted whether I dreamt, or merely obeyed the prompting of a tenacious memory. I had, moreover, no sensation of regret or of satisfaction: no emotion whatever was excited within me. A soothing and placid calm cradled me, as the mother's arm cradles her slumbering babe. It was a strange—almost a supernatural species of enjoyment, an atmosphere of etherealism, on which I appeared to float without any volition of my own. It was a state sweeter than sleep, because I was conscious of existence; more delicious than waking, because no painful feeling troubled my visions. It was a twilight of the spirit, which, like that of nature, softened and toned down every salient and rugged object, and invested all about me in the sweet and vapory shadows which lend a mysterious charm to all upon which they rest.

But this intermedial state of being (if such an expression may be permitted to me) could not endure forever, arising as it undoubtedly did from the shock which had been given to my nerves, and the long and heavy faint from which I was only slowly awakening. I became gradually conscious of violent suffering in my head. The pulses in my temples beat strong and hard, and the pulsations of my heart were quick and painful. The vapors were passing from my brain, and, as they rolled away, the sensation of mental as well as bodily uneasiness came back upon me. Again the meeting of the morning rose full upon my memory, but

now it brough bitterness, regret, and self-reproach along w .h it. I felt humbled in my own eyes.

I was aware that I had acted weakly and unworthily. How had I met Devereux?—how had I parted from him? Like a peevish child, incapable of acting from either motive or principle. What must he think of me? I, who had unhesitatingly poured out on paper all the romantic feelings of devotion and constancy which his anxious attachment had exacted—who had pledged myself to make all things yield to my love for him—who, in the security of my chamber, had defied fate and authority for ' s sake with passionate vehemence; and fr m whom he had thus acquired the right to e. ect at least exertion and consistency? I s eddered as my reason taught me that it could e only with contempt! Once before had we een separated under circumstances which had crushed my pride into the dust, but that had been through the agency of another; and even had I shown weakness then, my age would have excused it. It was too plain; I had no strength of character. Adela had read me rightly. With all my haughty and despotic self-will in small things—with all my self-value and presumption, I was utterly powerless at every important crisis. Rushing recklessly upon difficulties, I wanted energy to combat the phantoms which, through my own imprudence, I had evoked.

I felt crushed and miserable under the burthen of my own reflections. I wanted help even to think; and I passed a wretched night, throughout which I never closed my eyes, even for an instant. I no longer understood my own position. Had Devereux considered our separation as a final one, or did he still look upon me as his affianced wife? This was a question which I was utterly unable to answer; nor could I comprehend how it might be solved, for I remembered that he had told me not to expect to hear from him, and warned me to desist from attempting a correspondence by which we should probably both be compromised. Thus every avenue of communication between us was closed, and that at a moment when my peace of mind depended upon an exact understanding of our relative position toward each other. And upon what could I cast the blame of this undignified dilemma? Solely and utterly upon my own weakness and want of self-government. In short, view the matter as I might, the whole evil had originated in myself.

I soon convinced my fears that Devereux's affection was irrecoverably lost to me, while his claim upon my honor remained in full force; and I need scarcely confess, that I believed my love for him at that moment to be more powerful than ever. I pined for daylight. I had now no hope, save in Adela. Yes—my spirit was humbled even to this! Once my thoughts turned towards Lady O'Halloran; but I felt relieved when I remembered that she had been absent in town for several weeks; for how could I have rallied my courage sufficiently to tell her such a tale? No—Adela was my only resource; and to her I should be spared the mortification of detailing the cause of my embarrassment.

I anticipated from my sister an early visit in my chamber on the morrow; but when that morrow came, it brought only a civil inquiry through her maid, to which I replied as briefly as it had been made. Nevertheless, I continued anxiously awaiting her appearance for several hours in vain: when, satisfied that she purposely avoided me, I became more restless and apprehensive than before, and could endure this additional suspense no longer.

Summoning Joséphine, I made a hasty toilet; and, near its close, had the satisfaction of seeing Adela in the grounds, making her way towards the wood which belted one side of the home-park. I threw on my bonnet and shawl in an instant, and started in pursuit. She had evidently not remarked my approach; and when I reached her, she was sitting upon the mossy turf at the foot of a beech-tree, not occupied with a book, as was her usual habit, but with her face buried in her hands, and lost in a train of deep thought. She started as I paused, panting and breathless beside her; and as she raised her head, I remarked that two large tears were resting on her cheeks.

"I have been anxiously expecting you all the morning in my room, Adela," I said, as I cast myself down beside her; "but at last I began to fear that you were purposely avoiding me?"

"Your fears were correct," she replied coldly.

"And wherefore?" I asked earnestly; "surely you have a thousand things to say to me?"

"You are wrong—I have nothing to say."

"Have you, then, already forgotten the scene of yesterday?"

"By no means. You unexpectedly had an interview with your noble-hearted lover, whose attachment is worthy of any sacrifice, however great. You declined to make any—even the most trifling. He left you with a bruised spirit and a wounded heart. Surely there could be no occasion for me to repeat to you circumstances of which you are so well aware as these."

"At least," I said sadly, "you might pity me for having given him this pain."

"What obliged you to do so?"

"Reason and prudence."

"Rather confess that your love for him is not sufficiently great to induce you to run a paltry risk in order to secure it. Your lips would never have hesitated to utter the vow which he claimed from you, had it been written in your heart."

"Do you, then, blame me for having refused to ratify our engagement?"

"Blame you!" echoed my sister, turning her eyes, which were flashing with disdain, full upon me; "quite the contrary. I applaud you for having been just to yourself. A feeble nature should at once, as yours did, yield to events without a struggle, and not venture to encounter trials to which it is unequal."

"Adela," I said bitterly, piqued by her uncompromising frankness, "we should all wait until we are tried, and prove our own strength before we scoff at the weakness of others. Opportunities to do so, I should imagine, are never wanting long to any one, and even the firmest will may be damped. Wait until our mother interferes with your own views, and presses

upon you a marriage for which you have no inclination."

"If I love elsewhere—above all, if I am so happy as to be beloved," she answered calmly, "all her interference and all her efforts will be vain. I have already told you this."

"I fancied so myself; but I have discovered my error. As regards your own declaration, I put no faith in it at the time; nor do I now."

"You are wrong. You should not judge of my character by your own. The difference of our education has necessarily influenced our modes of thinking and feeling. Brought up in the arms of those to whom you owe your being, the first sentiments of your heart must have been those of tenderness and submission; you instinctively learned to love and to respect an authority to which you were indebted both for security and comfort. Things have changed. The yoke has become more heavy and more irksome; but the fetters of habit are upon you, and you do not retain even the will to shake them off. My case is wholly dissimilar. The outcast child of an unloving mother, I no sooner became capable of appreciating my position, than I wept over myself. Tears were the luxury of my early girlhood; of those hours when I was dismissed to my sports. I grew up on tears; until I ventured to ask myself by what right and upon what pretext I was thus flung off! You may believe that I could discover no plea which sufficed to satisfy my reason; and I then made it the one great moral business of my life to weigh every detail connected with my misfortune. Under this mental discipline, both my heart and my character have been educated. I trust to be able some day to prove that I have been just alike to my mother and to myself. I have now clearly defined the bounds within which to admit her authority as legitimate; and beyond those I will not yield even a hair's breadth. Judge, then, what prospect there is of her being able to influence me in the most important decision of my life."

"And can you really have come to such a resolution before you are quite sixteen years of age?"

Adela shrugged her shoulders with a contemptuous smile, but made no reply.

"I cannot boast of the same moral independence," I pursued, after a moment's silence; "and I seriously require your advice."

"My advice! *A quoi bon?*"

"That it may guide and strengthen me."

My sister laughed. There was a mockery in her laughter at times that made my blood leap in my veins; it did so now. "You are merry," I remarked with asperity; "I asked counsel, not contempt."

"I have no advice to offer. Counsel to you would be merely a verbal improvidence."

"Why so?"

"Because you would be, in all probability, afraid to follow it."

"Then, were it your case, you would risk everything to keep your faith?"

"Never mind me. I am in no way connected with the business. But are you so sure that the climax of the adventure is still dependent upon yourself?"

"Surely you do not imagine that Devereux will consider our parting of yesterday as a final one?"

"I imagine nothing. It is certain that he had previously exhibited a rare degree of patience."

"I should be wretched!" I exclaimed, as my tears fell hot and fast—"I should be miserable, were he now to abandon me. I have never loved him so perfectly as within the last few hours."

"That is unfortunate," said Adela, perfectly unmoved by this sudden burst of feeling; "very unfortunate; but quite in rule. You were certainly destined from your cradle, Eveleen, to be a heroine; and no heroine can expect to pass through life without many sharp trials."

"And is this all the consolation which you are able to give me?"

"I consider that there can be none greater. You are already on the stage, and will ere long have the world as your spectator; for you may remember that Mr. Devereux asserted the probability of your soon being withdrawn from Rooksley."

"What will the world be to me?" I asked, as I wiped away another burst of tears. "He will be absent whom alone I shall care to please."

Adela sprang to her feet, and drew her shawl closer about her: "I will continue my walk," she said with a suppressed gesture of weariness; "for you will, I doubt not, find your own thoughts more agreeable society than myself."

I did not seek to detain or to accompany her. I was more irresolute, more depressed than ever; the last straw at which I grasped had floated beyond my reach, and I had no longer any hope of help save in my own firmness. My own firmness! The conviction was an epigram, and a bitter one, upon myself; and the tears that I shed for the next half hour, and which I believed were given to Devereux, were in a great degree wrung from me by mortification and disappointment.

I was aroused from my fit of weeping by the sound of the warning bell from the upper lodge, which betokened the arrival of visitors; but I remained passively beneath my beech-tree. I knew of none that were likely to interest me; and I therefore left, as I generally did, their identity to chance. The year of weeds had expired. My seventeenth birthday was over. My mother had not written to congratulate me; nor, perhaps, all circumstances considered, could she be fairly expected to do so. Of her arrival at Rooksley, I, however, could not dream for a moment, as her last letter from Lady Devereux's, not yet of quite six weeks' date, had mentioned no such intention; and I was in no mood at that moment to be troubled by the appearance of any other person upon earth. Gradually I fell back into the same uneasy train of thought which had before absorbed me, and forgot the interruption altogether. At times a glow of resolution gave me momentary strength, and I resolved to neglect the warning of Devereux, and to write to Dublin, to entreat him to forgive the weakness which must so deeply have wounded his affection; and as I sat there, full of this courageous project, I framed a letter full of pathos and devotion, of which the effect could not have failed to prove all I wished; but then rose before me the memory of my mother, and I shrank affrighted from the audacity of my dream; and if, during my paroxysm of valor, the blood had

burned upon my brow, so, on the reaction of thought, I shivered with the chill of one who had suddenly been immersed in water.

The recall-bell, which summoned stragglers in the grounds to the house, at length rang; and very reluctantly I rose to receive the importunate guest, whomsoever it might prove. I saw nothing of Adela in my way, and at once proceeded to the drawing-room. A footman, who was stationed at the door, threw it back ere I could utter an inquiry, and announced me; when, to my astonishment, I found myself in the presence of my mother and Sir James Dornton. For an instant, I doubted the evidence of my senses. It seemed but a few weeks since I had parted from Lady Madelaine, veiled in crape, and enveloped in close and heavy drapery; and now she stood before me, still indeed in black, but attired with an elegance and a research which told no tale of mourning. She was in high beauty, and bathed in smiles. After having touched my forehead with her lips, she turned to her companion, and said gaily—"Will you stroll about the park for half an hour, Sir James, after you have shaken hands with Eveleen? I have a thousand things to say to her; but I will promise that they shall all be said so briefly, that your patience and gallantry will not be overtaxed."

The gentleman bowed obediently; took my hand, which he raised gallantly to his lips, and then, seizing his hat, passed out through the conservatory.

"How earnestly you examine me, Eveleen!" laughed Lady Madelaine. "Am I looking unusually handsome, or unusually plain, that I thus rivet your attention?"

"Beautiful! resplendent!" I replied instinctively. "I never before saw you so beautiful."

"Then you would not feel much surprise, were you to hear that I had already been importuned to take another name?"

"By no means," I said gravely, recovering from my first emotion of surprise and admiration, and falling back upon my own bitter feelings. "There are doubtlessly many who would gladly induce you to do so; my astonishment would be only at their success."

"And may I venture to ask wherefore?" demanded Lady Madelaine coldly, as a cloud gathered on her brow; "does the name of Tilden appear to you to be so distinguished that it could not be worthily replaced? In that case, the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan, who never ought to have borne it, would indeed, in your eyes, commit a heinous offence by assuming another which she might herself consider to be better suited to her birth and rank."

I thought of my father; my heart swelled with indignation; I could not utter a syllable.

"Explain yourself, I entreat, Miss Tilden," continued my mother, more and more irritated. "I understand perfectly from your manner that here is an *arrière pensée*, and I request that you will express it."

"I would rather avoid a subject which appears to anger your ladyship."

"Anger me! You mistake. This is a matter of feeling, not of temper. Let us understand each other."

"Then, madam, since you press me to speak, I confess I had believed that free to act as you please, affluent, and with two daughters of an age to be companions to you—."

"I comprehend you perfectly," interposed Lady Madelaine with impatience. "You have some idea of reading me a lecture. Do not deny yourself the gratification. Proceed, and tell me that at the age of thirty-five I ought to devote myself entirely to my children; and renounce, for their sakes, my tastes, my influence, and all the pleasures in which they cannot share."

"Believe me," I said composedly, "that I never imagined such an event possible; nor did I ever feel selfish enough to wish it. It was contrary to my inclination that I was urged to make any comment upon your actions. I am quite aware that you are at liberty to please yourself in all things, and that my sister and myself have only to respect your will."

"I am of the same opinion," was the dry rejoinder of Lady Madelaine, "and consequently expect that such will be the spirit in which you will receive the tidings of my approaching marriage with Lord Otterford."

"With Lord Otterford!" I echoed in violent emotion, as I sprang from my chair.

"Even so, Miss Tilden," replied my mother while a flush passed over her face, "have you anything to object to such an arrangement?"

I was silent. My heart was wrung. I remembered past scenes—I remembered Emily Vernon, and my father, and the meeting in the octagon room—I was spirit-sick. I am afraid that, at that moment, even ignorant as I was of the extent of her weakness, I despised my mother.

"As I appear to have nothing to expect, either from your duty or your affection at so critical a moment, Miss Tilden," said Lady Madelaine, harshly, as she also rose, "I will detain you no longer than to request that you will inform your sister of my intended marriage. I shall dispense with her presence, as I have no wish to expose myself to a second insult."

I required no further bidding; but, with a silent courtesy, hastened to profit by my dismissal. I had scarcely reached my own room, when I heard the recall-bell summon the baronet from his walk, and a quarter of an hour afterwards the carriage drove off. The whole affair had been, to say the least, singularly conducted. It was evident that my mother had not even seen Lady Flora; she had specifically declined to see Adela; she had traveled a long distance—scarcely remained an hour in the house—and left without taking the slightest refreshment. And again — why should she come accompanied by Sir James Dornton! It is true, that he was an old friend of the family; but had she not her still older and *female* friend, Lady Devereux, who would have seemed to be a more fitting companion for so long a drive? Or even Lord Otterford himself, so soon to be her husband, and who might necessarily be supposed eager to conciliate her daughters by so simple an act of courtesy? The more I reflected, the more my astonishment increased. The cool and unhesitating manner in which Lady Madelaine had given her companion to understand that his absence was desired on my entrance, and the passive acquiescence which had followed on his side, showed also a famil

'arity which I could by no means explain to myself, particularly under my mother's present circumstances. My own pale and depressed appearance, which, on another occasion, would not have escaped comment, and probably reproof, had not elicited a remark, although it was too visible to remain unperceived. The whole thing was an enigma.

Nevertheless, I soon turned from this subject of marvel to the still greater one of Lady Madelaine's marriage. The arts of the "Circe" had then prevailed! I had not yet learned to remember the spell of wealth. I was now eager to communicate the astounding news to Adela, and I sought her first in her own chamber; but, not finding her there, I descended to the drawing-room, where she was sitting, still folded in her shawl, and so buried in thought that she was not conscious of my presence until I spoke. The tears were yet trickling slowly down my cheeks, while those of my sister were suffused with so bright a bloom that she looked positively handsome.

"Not yet consoled, Eveleen?" she asked, with a smile; "what said our lady-mother to your grief?"

"It is she who is the cause that I weep," I answered, as I flung myself down on the sofa beside her. "Prepare yourself for strange news, Adela. Her term of mourning is over. Our poor father is already forgotten. She is about to become once more a bride."

"Do you consider that so strange?" she asked coldly; "I have been prepared for such an event for months. You might have guessed that this would be the case when our mother left Rooksley, and that we were not her companions."

"To marry again!" I repeated, not having yet conquered my consternation; "with two daughters of an age to be established, who require to be produced in the world, to be suitably introduced, and to be no longer treated as children. I flattered myself that in this instance, at least, she would not have failed."

"You are to be pitied for having encouraged such a delusion," interposed my sister; "as for me, I am no day-dreamer—I find the realities of life suffice. Little care I how Lady Madelaine may dispose of herself—whether she marry again, or remain a widow."

"But do you not dread the idea of a father-in-law?"

"I never took fright at a name. If he be amiable, courteous, and kind-hearted, he may be of service to me; if the contrary, I have little to fear from him."

She sank again into silence, and soon became once more absorbed in thought. I observed her narrowly, but her indifference was evidently genuine. I almost envied her impassibility.

"Have you then no curiosity to learn the actual name of this new bridegroom?" I asked.

"So little, that I should suffer nothing by waiting until it is officially announced."

"Nevertheless," I persisted, "you cannot fail to be surprised when I tell you that it is Lord Otterford."

"Lord Otterford! Indeed. I congratulate you. His marriage with the mother will probably be succeeded by that of his nephew with the daughter. The drama will prove a comedy after all."

"Adela, this is cruel. You know too well how we parted."

"You will meet again."

"How? Where?"

"In any way—everywhere—nothing is impossible to a determined spirit and a devoted heart."

"Alas! I have no hope. I dare not anticipate happiness to myself from this incomprehensible marriage."

"Anything but incomprehensible in my opinion," said my sister with her usual phlegm; "that Lady Madelaine should so soon have consented to resign her liberty may astonish those who do not comprehend her; but there the marvel ceases. It is the rank of her new suitor which has determined her. Nothing can be more natural, or more consistent with her general character; nor do I impute it to her as a crime; an elevated station was her birthright; and it is a prejudice which claims respect, and is by no means without foundation."

"But tell me seriously, I beseech of you," I said after a pause; "do you believe that Devereux will resent my indecision of yesterday?"

"The last time we spoke together upon this subject you appeared confident of your power; why do you now suppose it to be weakened?"

"I cannot tell, but the more desirable our union appears, the less reliance do I feel on my influence over his heart."

"And does it now appear more desirable than when, with all the ardor of an earnest and honest affection, he was, only a few short hours ago, urging you to unite your fate with his?"

"It does, because I have since reflected deeply. I have revolved all the circumstances in my mind, and I cannot perceive one which should be adverse to us. Devereux is well-born—he is the nephew of my mother's intended husband—independent in his means, handsome in his person, high-bred in his manners. Surely that mother can have no ambition beyond such a son-in-law."

"It is nevertheless possible that she may have other views for you. But were you really to marry Mr. Devereux, are you quite assured that you should love him?"

"What a question! He is charming! I should adore him—"

"And if your love were not returned?"

"My love not returned! I have no fear that such could be the case. I am now a thousand times more beautiful than when he saw me first."

"I admit the fact; but if, meanwhile, he should have formed another attachment?"

"I will win him back."

"You may not succeed."

"I have no fear of failure. This, moreover, is a risk which I must run in common with a thousand other women who are envied by half the world. The essentials of happiness would still remain; affluence, a handsome establishment, agreeable society, freedom of action, and a good position; with all these there can be little to apprehend."

"I disagree with you entirely," said Adela, earnestly; "all these things are desirable, it is true; but it would require far more to make me

happy. I must love, and be loved, fondly and exclusively; and did the greatest and most powerful noble of the land offer me a coronet upon any other terms, I would reject it, for it would only burn into my brow."

"And you talk of my romance, Adela! Who is rational and reasonable now?"

"Time will show," said my sister; "and, in the meantime, I hear the dressing-bell."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

My mother was married in the eighteenth month of her widowhood. The event was duly announced by letter at Rooksley, and was accompanied by two costly ornaments, as bridal gifts to Adela and myself; but of any regret that we were not present at the ceremony, or of any wish to see us in town, we received not a word. I had so thoroughly persuaded myself that my mother's union with Lord Otterford must necessarily involve my own introduction, and subsequent marriage with his nephew, that my health and spirits both failed beneath the disappointment, and the rather that I had heard nothing of Devereux from the morning on which we parted at the lodge.

From my sister I received no consolation. She affected rather to pity than to blame my weakness, and did not hesitate to affirm that I was destined to be a puppet worked by the wires of others, and certain to destroy my own happiness without either credit or comfort to myself. When I asked her to answer frankly and definitively the question, whether in my position she would take some decisive step, and make Devereux acquainted with my exact sentiments, she always answered me by the assurance that her conduct could be no rule for mine, as we were differently constituted. "I am in the world, but not for it," she was wont to say, with one of those peculiar laughs which always excoriated my nerves; "I care little for the frowns and threats which can only wound my vanity without disturbing my reason. You have been otherwise brought up. Do not try to force nature: you have not strength for such unequal contention. Had you loved Mr. Devereux, as you fancied you did, and as you are still endeavoring to believe that you do, you would have parted in faith and certainty. The question now is, whether he will not henceforth meet you as a stranger."

This was, from the time in which she first uttered the doubt, the text of all my future reveries. I combated the idea, week after week, and month after month, for it wounded my vanity. Idleness has been justly called the mother of passion, and so it proved in my case. Having no other pursuit, I became the heroine of a romance of my own. My reading supplied me with an infinity of models, and I pleased myself with the belief that no innocent beauty of seventeen had ever been injured like myself by an inconstant lover. Could Devereux have seen me daily haunting the borders of the lake, and looking, in vain, into the hollow trunk of the old willow which had formerly served as our *bureau de poste*, he must at once have been at my feet. But, alas! I wandered, and wept, and nursed myself into a conviction that my only hope of happiness was centered in his affection, totally in vain. Not a sign of remembrance could I meet in any direction. It was too true—Adela was a prophet—he had forgotten me!

From this morbid state of feeling I was aroused by a letter from my mother. Lord Otterford and herself had just returned from Rome, where they had spent six weeks. It sounded classical and correct, and they both piqued themselves upon their *savoir vivre*; therefore they went to Rome to look at each other, and to have their proceedings duly set forth in the public journals. In this letter I was desired to prepare myself for an early removal to town; but, save a cold remembrance, there was no mention made of Adela. It was evident that we were to be separated. Lady Madelaine was too thoroughly a woman of fashion to risk a third petticoat in her opera-box, or a second daughter in her morning-room. *Il ne faut jamais afficher ses malheurs*—at least, all together; and, instead of experiencing surprise, I ought to have felt this at once.

I hastened to announce to my sister my approaching departure, but there was no triumph in my tone. I had exhausted myself in regret and uncertainty. I began to dread a meeting with Devereux, whom, at last, I really loved, and to shrink from the idea of his coldness and avoidance.

"So calm, when you have so long looked forward with impatience to this emancipation, Evcleen!" said my sister, whose very lips had become pale as she read the letter; "it is now my turn to say, 'I cannot understand you.'"

"Listen to me, Adela," I replied, gravely: "if such were your design I know not, but it is certain that the comments you have made upon the confidence with which I have entrusted you have changed my very nature. You have applauded my wavering, vacillating, contemptible tampering with the happiness of Devereux, telling me that I was incapable of more stable conduct—but how? In a manner to make me feel, even to my heart's core, that you despised me for the weakness to which my fear of Lady Madelaine caused me to yield. You have assured me that Devereux had received my last adieu as final, and reminded me that, with my beauty, I could soon command another and a *safer* suitor. Did you, indeed, purpose so to induce me to resign his affection? Oh! no, no! Where you have learned the bitter lesson is your own secret; but you assuredly know the human heart too well to have imagined that such were the opiates by which it might be laid at rest. I do not even ask you why you have so strangely responded to my frankness when I bared my whole spirit before you, and asked for sisterly counsel; suffice it, that you have driven the arrow home. I can never again love a human being as I now love Devereux."

I spoke energetically and rapidly; and, as I paused, I looked towards my sister. Never did I witness a change so sudden and so complete—cheek, brow, and bosom were one blush; her eyes flashed, her bosom heaved—she gasped for breath.

"What means this, Adela?" I asked, completely awe-struck.

"It is rather I who should put the question," she replied, commanding her emotion by a

powerful effort; "how can it affect *me*, that you should love, or not love, Mr. Devereux?"

"We are a mutual enigma," I remarked, greatly offended.

"By no means," was the ready retort; "you have long ceased to be one to me; but I pray you, act as you may, not to transfer the responsibility of your proceedings to my influence. Leave me, at least, at peace in my solitude."

"I have no wish to do so, Adela—you mistake my meaning altogether. Did you know my present feeling, you would pity rather than blame me. The removal from Rooksley to the home of Lord Otterford is but exchanging one prison for another. Here, at least, I am physically free; there I shall be the slave of both caprice and circumstance. Here I might still live on in a fool's paradise, watching from day to day for *his* reappearance; there I can never hope to see him, for I know the nature of my mother too well to believe that she will ever forget the past. Moreover, how can I be sure that Lady Madelaine has not other views, and that I may not be persecuted to marry some husband of her own selection?"

"In which case you will yield," said Adela, freezingly.

"Never! I give you leave to smile at my precocious fears, for I am convinced that they are too well founded. I shall not long be an inmate of my mother's house. She wants no full-grown daughter constantly beside her, to make an epigram of her bridehood; and I am to be the victim of her vanity. Were you only to be my companion, I should not shrink so much from the trial."

"Dismiss such a feeling at once," said my sister. "I shall be left quietly at Rooksley until Lady Madelaine flatters herself that she has provided for me elsewhere. Nor can she do me a greater pleasure than to forget my existence until I myself remind her of it. You and I require different handling, Eveleen; she may find amusement in startling the leaves of the sensitive plant, but can derive small entertainment in seeking to crush those of the nettle."

A fortnight after this conversation I was in London. The improvement which had taken place in my appearance made my *debut* a triumph, and even elicited the congratulations of Lady Madelaine. I was no longer the precocious child of whom the Rooksley guests had made a plaything. My person and mind had both become matured, and I took my place at once in my mother's circle, with a composure and an *à plomb* which removed all awkwardness, and taught those around me to forget that I was a novice in the world and the world's ways. Lord Otterford was evidently delighted at my success, and I fondly flattered myself that he was exulting in the beauty and fashion of his nephew's bride. He was the most gallant of husbands and fathers-in-law. Raised to affluence from comparatively straightened means, by the noble income of his wife, he saw all *en beau*, and still played the lover so admirably that it was easy to divine the gratification of both heart and vanity enjoyed by Lady Madelaine. Secure of the only man whom she had ever, in all probability, really loved, my mother was radiant with happiness, and, had she still been a widow, must have proved a formidable rival, even to her own daughter. Still in the full glow of her glorious womanhood; attired, not only by the hands of the Graces, but with all the art of fashion; popular, influential, and wealthy, without a cloud upon her brow or an anxiety at her heart, her peculiar style of loveliness was perfected rather than diminished by time. She no longer appeared desirous to turn aside the incense which was offered up at my own shrine, but, on the contrary, seemed to live over again the days of her own triumphs, when under the guardianship of Lady Sinclair; while her train of admirers, instead of becoming diminished through my means, appeared rather to increase. Our opera-box was ever the center of a brilliant throng; our morning-rooms were crowded by all that was most distinguished both in fashionable and diplomatic life; we had not a moment unoccupied. But the great event of the season was my presentation at court. The queen was pleased to welcome me in a most gracious and flattering manner, and to compliment my mother upon my grace and beauty. The most gallant of princes at once christened us Spring and Summer, and declared that were he possessed of the apple of Paris, he should scarcely know where to bestow it. Invitations poured in upon us from the most distinguished persons in the realm; and, in short, to so glorious a pinnacle had royal favor exalted us, that it was ere long decided that Lady Madelaine, in marrying Lord Otterford, had rather consulted the interests of her beautiful daughter than her own inclination, it was so necessary that Miss Tilden should have a privileged protector. It was so considerate and delicate in Lady Madelaine!

Kind and ever charitable world. It is always ready to stretch forth a helping hand to those who desire to receive it empty!

But where, amid the crowd who thronged my path, was Herbert Devereux? Of my mother I dared not make the inquiry; but, although I had not heard a word from him since we parted, I was aware that he was no longer in Ireland, many of his brother-officers being at that moment on our visiting-list. Three months elapsed, and still I looked in vain for his appearance. I wrote incessantly to Adela, to whom I poured out the full tide of my disappointment and perplexity. Need I say that I also imparted to her my inflexible resolution to remain faithful to him to the last? I reminded her that I was at length emancipated, that I had taken a definite position, that my claim to do so was tacitly admitted; and that, consequently, I must and would sustain in this, the most interesting circumstance of my life, at once my own principles, and the plighted word which I had freely given.

The replies which I received to these lengthy epistles were universally brief, ambiguous, and unsatisfactory. They contained neither congratulation nor warning. Adela still affected to believe that I was incapable of a deep and lasting affection; and, passing slightly over the passages which related to Devereux, appeared more interested in ascertaining the names and pretensions of my new suitors. The most assiduous of these was Sir James Dornton; but, as I never looked upon him in any other

light than as an old admirer of my mother's, I did not include him in the catalogue; and the rather, as, presuming upon old acquaintanceship, I attached no consequence whatever to the complaisance with which he resigned himself to all my caprices.

Occasionally, when the memory of Devereux rose up vividly before me, I felt indignant at the persevering attentions of the patient baronet; and treated him with a cold and haughty formality which would have acted as a final dismissal to most men, although it produced no effect whatever upon Sir James. He was just as gay, just as witty, and just as maliciously at ease when I affected a repugnance toward him, as when I showed amusement at his sallies. To my mother he had suddenly become absolutely essential. No project of any description was finally decided before it had been discussed with Dornton. Nothing could exceed his intimacy with Lord Otterford, or his favor with Lady Madelaine. One complaint of my discourtesy toward him would have involved me with both; but that word was never uttered. He appeared tacitly to admit my right of acting as I saw fit, and never evidenced the least consciousness of my change of mood or manner. That he was perfectly heartless I soon convinced myself, and the natural result followed. My vanity was flattered by the devotion of a man of taste and fashion, whose admiration added to my consequence; and whose feelings were, as I firmly believed, quite beyond the reach of injury; cheerful and buoyant in disposition, the varied, ingenious, and witty sallies of the baronet first amused me, then attracted me, and finally I began to miss them during his absence, and to recall them for my own gratification. This fact had, nevertheless, no effect upon my heart. Devereux was still its hidden idol. I even wept at times in solitude over the mystery in which he had enshrouded himself. Not once had his name been uttered in my presence, although Lady Devereux was a frequent guest in Grosvenor Square; and never failed to overwhelm me with attentions and professions of regard. At length I could endure this state of suspense no longer; and chancing one morning to find Lord Otterford alone in the library, I resolved to compel him to make some communication on the subject. He was engaged with a pamphlet, and merely nodded a salutation as I entered the room. The opportunity was, however, too favorable to be lost; and, disregarding his look of surprise, I drew forward a reading-chair beside his own, and entered abruptly upon the subject.

"Perhaps, my lord," I said, as composedly as I could, though I felt that the warm blood was rising to my forehead, "you will be good enough to give me some intelligence of your nephew, Mr. Devereux. I apply to you, because his name appears to be under a ban in this house; and that I do not understand the social excommunication of an old friend."

"Mr. Devereux is at Paris. He has been indisposed, but is now almost convalescent."

"So far well," I said steadily; "but is this all?"

"What more do you require to hear, Miss Tilden?"

"Need I explain it to *you*?"

"I guess your meaning. You would ascertain the present state of his heart. I am not his confidant, and even if I were I should decline including you in the secret. Should he imagine that he still loves you, he is to be pitied; and the sooner you put an end to the delusion, the more generous and prudent you will be."

"Endeavor myself to make him forget me!" I exclaimed indignantly; "that will I never do. Our attachment is reciprocal. We have vowed ourselves to each other. We have no other hope of happiness."

"Charming conclusion!" smiled my auditor; "and upon what premises do you base such an opinion? Is it upon the strength of Devereux's character? upon his estimable qualities? upon his constancy, and the fervor of his affection? Do not deceive yourself, my dear girl; you know nothing about these. I do not intend to deny him the possession of every virtue with which you have generously invested him. I am not Jesuit enough to probe a young man's spirit; but let me ask you if you have discovered in him what is much more perceptible—an uncompromising delicacy, an exacting upright ness, and a susceptibility of temperament very ill calculated to insure the happiness of a handsome and fashionable woman? Are you aware that he never forgets an action or a word by which his feelings have been wounded?—that he never condescends to reproach, or to complain?—and that he perhaps suffers mortally at the very moment when a superficial observer would believe him to be perfectly calm? Have you made this discovery, and then asked yourself how these tenacious qualities would act upon so volatile a nature as your own?"

"No, my lord," I answered angrily; "I have entered into no such speculations; and I cannot but express my astonishment that you should appear so predisposed against an alliance which I should have thought might be considered as both honorable and eligible for your nephew."

"There can be no doubt that it would be both," was the calm reply; "but I was discussing *your* prospect of happiness, Miss Tilden, not the interests of Mr. Devereux. I avow frankly that a union between yourself and Herbert would have been a great gratification to me personally; and the rather that, although not blind to his faults, I believe him to be possessed of many high and noble qualities; but, having been made aware that it can never take place, I now consider it my duty to discourage it to the extent of my power."

I rose proudly from my seat, saying as I did so: "I thank you, my lord, for your candor; and I now comprehend my position. Lady Madelaine Otterford has a personal interest in separating us, and you are influenced by her objection. Mr. Devereux and myself have therefore no help to hope from either. Be it so. We are now, at least, both old enough to be aware that we are not to be victimized by the tyranny of our relations, and disposed of like merchandize, without the assent of our own free will. Surely we are not to be denied the control of our future fate!"

"You must excuse my terminating the conversation," said Lord Otterford, as he also rose; "I am in a peculiar and difficult position as

regards this affair. I have already heard too much. I pray you spare me all further discussions. If I can be of service on any other subject—and surely your thousand and one adorers must occasionally cost you some perplexity—command me without scruple:" and he extended his hand half laughingly.

The taunt awoke me to a desire of vengeance. "One moment more, my lord," I said, as I laid my hand in his; "there is yet another exile, both from sight and remembrance, for whom I would inquire — Miss Vernon — poor Emily—what of her?"

I felt the fingers tremble which were clasped about my own; and as I looked steadily at my companion, I saw his cheek blanch, and his lip quiver; he rallied, however, by a strong effort, and answered with affected indifference;—

"Poor Miss Vernon! You have not forgotten her then? She was a sweet rose, with a canker at the core. She has been long suffering, but her sorrows will soon be over; her brother writes word that she will not live to leave Naples."

"The faculty call it consumption, doubtless," I whispered through my tears.

"They do. Hopeless consumption."

"And what name would you yourself give to her disease, were your opinion sought?" I inquired emphatically.

"From what I observed," was the troubled reply, "I should have no hesitation in adopting the same conclusion."

"How fair she was!" I murmured, as though communing with my own recollections; "how pure, and gentle, and trusting, as she stood in the octagon-room at Rooksley on that calm summer evening, drinking in, without one misgiving, without one suspicious shrinking of distrust, the honeyed words of love and passion! Do you remember that interview, my lord, when you taught her how greatly her own pure, and placid, and modest charms outweighed those of the brilliant and worldly Circe? Alas! poor Emily—may we not believe that the seeds of death, which have since germed so fatally, were sown beneath that summer evening sky?"

"Evelyen, what mean you?" gasped out my auditor, as he grasped my hand forcibly in his own.

"Consult your memory, my lord," was my reply; "and satisfy your vanity, if it be not unappeasable, with one victim; without seeking to reduce me to the same extremity as her of whom I spoke."

"Do you mean to infer that I—?"

"I infer nothing, I speak frankly and fearlessly. What should I fear? Do we not read each other's hearts? What a cheat is human life! A pale brow droops, a bright eye grows dim, a young heart breaks slowly and silently, and then physicians are called in to give the disease a name; the learned men know nothing of the antecedents; the patient does not confide to them all the detail of the past; not a syllable is breathed of the simulated passion which awoke happiness and hope—not a word is murmured of the falsehood which left its venom to fester in the heart,—and so they throng around the bed; and while the mother listens through her tears for one cheering prophecy, and the brother turns away too proud to betray his agony, they mock the victim, whose only cure must be the grave, with scientific subtleties and idle logic. And then come the hearse, and the bed of earth—and the drama is played out, and the curtain falls. Is it not so, my lord?"

Long before I ceased speaking Otterford had sunk again into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. I stood for a moment looking upon him in silence; but he attempted no reply; and after a while, I turned slowly away, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A few weeks after this interview London began to thin rapidly. The season was nearly at an end, and the court had removed to Windsor. To Lady Madelaine, Rooksley was, of course, out of the question; and we accordingly removed to Woodville, a hunting-seat on the border of the New Forest, belonging to Lord Otterford; and which he had, since his marriage, caused to be enlarged and beautified. To me the place was positive enchantment; and I should, had I been happy, have required no other source of amusement than that which was afforded by the features of a country so novel and picturesque; my mother, however, professed no taste for country pleasures; and, accordingly, we were speedily followed by a score of her *habitués*, among the earliest of whom was Sir James Dornton. Assuredly, his social talents were universal. He was as gay, as thoroughly at home, and as constantly occupied at Woodville, as amid the busy crowds of the metropolis. No *ennui* could successfully contend against his unvarying spirits. Every day he contrived to discover some new object of interest or amusement. He was a perfect wizard. His influence gladdened our whole circle; but in all his exertions I could not fail to remark that it was my peculiar gratification which he the most zealously sought to insure. In my cause he was indefatigable; and, what was still more welcome, never intrusive. Not a word of love—not a gesture of preference escaped him. His tact was admirable. My mother was loud in his praise when he chanced to be absent; and never lost an opportunity of encouraging his attention to myself; appearing even to forget that he had once worshiped at her own shrine.

The idle, pleasure-seeking life which we led in the country favored this species of chivalric devotion, which affects to expect no return save the enjoyment of the passing hour. Lord Otterford had placed himself at the feet of Mrs. Trevyllian, a faded beauty, who was too indolent to be exacting, and too uninteresting to disturb the peace of Lady Madelaine; and she, in her turn, had passively suffered herself to become the momentary idol of the Marquis of Chaffington, a noble fopling, with light curling hair and delicately small hands, good-tempered, popular, and inoffensive. All the young ladies pronounced him charming; but this was a mistake. He was like a handsome piece of wax-work, pleasant enough to look at, though it required the best will in the world, after the first five minutes to enable you to find patience to listen to him. He talked, moreover, inces

santly, and was tolerably happy in the choice of his subjects; but he overwhelmed you with a perfect cataclysm of words, weak, watery, and wearisome.

I sought in vain to effect an intimacy with Lady Devereux; she had replaced her lord, who spent the whole of his time in the forest among game-keepers and rangers, by a worthy old general, whose undisguised admiration of her waning attractions made her feel once more young. In short, with the exception of half-a-dozen insipid pretenders to my own hand, who had contrived to get themselves invited for short periods to Woodville, I found only Sir James Dornton sufficiently unoccupied to command leisure to entertain me. When we rode out, he was always beside me; and, as he was familiar with all the by-roads through the forest, he was our guide, and left no object of interest unseen or unexplained. The small difficulties which occasionally presented themselves in these expeditions were always converted into matter of mirth by his untiring pleasantry; in short, he appeared to have totally laid aside the hyperfastidiousness by which he was generally distinguished, in order to make us fully conscious that we could scarcely dispense with his society.

Finding that he evinced no intention of profiting by the numerous opportunities thus afforded to him of persecuting me with his addresses, I became less reserved in my turn, and no longer feigned insensibility to his wit and good humor. The change evidently gratified him; but I was far from imagining to what extent. Unconscious that he was cognizant of my secret, it had never once occurred to me that he was thus exerting all his powers of pleasing in order to supersede Devereux in my affections; and that, what was the mere relenting of my dislike, could be misconstrued by him into a symbol of success. Such was the case, however; and so thoroughly had he contrived to convince himself of the fact, that he at length ventured to approach the subject which I so much dreaded; yet even then, not as I should have anticipated from a man who could expend enthusiasm even upon trifles, and at times display a depth of feeling which was evidently intuitive and spontaneous. Whenever he talked seriously, or what some would call passionately, to me, it was evident that he labored to do so gracefully; that he rounded his periods smoothly; and seemed almost to seek for phrases which might compensate for the chilling, monotonous, and forced manner in which they were uttered. I well remember that, in one of my letters to Adela, I told her the pleasant baronet would never win a woman's heart; for that, although a gay-spirited friend, he made a most drowsy lover, and only helped the cause of the man whom he affected to seek to supersede.

On a glorious evening, near the close of July, I was alone in the stone balcony which extended across the windows of the room in which all our party were assembled. The curtains were drawn, and the sounds of my mother's harp came faintly through their heavy folds. A small stream which had its source in the neighborhood had been diverted from its original channel, and forced through the pleasure-grounds, and, immediately under the windows, it poured its sparkling waters into a miniature lake bordered with flowering shrubs. The moon was rising, and the stars were walking forth to meet her from every quarter of the firmament; and as I leant there in silence, dreaming of Devereux, and indulging in a thousand vague and fantastic wishes, I almost unconsciously watched the dazzling reflection of each separate star, as it seemed to spring upward from the depths of the sleeping water, in order to gem its surface into a mimic semblance of the blue sky above it. The softened music from the room, the distant gush and fall of the myriad notes of the nightingale, the luxurious breathings of the flowers under the languid impulse of the summer wind, the whisperings, mystic and wordless, of the leaves, and the bright hopes which I was building up, all combined to fill my heart with a calm and placid joy to which I had been long a stranger; nor was I conscious that I wept until a large tear fell upon my hand.

"What are you thinking of so deeply?" murmured a voice close to my ear.

I started, and saw Sir James Dornton at my side.

"The question is scarcely discreet," I answered, with affected gaiety. "I have not yet adopted a confessor."

"You need no such functionary. Should you suppose yourself to be imparting anything secret, if you were to tell me frankly that you were thinking of Herbert Devereux?"

"Decidedly. Had such been the case, and were I to admit it, I should consider that I had transformed you from a friend into a confidant."

"Disabuse yourself at once, fair dreamer," was the retort; "the image of Devereux never rises up before you; you never heave a sigh at his remembrance; nay, you never vaguely recall his memory, that I am not conscious of the fact."

"In that case," I said impatiently, "I am very likely to consider your presence insupportable."

"I apprehend no such injustice on your part. You are too generous to punish me for taking a lively interest in all that affects your happiness."

"I am sorry, Sir James," I replied coldly, "that you should employ your feelings so unprofitably. If you are really as conversant with my secret sentiments as you appear to imply, you must be well aware that I desire no such demonstrations."

"Yet how can it be otherwise, Miss Tilden! Are all the world to be at liberty to admire, to adore you, and to tell you so, save myself? Say 'Yes,' if you will, and I must submit to the decree; but, at least, suffer me to retain the control of my feelings. Do not reduce me to a perfect cipher, simply because I have done you more worthy justice. You are at this moment the victim of a hopeless attachment; it overshadows the brightness of your spirit, it subdues the buoyancy of your nature: deny it if you can. And do you suppose that I can look upon your sufferings coldly?—that I can abstain from the desire to tear away the veil from that bright spirit, to restore the buoyan elasticity of that pure young heart? No, no you cannot so strangely have mistaken me."

"Presuming your inference to be correct, I beg you to believe that when I seek to disenthrall myself, I shall be quite equal to the task."

"I rejoice to hear it; for, were it not for the firm hope of that deliverance, I should become desperate."

"Sir James Dornton! Have you considered your words! Do you remember to whom they are addressed?"

"Perfectly."

"Then, sir, you must concede that they are both ill-judged and ill-timed."

"I will do nothing of the sort; ere long you will be less severe.

"The future must depend upon yourself," I said haughtily; and lifting one of the curtains, I passed into the room without awaiting his reply.

From that evening I avoided every occasion of meeting him *tête-à-tête*. I could not brook that he should force upon me his advice and his reproaches. I was no longer at ease in his presence. Every word that he uttered, and every look that he turned upon me, seemed to contain an epigram. I would fain have complained of the confidential tone which he had thus suddenly assumed; but to whom could I pour forth my indignation! Lady Madelaine, I well know, would not listen to any blame of her favorite, nor could I have confided to her my mortification and annoyance, without betraying my continued interest in Devereux. Neither could I appeal to Lord Otterford; for, since the conversation which I have recorded, we had never exchanged a syllable, save in public. There was, consequently, no method of ridding myself of this system of persecution, save by my own firmness; and I resolved to lose no opportunity of convincing Sir James not only of my indifference, for of that I flattered myself he was already well aware, but of the positive dislike which he was rapidly entailing upon himself by his inquisitorial bearing.

Isolated as I was amid a crowd—disappointed day after day in the hope which I had cherished, that Devereux must, sooner or later, join the circle of his uncle's guests—angry with myself for having been so unwarily made the dupe of a man to whom my secret was known, I shunned him with a feeling which soon grew into positive hate; nor was it lessened by the perfect *sang froid* and composure with which he bore every exhibition of my petulance. His quiet and self-satisfied smile never failed to drive the blood to my brow, but I dared not venture upon any decided demonstration of my annoyance. The eye of Lady Madelaine was frequently upon me, and there was a warning in it at those moments, before which I quailed even in the first burst of my indignation. What was I to do? What measures could I adopt, to rid myself of the impassible and pertinacious baronet, who evidently considered me as his own property, and to whom my struggles were mere matter of curiosity and pastime! I pleaded sickness, and kept closely to my own apartments; but this proceeding thwarted the projects of my mother, and I was not permitted to persist in my seclusion.

When, after an absence of three days from the party, I was compelled to reappear, I was besieged with compliments and condolements, which were even more bearable than the light and mocking laughter with which I was greeted by Sir James. He declared that I had been engaged in the composition of some new cosmetic, and that I had made trial of it upon myself with most undeniable success, for that he had never seen me look more charming. His callous mockery cut me to the heart; and I replied with bitterness, as I turned away, and addressed, for the first time in my life willingly, the member for the county in which Woodville was situated, and who was a constant guest at Lord Otterford's.

Mr. Curties was tall, straight, and meagre—one long perpendicular line of humanity; who, had it not been for the peculiar carriage of his arms, might, at a distance, have been mistaken for his own walking-stick. He was very dull—very sententious, and very shallow—well-born, and priding himself highly upon the fact. He also assumed to be well-bred, and it was difficult to define why he was not so; be the reason what it might, however, there was a something wanting, trifling, perhaps, in itself, but still felt to be an omission—a social catalectic, evident at once to the initiated.

Now of all the *habitués* of Woodville, this man had always struck me as being the most uninteresting and impracticable. In conversing, he invariably *looked over* his companion; for his giraffe-like throat, enveloped in a high, rigidly-starched cravat, was never bent; and there can be no great interest in a dialogue, during which one of the speakers looks only at the crystal drops of the chandelier. A wrinkle, even in one of his gloves, would have been a relief; but Mr. Curties never wore ill-fitting gloves; and every other article of his dress appeared as if he had been inducted into it in his youth, and that they had since grown up together. His very hair was like that of no other man. It was long, and lank, and smooth, and in surface and tint exactly resembled a piece of fawn-colored satin. His eyes were light blue—very light blue, and almost round; and his eyebrows, eyelashes, and whiskers, had just escaped the danger of being described as red.

A sudden inspiration restored my good humor at once. I resolved to make an escape-valve of the honorable member! Nothing could be better. No one would accuse me of coquetry with so unsympathizing and unsentimental a being. It never occurred to me to remember that some people might consider his princely fortune as an equivalent for the absence of all other attractions; nor was I aware that he himself avowedly lived in terror of fortune-hunting mammas and establishment-seeking daughters. In short, I had never cared to ascertain that he was the "great match" of the county.

All this was very unfortunate; but I was happily unconscious of my temerity; and when I turned upon Mr. Curties the light of the most sunny smile which I could summon *à l'improviste* from amid the dark clouds of my displeasure, I was quietly congratulating myself on the acquisition of a dangler, of whom Devereux, appear when he might, must have too much self-respect to affect jealousy.

How little do women generally suspect the price at which the plainest men estimate their attractions!

If I had, indeed, committed an error, like that of Sir Peter Teazle, it brought its punishment along with it; for never did fair lady in a fit of petulance entail upon herself such a task as that which I had voluntarily undertaken. A flirtation was my object—a decided flirtation; which might reduce Sir James Dornton to his proper level, and teach him a salutary lesson. I was young, beautiful, and accomplished; I was fashionable, and an heiress; of course I could have Mr. Curties at my feet when I chose to beckon him to that enviable station; and equally of course, I could rid myself of him with a word, whenever I became wearied of his homage. I did not know the honorable member for ——. He was no *chien barbet*, to fetch and carry at the caprice of a young lady. He had no objection to the attentions of a married woman, for they could only commit herself; but the preference of a single one might commit *him*, and that was a far more serious matter. He was a "great catch," and as such, he estimated himself; and we all know that "great catches" are not to be approached like common men.

Thus I could not have possibly made a worse selection than I had done, of an instrument of vengeance; and that Mr. Curties should lend himself to my views, so composedly and collectedly as he did, must be altogether attributed to his regard for his host and my relative, Lord Otterford.

I was amused by the look of blank astonishment which spread over the features of Lady Madelaine, as she heard me invite Mr. Curties to occupy the vacant seat on the sofa beside me, and then saw me begin to play off upon him all the artillery of the most finished coquetry. She was not yet aware of the extent of my accomplishments, nor of the zeal with which I had studied to imitate her example. My unfortunate victim was evidently bewildered; I had, until that evening, so pertinaciously avoided him. I had taken so little trouble to conceal how much he bored me whenever he ventured an approach, that his pride was piqued as greatly as his vanity was wounded; and in order to avoid all suspicion of annoyance, he had constantly affected to speak of me with marked admiration. He believed that he had nothing to fear, and was consequently at his ease, which was seldom the case with him when in the society of an unmarried and marriageable woman.

It will be readily understood, under these circumstances, how completely unprepared he was for the sudden demonstrations which it was my peculiar and uncalculating pleasure to make on that particular evening. The poor man fairly lost his *à plomb*, and remained helplessly at my mercy. Conflicting feelings heightened my complexion, and deepened the fire in my eyes. I was exquisitely dressed; for, be my state of mind what it might, I was woman enough never to neglect that all-important fact. I was resolved to exhibit myself to the best advantage, and I well knew the effect of every *pose* and of every gesture of which I availed myself. I was brilliant, even witty: and to be witty beside Mr. Curties betrayed no common power. There was scarcely a subject upon which I did not touch, under cover of his monosyllabic replies; even that vampire aliment scandal hung upon my lips, and was seasoned with smiles.

Sir James stood near, with a frown upon his brow which more than repaid my efforts. My mother made a false move upon the board, and was checkmated by Lord Chaffington, to his great and somewhat too audible delight. I had evidently distracted her ideas. Mr. Curties, meanwhile, was sorely perplexed. Flattered by my unconcealed preference, and not quite decided in how far he might desire to encourage its demonstration, he did nothing but smile, and bow, and utter "yes" and "no," sparingly relieved at intervals by an ejaculation of "indeed!" He trembled lest he should be prematurely compromised. Still he was dazzled—and as that was precisely what I intended, I perceived it at once. Like all dull men, he loved to be amused when he could do it safely; so he did not make an effort to escape, and satisfied himself by giving no tangible encouragement to my sudden *engouement*.

The young marquis had rearranged the chessmen to the music of his own self-gratulations, but Lady Madelaine declined to tempt fortune a second time—she was bent upon separating me from my new companion.

"Eveleen," she said, carelessly, "as you are sufficiently recovered to exert yourself, pray, let us have some music. Sir James Dornton will, I dare say, accompany you with his flute."

I rose at once, and, extending my hand to Mr. Curties with a bland smile, requested him to lead me to the harp. "You must not forsake me now," I added, as he drew forward the music-chair: "I want some one to turn over the leaves, and I am convinced that you will do it admirably."

"I fear not," said the honorable member, hesitatingly: "I am no musician, and may embarrass you."

"By no means. I will prompt you with a nod, thus—so you have only to watch, and there can be no mistake. What shall I play?"

"You are too obliging. I would rather leave the selection to your better taste."

Sir James approached with his flute, upon which he was a proficient, and my resolution was taken at once. I selected a capriccio; upon which it was impossible for that instrument to follow, and dashed at once into its rapid and intricate movements. My manœuvre was thoroughly understood, but it did not produce the effect which I had anticipated. The baronet relinquished his instrument, but he took his stand immediately behind my chair, where he could command every word and look that passed between Mr. Curties and myself. Conscious that such was the case, I had no sooner accomplished my task than I rose and retired to a settee in the extreme corner of the room, and to my infinite satisfaction, I was immediately followed by Mr. Curties, who, as if instinctively, once more dropped into the vacant place at my side. In the next instant Sir James Dornton had turned the music-chair, and was seated opposite to us, with his back to the rest of the party.

"You are a happy man, Curties," he commenced as he turned a mocking smile upon

me. "Sooner or later all you *millionaires* are sure to carry off the favor of the young and fair from we poor devils of younger brothers. Even Miss Tilden, you see, 'the observed of all observers,' cannot withstand you; but beware, lest you should have a score of duels upon your hands."

"Now, on my honor, Sir James," stammered out the affrighted Crœsus, looking down his very long nose, and contracting the muscles of his mouth; "you mistake me altogether—I have no pretensions of the kind. This is the first occasion upon which Miss Tilden has done me the honor to converse with me."

The baronet laughed tauntingly.

"Nay, nay, do not let me alarm you," he said; "we all know that you are county property, and consequently not to be trifled with. But again, I say, beware!"

"I can apprehend no danger in Miss Tilden's society," retorted Mr. Curties with a rigid bow; "I only regret that I can profit by it for so short a time, being compelled to leave Woodville to-morrow morning, with but a very slight hope of being enabled to return during the stay of your delightful party."

I felt the blood rush to my brow. Sir James had triumphed. All the narrow-hearted suspicion and mean conceit of the wealthy bore had been aroused by his inane jest, and I had lessened myself in my own eyes most unavailingly. Do as I would, this man appeared destined to become my evil genius. I hated myself for having even evinced the slightest pleasure in his society. Master of my secret, he well knew his power; nor did any feeling of delicacy prevent his betraying a consciousness that he held me in his thrall. To increase my annoyance Mr. Curties shortly afterwards rose, and slowly made his way to the other side of the saloon; and he had no sooner vacated his seat than the baronet took possession of it, with a nonchalance and ease which seemed to imply that the proceeding was a mere matter of course.

"You must have spent a delightful hour, Miss Tilden!" he commenced, as he fell back among the cushions; "the honorable member for the county which we have just now the honor to inhabit is a delicious companion—so intellectual and charming, especially in the society of pretty women. What a formidable rival for poor Devereux! On my soul, I believe I must write and warn him of the perils which environ his Helen. Do you not think that it would be a generous act on my part?"

"I have no opinion to offer on the subject."

"*Tant mieux.* You are therefore indifferent whether the rumor of your flirtation reach him or no? This, at least, is encouraging for *nous autres*. I felt convinced that your late seclusion would prove morally beneficial; but what, in the name of all that is perpendicular, ever impelled you to turn the light of your smiles upon that unfortunate man yonder, who looks upon every unmarried woman as a drawing-room pickpocket,—a species of matrimonial *chevalière d'industrie?*"

"Your witticisms, Sir James Dornton, are too personal to be pleasant."

"Nay, nay—you are too hard upon me. Were you not an hour ago anatomizing your mamma's pretty page, my little Lord Chaffington, rather freely?"

"Am I required, sir, to justify to you either my words or actions?"

My companion fixed upon me a look that was untranslatable. It seemed at once to dare me to defy him, and to express an assent which he could not venture to put into words. But this solution I at once felt must be erroneous; and I turned away my eyes scornfully as he replied with perfect composure—

"Friendship has privileges even more stringent than that from which you shrink."

"Friendship!"

"Even so."

"But that friendship must first exist, and be admitted."

"Do you deny me the gratification of feeling it for yourself?"

"It is out of my power to do so; its reciprocity is all that I can control."

"And that reciprocity?"

"Is at least doubtful."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Sir James, elevating his eyebrows somewhat disdainfully; "I was not aware that the coquetry of Miss Tilden was quite so expansive. Is it permissible, according to your peculiar code, to admit a mere acquaintance to the bridal rein of your horse, to your solitary lounge in the grounds, and to your music-stand in the drawing-room? Come, come; you are angry, you are indignant, that just as you were angling for a new victim—a *souffre douleur*, who might enable you to escape me and my importunities—I should show the hook to the poor devil, and scare him from the bait. And why do you endeavor to avoid me? Because I speak to you of Devereux? Only say the word, and I will never so offend again."

"If I could trust your promise—"

"On my soul you may! and the rather that I should much prefer that he had never existed."

"Again!"

He affected to laugh as I uttered the warning; but he was evidently ill at ease. He was to leave Woodville the following morning for a few days. These occasional absences had been of such frequent recurrence latterly, that they had excited both remark and speculation; but Sir James had carefully concealed their object, and turned off every inquiry with a jest. On his return, he was invariably moody and thoughtful for a few hours. I knew that he had been questioned upon the subject by Lady Madelaine, who, since his visit to Rooksbey during her widowhood, appeared to have assumed a singular authority over him; and she was apparently satisfied with his explanation for she never afterward made any comment upon the circumstance. As he now sat beside me, he alluded to his departure: and in order to change the conversation, I requested him to bring, on his return, a particular piece of music which I was anxious to possess. He looked embarrassed for an instant, and then expressed his regret that he could not execute my commission, as he was not going near town. At the moment, it did not strike me that there was anything extraordinary in this fact; and I accordingly paid little attention to it. I remembered it afterward.

CHAPTER XXX.

Two days subsequently to this conversation, as I was preparing for a drive, I was summoned to my mother's apartment. She was still dressing; but when I entered she at once dismissed her women, and motioned me to a seat.

"You are in high beauty this morning, Eveleen," she said, with a gracious smile; "and one season in town has sufficed to show you the full value of your attractions, if I may judge by the coquetry which you lavished so unsparingly upon poor Mr. Curties, an evening or two ago. What was the meaning of that sudden *engouement*, I pray you? Had you really a design upon his heart?"

"I never even contemplated the possibility of his boasting such a possession," I answered, with a shrug.

"But you laid yourself out to engross his society," persisted Lady Madelaine. "Can it be that his great wealth has excited your ambition? Have you, already, learnt the value of money, and resolved to sacrifice passion to prudence?"

"I deserve to be made a jest for having sacrificed even an hour to such an automaton," I answered, impatiently. "One cannot always account for a visitation of caprice."

"Caprice!" echoed Lady Madelaine, incredulously. "However, I am glad that you were merely indulging a whim (although I would counsel you, in future, not to make your eccentricities quite so conspicuous), for I confess, that Mr. Curties is not precisely the style of person whom I should covet as a son-in-law; unless, indeed, I could secure him for Adela, of which there is little probability; for your dull men are seldom an easy prey, especially when they sleep with their heads on a rent-roll. He is by no means the Thule of my wishes, as regards yourself. I have too much affection for you, to contemplate such a sacrifice with satisfaction."

As she ceased speaking, she looked toward me, with a faint smile, as if to demand my acknowledgments. I made a slight bow, and she continued.

"I am aware"—and she said it with some little hesitation—"that circumstances may have led you to doubt the extent and warmth of my feelings toward you. My position has been a trying one; and the world had demands upon me which I could not slight. I became a mother too early; and children spring into women before the plans of their parents are matured. You are now of an age, however, to understand me better, and to do me justice. Nor is this all. You are also old enough to take a position in the world; and to this fact I have, for some time, given my most serious attention. With your beauty and your fortune, you will find no difficulty in securing an establishment. The important phase of the question is the perfect eligibility of that establishment; and, on this point, you are both too young and too inexperienced to be abandoned to your own judgment."

I was about to speak, but an imperious gesture of the hand silenced me.

"Nevertheless," pursued Lady Madelaine, hurriedly, "you will be glad to learn, that I am altogether satisfied with your deportment during the few months that we have spent together in the world (always excepting, of course, your folly with Mr. Curties, which has driven him from Woodville, to the great annoyance of Lord Otterford); and the rather, as you have taken no pains to conceal your real sentiments, which coincide with my own views. I am quite aware that I might, had I so willed it, have told you at once, and abruptly, when I summoned you to town, what those views were; but there would have been a want of delicacy in such a proceeding, from which I revolted. Satisfied that your guardians would never venture to interfere on a subject exclusively with in the province of a mother, I might have compelled you, not only to an indifferent, but even to a repugnant marriage. I disdained to do this; and, far from enacting the tyrant, or the duenna, I left you at perfect liberty to cultivate, or to decline the friendship of those by whom you were habitually surrounded. You must have perceived, if you have, indeed, done me the favor to reflect upon the whole tenor of my conduct, as regards yourself, that I have left you the complete mistress of your predilections; that I have interfered in none of your avocations; and that—ungraceful and unpleasant, as it could not fail to be, to Lord Otterford, to have a womanly daughter-in-law constantly before his eyes, and under his roof—I have given you time and opportunity enough to decide on your own fate."

"It is decided, madam—it has been long decided."

"I am rejoiced to hear it from your own lips, even although circumstances have for some time assured me that it must be so. Had you been about to commit an imprudence, I should long since have interfered; as it is, I have but to congratulate both you and myself. The only possible difficulty has been removed within the last few weeks; and, to my own approbation, I am authorized to unite that of Lord Otterford who takes the most kindly interest in your welfare."

I was bewildered—overjoyed. Still indulging the fond hope of a union with Devereux, it never occurred to me, that my mother might allude to another person. I was so overcome with delight, that, although I would fain have asked a thousand questions, I could not utter a word. I could only press the hand of Lady Madelaine to my lips in speechless gratitude.

"Enough, enough, young lady," she said, jestingly; "or I shall begin to fear that you are most unfashionably in love, and will become a proverb, after marriage, which is by no means desirable. We must have no more scenes, until I am able to congratulate you as Lady Dornton."

I sprang from my chair as though a thunderbolt had exploded at my feet. "Congratulate *me* as Lady Dornton!" I exclaimed, passionately. "Was it, then, of Sir James Dornton that you spoke, madam? Of a man who is not only indifferent, but even distasteful to me? Sir James Dornton, whom I have been accustomed, from my childhood, to see only as—"

I paused. I dared not, even excited as I was, terminate the sentence; nor was it necessary. A blush rose to the cheek of Lady Madelaine, and a cloud gathered upon her brow.

"Proceed, Miss Tilden," she said, in a cold tone, rendered slightly tremulous by the emotion which she could not altogether control; "let no feeling of delicacy toward your mother check the expression of your disgraceful and unmaidenly conjectures. I am prepared to bear even insult with patience."

"Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" I faltered out; "forgive and pity me, for you know not from what a dream of hope and happiness your last words have awakened me! You spoke of my predilections, of my preference; and I was misled by the yearnings of my own heart."

"Can you deny, that you have, for some time past, given marked encouragement to Sir James Dornton?"

"If I have done so, it has been unwittingly. How could I encourage him, when my affections were devoted to another?"

"Better and better!" exclaimed Lady Madelaine; "I now begin to comprehend the hollowness of your character. I weakly believed that your late exhibition with Mr. Curties was a mere girlish piece of inconsistency, but I now find that you act upon a system of deceit, and sacrifice every better feeling to your vanity. How do you pretend, Miss Tilden, to justify your rides, and walks, and *tête-à-têtes* by moonlight, upon balconies, with Sir James Dornton? Do you imagine that you will make the world believe you were unconscious that these things were marked and undeniable encouragement to a suit which has long ceased to be problematical to every one around you? Or can you for an instant suppose, that I shall submit to see a daughter of mine made a mark for the world's scorn! Your own conduct has decided your fate. On Sir James's return to Woodville, you will receive him as your accepted husband, without the slightest symptom of repugnance or hesitation—or, you must abide the consequences."

I wrung my hands in agony. Too late did I perceive the fearful advantage which my own thoughtlessness had given to the projects of my mother.

"In truth, you are a sad victim!" once more resumed Lady Madelaine, as she looked down upon me with withering contempt; "you are steeped in tears—and, for what? Because you are about to become the wife of an accomplished, high-born, and fashionable man, and that you will be an object of envy to half the women in town."

"I would rather die!" I exclaimed, vehemently. "I do not, I shall never love him. We should both be wretched."

"He consents to run the risk."

"He cannot be so selfish, or so base—he knows that I love another—he knows that I am beloved. He will have pity on my tears—on my despair."

My mother laughed scornfully.

"Rise, Miss Tilden; rise, and recollect yourself," she said sternly; "we are not now rehearsing a tragedy, nor am I disposed to hear you rhapsodize on the subject of your boy-lover, Mr. Devereux, whom I suppose to be the object of this tirade. Leave the remedy for his baby-passion in the hands of Sir James Dornton; he is a man of sense as well as a man of the world, and will soon make you ashamed of your extravagance. As to Devereux, he has long ceased even to remember your existence.

This taunt aroused my pride at once. I sprang to my feet, and even ventured to meet the threatening eye of Lady Madelaine without quailing. "The proof that he has not done so, I said firmly, "exists in the fact that you have exiled him from your house—his uncle's house—from the hour in which I became its inmate No, madam; I may be your victim—you may profit by the thoughtlessness which has placed my fate in your power, but you cannot deprive me of the certainty that I am beloved by Herbert Devereux."

"A noble triumph!" exclaimed my mother; "but a sorry one for both of you, if such be indeed the case; for I cannot suppose that even you, Miss Tilden, are so utterly a coquet at heart as to derive any gratification from the prospect of his sufferings; while on your own side, the inconveniences might be greater than you can possibly anticipate. Be advised, while there is yet time. Do not attempt to oppose my will, beneath which you must bend at last The wife of Herbert Devereux you shall never be. Receive with becoming submission the husband whom I have selected for you, and conquer your repugnance by remembering that you have long treated him as a favored suitor, and that you are consequently in his power. And now, retire to your room, and endeavor to make yourself presentable before you are seen by any of the guests. Not a word!" For I was again about to speak. "I shall hold no further conversation with you upon this subject, until you can discuss it in a becoming spirit of obedience."

Before she ceased speaking, she rang the bell violently, and I hurried from the room to escape the observation of her women.

I have no words in which to paint my wretchedness when I again found myself alone. All my love for Devereux had been previously weak and languid to what I felt for him at that moment; while my dislike of the baronet became comparatively stronger and more bitter. I hated myself also for the weakness which had induced me to gratify my vanity and idleness by permitting his attentions. In short, I was miserable; and so far from attempting to efface the traces of my agitation, I gave free vent to my tears and sobs, and encouraged the feeling of desolation and bitterness which had taken possession of me.

Suddenly I thought of my sister. She was in possession of my secret; I remembered the strength and resolution of her character. There was yet hope for me. I determined to confide to her my present sufferings, and to be guided by her advice. I had neglected her too much of late. Absorbed in pleasure, there was nothing around me to recall her image, but now that sorrow had fallen upon me, it rose vividly to my remembrance. I sat down eagerly to my desk, wiped away my tears, and commenced forthwith the outpouring of my grief.

I accused my mother of cold-hearted selfishness, and Lord Otterford of unwarrantable interference. I apostrophized Sir James Dornton; I declared my detestation of him in no measured terms; and I upbraided myself for having

solely as I had done. My letter was full of passionate ejaculations, of incoherent vows and exclamations. Finally, having exhausted the vocabulary of expletives, I asked for counsel—humbly, earnestly, as I would have implored the assistance of an oracle; and then I closed my long and lamentable epistle, and began to count the hours which must elapse ere I could hope for a reply.

Sir James Dornton was still absent, and this, at least, was a relief. I excused myself on the plea of a violent headache to my mother and her guests, and remained during the rest of the day in my own room; but on the morrow I did not dare to repeat the experiment. I descended therefore to the drawing-room, and underwent the condolements of the party on my relapse with the best grace I could assume; while, as regarded my mother, I was *quitte pour la peur*, for I discovered not the least change from her ordinary manner. She turned her cheek toward me with the usual indifference, criticised some detail of my dress, and then employed me in replying to half a dozen uninteresting notes which she had received by the last post. No one would have suspected the scene of severity and anguish which had so lately passed between us.

Two days subsequently, on awaking in the morning, I perceived a letter lying on the chair beside my bed. I seized it eagerly. It was, indeed, the reply of my sister. My fate would now be determined. My heart beat violently. Would she advise resistance? and, if so, should I have courage to resist? Would she counsel me to yield? Would she bid me fling away all hope of happiness? For a moment I dreaded to open the letter; but at length, unable longer to control my impatience, I tore it hastily from its envelope, and read as follows:—

"Do not anticipate, I entreat, any advice from me. There are circumstances in which the heart alone should be the counselor, and yours appears to me to be a case in point. If you are not beloved, your fate is frightful. If you are—believe me when I tell you that there exist others far more worthy of pity than yourself."

I was thunderstruck. The letter had neither commencement nor signature. The writing was disjointed, rambling, and altogether unlike the usual neat and carefully-formed characters of my sister's hand. Brief, abrupt, and obscure, the matter of the communication was as unexpected as the manner. I read and reread it half a dozen times, hoping to detect some hidden meaning, or to convince myself that it was a counterfeit, but I could not succeed in doing either; and at last, worn out with disappointment and mortification, I tore it into a thousand fragments

"It is easy for her to make a mock of my misery," I murmured bitterly to myself. "How can she appreciate the wretchedness of marriage with a man whom I cannot love, and of separation from one to whom I am devoted? How deluded have I been to imagine, because she talked bravely when no trial was near, that she would be as courageous or as clear-sighted when that trial came! I have indeed leant upon a reed! 'There are others more worthy of pity than myself!' Perhaps so. There is the leper on his desolate pallet, watching for death in solitude and suffering—there is the galley-slave, chained to the oar, and laboring away his heart beneath the lash of his captors—there is the beggar in his rags, gaunt with famine, with his death-sobs frozen in his throat. I wanted no oracle to tell me this—I asked for comfort, for solace; and her words, scanty as they are, have but increased the evil. 'If I am not beloved,' she says. Even here, where I am to be victimized, she raises a frightful doubt—'If I am not beloved, my fate is frightful'—but of this love, little as I prize it, I am at least assured. Why should Sir James pursue me, despite my repugnance, unless he loved me? And yet—his words, his looks, his very attentions, are scarcely those of a lover. When beside me, he is frequently absorbed in sudden thought; he has the appearance of a man whose heart is elsewhere—or whose affections are exhausted. What if his affected passion should be a mere fancy—a mere caprice? What must inevitably be the result of such a marriage? Or, worse still"—and here a new terror grew upon me—"what if he should be the tool of Lady Madelaine's cold-hearted policy — if it should be to please her that he has offered himself, to prevent my union with Herbert Devereux? To make me miserable, that he is about to *sacrifice* himself? I have youth, beauty, fashion, station—all that can flatter his ambition; he is no longer young—he has long been the slave of my mother's will. Alas! alas! I have fallen upon the bitter, the mortifying truth!"

Again I wept; but, after a time, I began to feel ashamed of my own cowardice. "After all," I said mentally, "I cannot be compelled to marry this man. My mother is tyrannical and self-willed, it is true, but she is not omnipotent. I have my weapons, even as she has hers. I have been too easy, too familiar, too condescending to Sir James. I will show him, and all the world, that I am aware of this. He shall now see that I am not, like himself, a mere tool in the hands of others."

I was faithful to the pledge thus tacitly made. Sir James, on his return, no sooner approached me, than I armed myself in all the panoply of my self-appreciation, and became *porcupinish* in my mood. Not a smile rewarded his liveliest sallies: not an acknowledgment repaid his most labored attention. I was worse than icy—I was hostile. The baronet was evidently unprepared for this sudden change; and I fear that he was clever enough to detect at once how great a share *temper* held in the affair. Be that as it may, however, it is certain that he was by far too good a tactician to be discountenanced for so small a matter: he only altered his system.

He became reserved and circumspect. To his habitual style of gallant, and occasionally caustic conversation, succeeded respect, sentiment, and deference. He seldom directly addressed me, but he spoke to others in my hearing in those tones and terms which interest and flatter our sex, even despite our prejudices. This able metamorphosis annoyed me. My temper failed more and more as I became conscious that I was losing ground. Frequently when I had prepared myself to utter some cut

ting remark, a sudden cloud which gathered upon his brow—a melancholy which darkened in his eyes — made its utterance impossible. Astonished, perhaps conciliated, by these evidences of feeling, I began to hesitate: I might probably have wronged him; what was I to conclude? Could it be that what was in the first instance the mere wish to please my mother, had grown into a feeling toward myself, over which he could no longer exercise a control that would have spared his pride? The idea was at least a flattering one: and I found myself well inclined to indulge in it. Not once did it occur to me that my fortune might play a prominent part in the farce. At eighteen, girls never think so meanly of themselves as to believe that the possession of their affections can be put into competition with that of their purse, or that a few thousands, more or less, may have power to control their destiny; at eight-and-twenty, when the world has educated them, they modify their creed.

I was not sorry when I had argued myself into the belief that I had done Dornton injustice. I relaxed a little, in consequence, in manner as well as in feeling; but my concession extended no further. As a husband I could not look upon him with anything save aversion. Amid all my folly and frivolity I never forgot Devereux, and never ceased to look forward with hope to his reappearance.

CHAPTER XXXI.

My mother looked on in silence. I attributed her neutrality to weariness of the conflict. I wronged her; I should have placed it to the credit of her diplomacy. She was suffering the enemy to exhaust his strength in idle skirmishing. Dictatorial as she was, she did not wish my marriage with her *protégé* to appear one of compulsion. She was too well-bred to volunteer herself as a spectacle to all her circle; and she had wit enough to see that in my then frame of mind, opposition would only serve to strengthen my determination. The contest between us was unequal. Like her countrymen, the Campbells, Lady Madelaine was content to "bide her time;" while she well knew that the factitious spirit of courage which I had so suddenly summoned would moulder away of itself, if left disregarded, like a column of sandstone. The material of which it was built up was not of a nature to endure. She had communicated her will, and now preserved a dignified silence, leaving the rest to the attentions of Sir James, who might well be supposed to possess more than sufficient experience of the sex, to overcome the stubborn will and childish attachment of a mere girl.

Dornton was, however, by no means so certain of his ultimate success as my mother assumed to be. My conduct was too consistent to have grown out of a momentary whim; and he was, probably, less satisfied with my partial return toward courtesy, than he would have been under a persistence in the ultra measures which I originally adopted. He felt that he made no progress, and, without doubt, he communicated his conviction to Lady Madelaine; for the avalanche suddenly fell when I had ceased to dread its descent.

A new summons to her dressing-room struck a chill to my heart. The hour was indeed come! I sank trembling into a chair, and for a few minutes was unable even to ask myself if I had strength left to contend. Gradually, however, I recovered some degree of self-possession, and began to make formidable promises to my own heart. The happiness of Devereux depended upon my firmness—of this fact I had never permitted myself to entertain a doubt—therefore I was in honor bound not to yield. I argued upon false premises. I little anticipated the trial which awaited me.

"Take a seat, Miss Tilden," said Lady Madelaine coldly, as I entered her apartment. "I shall not detain you long; nor can I bestow much time upon the subject which I am about to discuss with you for the last time. In the first place, I must express my sincere regret that I ever made any portion of my personal happiness dependent upon your prosperity in after-life. My solicitude has been thrown away—but let that pass. No person of dignified mind could have been prepared for the system of heartless coquetry which you have so pertinaciously pursued with Sir James Dornton—a man, who in every phase of his character merited far different treatment. I was about to make you feel your error, and to exact from you not only a prompt but also a cheerful obedience to that expediency, and I will also say propriety, which you have so grossly outraged—I offered to pledge myself to Sir James Dornton that you should be his wife within two months from this time; but he would not receive my pledge. Too delicate to owe you possession to an act of maternal authority, and satisfied, as he asserts, that he has failed to gain your affections, he renounces all pretensions to your hand. Do you understand this, Miss Tilden? Sir James Dornton declines the alliance! This is your first step in life. Is it not a flattering *début*? You are silent; and perhaps you are right, for it is a circumstance by no means agreeable of discussion either to yourself or your family. We have now done with it forever."

I began to breathe more freely; I even rose to leave the room.

"One word more before we part," pursued my mother in the same cold and caustic tone as before. "Although the cause is removed the effects remain. My daughter, Miss Tilden, is already a marked woman—marked as a heartless coquet. You are at the mercy of Sir James and men who have been jilted as he has been by you, possess little of that forbearing virtue. Had I contemplated your appearance in town for a second season unmarried, your fate would ere now have been fixed forever. Sir James Dornton is not an obscure individual whose sarcasm would fall harmless; he is a man of fashion and figure, popular, witty, and distinguished; whose first sneer would have blighted your prospects. Fortunately, however you are rescued from this peril. Your inconsistent and incautious conduct has determined me no longer to burden myself with the responsibility of your guardianship, or to suffer you to have any voice in any measure in which you are concerned. It is, therefore, sufficient to inform you that I have this day had the grati-

cation to receive from Mr. Curties a letter, in which he formally makes you an offer of his hand and fortune."

"From Mr. Curties!" I exclaimed, in amaze.

"Nay, Miss Tilden, why do you affect such violent surprise?" asked my mother, disdainfully. "Had you indeed so very humble an idea of your personal attractions, as to believe that you could with impunity make so marked an attack upon any unmarried man, as that which you indefatigably carried on against Mr. Curties during the last evening of his stay at Woodville? If so, pray undeceive yourself. The result—the triumphant result—of your skill is before you. The gentleman acknowledges himself conquered, and will present himself in form three days hence, to receive my answer. I shall not, however, keep him so long in suspense. That answer will be decisive. I acknowledge both your obligation and my own to Mr. Curties; he has saved our honor; and I have now only to remind you that you are to prepare yourself to meet him as a man so soon to be your husband should be met."

"I cannot be awake," I murmured to myself, as I swept my hand across my forehead, and endeavored to still the beating of my temples, which was almost audible; "it must be a frightful dream!—a hideous nightmare! No, madam," I exclaimed suddenly, shaking off the panic terror which had seized upon me;—"no, madam; you seek in vain to terrify me. You cannot have such a project. Have you never, then, read the German tale of the living man who was attached to a corpse and so thrust forth to exist as he might? the quick and the dead brought together in unnatural contact—the breathing and the breathless linked each to the other by a hateful and revolting bond? Do you talk of me and Mr. Curties as man and wife? do you think that I could exist a month beneath his roof in such a character? If I have acted weakly, idly, I will not shrink from any just rebuke; but such a threat as this is refined cruelty, which I cannot, faulty as I am, have deserved."

"I know not what you may consider to be your deserts, Miss Tilden," replied Lady Madelaine, perfectly unmoved by my agony; "I am only cognizant of the consequences which your peculiar system of conduct has entailed upon you. Your baby-love business with Herbert Devereux made you at once the amusement and the prophetic theme of my drawing-room. I doubt much whether, at the period of my leaving Rooksley for town immediately after my discovery of your extreme levity, you believed that I was at all occupied by speculations for your welfare; but in that, as well as in many other things, you were both wrong and unjust. I looked round upon all the eligible men in my circle; but I did not see there one whom I could dare to hope, would, despite your fortune, assist you to repair the past. It was not until after the death of your father that, profiting by an accidental influence over Sir James Dornton, I induced him to consent to offer himself as your suitor."

As my mother sententiously uttered this offensive declaration, I felt as though my wounded vanity, and, still worse, my womanly pride, prostrated in its holiness and purity, would have suffocated me. Lady Madelaine looked toward me, as if she were prepared for some comment upon her words; but my emotion was so great that I could not articulate a syllable.

"Yes," she pursued, following up what she evidently believed to be her triumph; "fortunately for you, misguided girl, who had already called down remark by your inconsequent behavior, Sir James Dornton had sufficient regard for my feelings to—"

I recovered my self-government in an instant; the excess of my indignation and the extremity of my situation rendered me calm to an extent which surprised myself.

"It is, indeed, matter of self-gratulation to me," I said firmly, as I raised my eyes steadily to hers, "that, when it becomes necessary to repair the effects of my misguided conduct, your ladyship, who are, of course, altogether irreproachable in your relations with the other sex, should have chanced to possess so great an 'accidental influence' over a man generous enough, when he became convinced that he could not make himself master of the fortune and fashion of the mother, to condescend to exchange for them the fortune and youth of the daughter. But, madam, even as the mother *would* not, so also the daughter *will* not."

I shall never forget the rage of Lady Madelaine—her quivering lips were as white as her forehead; her hands were tightly clenched; and for an instant I believed that she would strike me; but after a brief struggle, she unclasped her fingers, and fell back in her chair, as she demanded the meaning of my words.

"It is simple, madam," I answered; "and it will suffice to tell you that I remember the visit of Sir James to Rooksley during your first period of widowhood; your long interview, and, above all, your mutual reappearance in the drawing-room; he, gloomy, embarrassed, and taciturn; you, radiant with ill-concealed triumph."

"And what more, Miss Tilden?"

"Nothing; save that I will never marry the rejected suitor of my mother."

"Truly, you do well," said Lady Madelaine with a smile of defiance, "to remind me that we have digressed from our original subject. You perceive that, fortunately for you, there will be no necessity for you so to degrade yourself; for—to pursue my sketch of your past prowess—you had no sooner made yourself the theme of half the county by your encouragement of the man whom you now affect to despise, and cast him aside in his turn, than Mr. Curties presents himself, and saves, as I have already remarked, both your own honor and mine."

I was suddenly flung back to earth again by the mention of that hated name.

"I would rather die than marry Mr. Curties!" I exclaimed vehemently; for once more I was overcome by my agitation.

"But Sir James Dornton has resigned his pretensions—"

"I will not be the wife of either," I said, resolutely.

"The declaration is impotent," was her reply; "I will not even offer you the alternative of returning to Rooksley, for such a concession

would only expose me to a probable renewal of the same mortifications. Indeed, your path is at once plain and imperative. Sir James has, as I have already informed you, withdrawn any claims which he had founded upon your good faith. More generous than yourself, he uttered no accusation which he could not prove—gave utterance to no suspicions which he could not justify; and at my first mention of my intention of compelling you to fulfil the hopes which you had not scrupled to create, he did what few men would have had sufficient pride or honor to have done—he declared his resolution to abandon his suit at once. I have already hinted to you what may be the after-consequences of his estrangement; and it is now, moreover, too late to calculate their probable effect in the world. You are fortunate in having secured a new suitor who is ignorant of your antecedents at so eventful a moment."

I was so terrified by the coloring which Lady Madelaine had so ingeniously given to the past, that all my courage abandoned me. I forgot how impossible it was for her to compel me to a hateful marriage—I forgot the pledge which I had given to my own heart to be worthy of the love of Devereux—I forgot Devereux himself. I thought only of the rigid, cold, impracticable Mr. Curties, with his endless monosyllables and untiring self-appreciation. Was *he* to be the climax of my dreams?—the partner of my after-life! The vision was too bitter to support. Every other feeling gave way before it; and, fairly conquered, I cast myself at the knees of my obdurate mother, and gasped out between my sobs—"Have pity on me!—have pity on me!"

I was too wretched, too thoroughly prostrated in spirit at that moment to remember what a triumph this scene would have been to Adela, could she have witnessed it; how complete a justification it would have proved of all her doubts and of all her prophecies. I was wholly absorbed in self; my pride and my passion were alike dormant.

"No tragedy, I entreat, Miss Tilden," said Lady Madelaine, waving me away; "I can brook no further contradiction. I am indignant at this perpetual disobedience, and will no longer encourage it by the weakness which I have hitherto displayed."

Overwhelmed by the cold decision of her tone, I attempted no reply. I buried my face in the cushion of her *fauteuil*, and wept.

"You fatigue my patience and outrage my pride, Eveleen," she pursued, after a pause; "pray, endeavor to be rational. Retire to your room; or, if you persist in remaining here in defiance of my wishes, cease to make yourself ridiculous, and tell me upon what line of conduct you have decided?"

There was a slight softening in her tone as she concluded her address, which once more awoke in me something like hope. I raised my head, and with clasped hands I faltered out, "Save me—oh! save me from this hateful marriage!"

"I cannot, consistently with your future welfare."

"Send me back to Rooksley—to Scotland—anywhere—let me not be heard of again by the world which has judged me so harshly—I will submit to any exile; but do not compel me to become the wife of a man whom I should infallibly detest."

"If you have no better arguments than these to advance, they will produce no effect upon me," replied my mother. "You can neither return to Rooksley nor to Scotland; we are not enacting a romance. You must marry Mr. Curties, since you did not consider Sir James Dornton worthy of your hand; and if you do not submit with a good grace to a marriage which you have brought upon yourself by your own levity, I shall, without further hesitation, exert my authority, and compel you to pay a proper regard to the dignity both of yourself and your family."

"All is then over!" I exclaimed, as I rose, "and I have nothing left but to die."

Lady Madelaine laughed contemptuously. "From what novel did you learn that phrase, child? It is utterly absurd. A woman does not die because she sacrifices her inclination to her duty. I gave a proof of that very trite truth when I married your father."

I disdained, wretched as I was, to reply to so coarse a taunt.

"Are you not ashamed," she pursued, "to play so poor and mean a part? I have no taste for melodrame, especially when it is got up under my own roof. You will multiply these extravagances without the slightest success; and I consequently advise you to act at once like a rational being, and to accept, as becomes you, a destiny which you cannot either control or avert."

I still stood half-suffocated with sobs, and silent.

For a few minutes my mother also forbore to speak. She had cast herself back in her chair, and appeared to be revolving some project in her mind. I watched her narrowly. At length she once more turned towards me, and said slowly—

"If I only consulted your deserts, Eveleen, I should not swerve from one single resolution which I have declared to you; but I cannot, even exasperated and wounded as I am, forget that I am still your mother. I cannot coldly abandon you to what you declare would be certain wretchedness; and I will therefore venture to take upon myself to hold out to you once more the chance—I may indeed say, the certainty—of happiness. I leave you free to choose between Mr. Curties and Sir James Dornton; for I am so well assured of the friendship of the latter, that I feel satisfied of his compliance with my wishes, when I represent to him that you have repented of your folly; but you must decide at once. I am now going to reply to the letter of Mr. Curties; he shall not be cannot, under the circumstances, be left in suspense or doubt for a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. Lord Otterford has interest in the county, which may be ruined by rupture with a person so locally influential. forbid you to utter another word, unless it be to express your decision."

The alternative was a bitter one; but the difference between my two suitors was so great that, had selection been the only difficulty, could not have hesitated for a moment; even as it was, the idea of becoming the wife of Sir James was less distasteful to me than it had

nitherto been, because the personal and social defects of his rival brought out his own qualities in bright relief. Of him I could not, at least, be ashamed. He might make me wretched, but he would never make me blush; nevertheless I could not utter the word which was required of me. I still expostulated, still pleaded—the image of Devereux once more rose up before me, and I regained a little courage; but I was no match for the strong will of Lady Madelaine. She drew her writing-table toward her; selected a crow-quill from the desk, with as much care as though she had been about to transcribe her first billet-doux; and then addressing me once more, she asked with perfect composure—

"Have you decided the fate of Mr. Curties, Miss Tilden? I am about to announce it to him before the letter-bag is closed. Shall I summon him to Woodville, or give him his *congé* until our departure?"

"Oh, for pity's sake, let me never see him again!" I implored through my tears.

"Then you are prepared to become the wife of Sir James Dornton!"

"He has withdrawn his suit."

"Do not trifle with me, Eveleen; I have already told you that I do not despair of my influence with Sir James."

"But would you subject your own daughter, madam, to the humiliation of seeing her hand accepted as a favor to herself?"

"Assuredly not. I am not so ignorant of the world, or of the nature of men. I shall persuade Sir James that you only acted as you have done, because your coquetry would not be satisfied without he submitted to the slights and trials wherewith you were pleased to visit him, and that you now see your error."

"But even this—"

"Enough, enough!" interposed Lady Madelaine impatiently; "have you left yourself another choice? Once more—what am I to reply to Mr. Curties?" and she dipped her pen into the ink.

"That I am about to become Lady Dornton," I murmured almost inaudibly.

"What an effort of courage!" exclaimed my mother, shrugging her shoulders: "and now go to your room, and bathe your eyes. I can converse with you no longer at present, and must be careful in the wording of my letter.—It is by no means easy to tell a gentleman, with proper courtesy, that he is rejected."

I waited no further bidding, but rushed from the room, just as Lady Madelaine was preparing to throw herself upon the sofa, in order to obtain a little repose after her unwonted exertion. It never occurred to me, poor innocent! that I had been duped. It never struck me that the letter of Mr. Curties, of which I had heard so much, remained invisible. I little suspected, in short, when I cast myself upon my knees, to weep out the bitterness of my sorrow, and to endeavor to collect my thoughts, that Lady Madelaine and Lord Otterford were laughing together over the mystification of which I had been made the victim.

Lord Otterford was revenged.

CHAPTER XXXII.

I did not see my mother again in private for the next four days. When I had succeeded, if not in mastering my emotion, at least in looking more distinctly upon my actual position, I accused myself bitterly for the weakness which I had betrayed; and resolved, without further delay, to declare the impossibility of my adhering to the promise which had been extorted from me. Notwithstanding this determination, however, it was a considerable time before I could summon sufficient resolution to encounter once more the anger and indignation of Lady Madelaine, strengthened, as I was conscious that they must be, by what she would not fail to denounce as a fresh exhibition of my levity. I did, nevertheless, so far conquer my terror, as to send Joséphine to her dressing-room, with a request that she should receive me for a few instants; and never shall I forget the state of agitation in which I awaited the permission I had sought. I might, however, have spared myself the suffering. My mother had doubtlessly little trouble in convincing herself of the purpose for which I sought the interview, and her reply simply announced that she should see me at table.

I felt, even while I despised myself for the weakness, like a reprieved criminal. I was compelled to confess in my own heart how much I feared her, as a sensation of intense relief grew upon me with the conviction, that before witnesses I had nothing to apprehend from her violence. Woodville was still full of guests; the absence of Sir James and Mr. Curties had left but a small blank; and the house was a constant scene of gaiety and amusement. Still, although I hugged myself under a sense of present security, and tried to believe that, even as it had chanced to many of my favorite heroines, *something* would and must occur to prevent the fulfilment of Lady Madelaine's project, I could not altogether forget that by my inertness I was strengthening her power.

How often did I sigh for a portion of Adela's firmness—how often did the tears spring into my eyes as I remembered our separation, which deprived me of her advice and support at so critical a moment. During my hours of triumph and dissipation I seldom thought of her; and her memory, even when I did so, was always productive to me of mortification and annoyance. Her cold and constrained letter had closed my heart against her; but now, in my sorrow and in my uncertainty, I forgot all, save the decision of character which had at times appeared to lend me a portion of its own strength, and as I wept over myself I regretted her.

My mother, before our guests, was all suavity and kindness; she created opportunities for the display of my accomplishments; and even, although rarely, forgot Lord Chaffington for a few moments, to occupy herself with me. In the bearing of Lord Otterford there was something which displeased me. That he was cognizant of the struggle which had taken place between Lady Madelaine and myself, I could not for an instant doubt; and yet there was a lurking smile playing about his mouth as he looked toward me, and an affectation of exaggerated respect in his manner, which was anything rather than conciliating to my temper, or agree-

able to my taste. All the rest of the circle were as idle, as pleasure-seeking, and as selfish as ever. Not one of them searched beneath the surface—why should they? There is nothing which worldlings find so much trouble in forgiving as the sorrow of one of their associates: it breaks in upon their personal comfort—it dislocates the chain of their ideas—it brings them back to the realities of life. In short, if by some unguarded demonstration of sympathy they chance to draw down upon themselves a confidence of suffering, it sounds in their ears like the shriek of the mandrake, which brought ruin upon him who called it forth.

Thus I was cast wholly upon myself; and once I almost formed the resolution of writing, to claim the counsel and assistance of Lady O'Halloran; but this my pride forbade: I could not brook that she should learn how utterly her kind and motherly advice had failed in its object; I could not calmly sit down to tell her that I had lost all authority over my fate by my own idle imprudence; and thus this rational and honest purpose was blighted in the bud.

At noon, on the fifth day succeeding our interview, I was once more informed that Lady Madelaine desired to see me in her morning-room. In spite of my better reason I still hoped; and the rather, as I had heard Lord Otterford inform one of the guests on the previous evening, that Sir Herbert and Lady Devereux were hourly expected at Woodville. I almost forgot my fears as I remembered this. Without doubt Captain Devereux would be their companion; and, perhaps ——! I, however, had not time to follow up the inspirations of my brightening fancy; and it was with a flushed cheek and a flashing eye that I found myself in the presence of Lady Madelaine.

"Upon my word, Miss Tilden," she said, as she looked attentively upon me, "you owe me a greater obligation than you can ever repay. I have made you reasonable; and, as my reward, I now see you by far handsomer than you had ever yet appeared to me. Nothing could be more fortunate. Sir James will pride himself the less upon his generosity."

These words sufficed to destroy the charm. I seated myself in silence, while I felt the blood chill and curdle at my heart. The effect was visible; for my mother hastily added, as she rose partially from her chair, What is the matter, Eveleen? Are you faint? Shall I ring for my woman?"

I shook my head in silence.

"This is immensely provoking!" murmured Lady Madelaine petishly. "I never saw a girl who took so much pains to disfigure her beauty, and to grow old before her time. Pray, exert a little more self-command, Miss Tilden, and remember that you are no longer a child. Rely upon it, that no husband will accommodate himself to the incessant vapors in which you indulge."

The tears fell silently upon my cheeks.

"This is intolerable!" again murmured my mother; "and had better at once be brought to an end." As she spoke, she rang the table-bell, which stood beside her; and desired the servant, who almost immediately appeared, to request that Sir James Dornton would favor her with his company for a few minutes in her own sitting-room.

I bounded from my chair.

"Yes, Eveleen," she said, as she marked my action, "Sir James is here. I have already seen him; but, as I wished to spare you both, I thought it better that you should meet, for the first time as affianced lovers, in private. All opposition is now too late. Let me not have to complain of you in this instance, or I vow to you that I will recall Mr. Curties by to-morrow's post, and you shall become his wife within six months."

I knew my mother's iron will too well to doubt her for an instant; nor, even had I possessed resolution at that moment to contend, should I have had time to do so; for, as she ceased speaking, I heard steps in the library, whence Lady Madelaine's room opened; and, before I could have uttered a word, the door fell back, and Sir James entered, and closed it carefully behind him.

I had meanwhile rushed to the window to conceal my tears, and stood there, half-buried among the curtains.

"Eveleen at last renders you justice, my dear Sir James," said my mother, as he moved toward her; "and we both hope that you will pardon all her past coquetry. It was, as I told you, the inspiration of her head, and not of her heart, and she is heartily ashamed of it; nay, I am not quite sure that it has not cost her a few tears; for, when she first entered the room she was radiant, while now she is as pale and wan as Desdemona. Will you promise to forget the past?"

The baronet bowed profoundly; and then approaching me, he took my hand and raised it to his lips, despite the inclination to prevent it which I dared not betray. "Miss Tilden is too handsome," he said with grave courtesy, "not to be pardoned for the wish to make so great a happiness as that which I am now permitted to anticipate, the reward of some suffering. She was anxious, perhaps, to make me purchase the triumph of her hand from herself, rather than to owe it to the intercession of her family; and her resolution is very flattering to me. I have neither right nor inclination to complain At whatever price so great a boon may be obtained, it can never equal its value."

I bowed coldly and in silence; my pride had been wounded by the apologetic words of my mother, and I revolted at both the tone and manner of my unwished-for suitor.

"I have warned Eveleen that we must have no more flirtations with Mr. Curties," said my mother with a forced laugh.

"I am less exacting," was the instant reply of Sir James. "I think it, on the contrary, vastly amusing; and if, at the same time, it amuses Miss Tilden, I see no reason why she should refuse herself so innocent a gratification. No, no; it is by no means of Mr. Curties that I should feel inclined to be jealous."

The malicious emphasis of his last phrase was not lost upon me. I bit my lips with suppressed rage, but I compelled myself to silence.

"Is Lady Devereux arrived?" asked my mother, as if anxious to change the conversation; "I thought I heard the sound of wheels upon the gravel before your entrance; but, as

had given orders not to be disturbed, no visitor was been announced."

"Yes, she is here—all animation and brilliancy; and will think every minute an hour until she has seen you."

"I will not defer the meeting any longer; my welcome is as ready as it is sincere," said my mother, rising from her chair, and advancing to the door of the library.

I understood her intention at once; I was to be left *tête-à-tête* with Sir James, but for this I had neither strength nor temper; and, accordingly, I withdrew with a stately courtesy from beside him; and, as she disappeared through one door, I escaped by the other.

I hoped that, once alone again, I should become more calm, but I was wrong. I only felt the wretchedness of my position more acutely; and the momentary hope in which I had so idly indulged served to render my increased disappointment the more bitter. It was with a feeling of powerlessness and despair that I sat down to review every phase of my situation in detail. I called up the past—dwelt upon words and looks that I had hitherto almost forgotten; and lingered over them long, very long—but I did not shed a tear; I examined, rigorously and resolutely, my conduct toward both Sir James and Mr. Curties; and, although I was compelled to admit that it had been childish and inconsistent, still I could not bring myself to believe that it authorized the tyranny with which I had since been treated. But when I at last began to reflect that I was now, and by my own tacit consent, the affianced wife of Sir James Dornton, the discarded suitor of my mother—for of that fact I never for a moment entertained a doubt—then again my tears burst out afresh, and for a few seconds I thought that I should have suffocated. Nor was this all. The scene of the morning was still visibly before me; and how had my proffered hand—for it had indeed been proffered, and not asked—how had it been received? With a cold bow and a few studied sentences. I felt that now indeed I was dishonored; that now, indeed, my dignity was humbled. Had not the man to whom I was to be tied for life been solicited to accept me? Had he not been asked to forgive all that he disapproved?—and had he not disdainfully made known to me at once that I was free to smile upon a rival, without one apprehension of wounding either his pride or his self-love?

Let any woman, accustomed to the voice of adulation, and more, to the accents of passion, place herself for an instant in my position; and then let her confess how much more readily she would encounter some real sorrow, which, while it crushed her heart, still spared her self-respect.

How differently would Devereux have acted at such a moment! We are all so apt to appreciate ourselves at the value set upon us by those who love us best, that I was thoroughly *désorientée* by the events of the few last weeks; and my thoughts once more fastened upon Herbert. "Ah!" I mentally exclaimed, "what would have been his indignation if he had seen my mother soliciting, in my behalf, the indulgence of Sir James Dornton? And I have calmly submitted to this degradation—I have, coward as I am, consented to receive as a suitor the man who, at such a moment, approaches me with covert insult!"

These reflections almost maddened me. I felt as though I should become delirious. I was frightened at myself. Once I rose, in a state of desperation, resolved to seek Lady Madelaine, and to declare to her, even though she should be surrounded by her guests, that I would not become the passive tool of her exacting pleasure; but a fresh terror soon grew upon me, and her threat of recalling Mr. Curties once more chained my steps.

I sent to beg that I might be excused from appearing at dinner; but my request was peremptorily refused. I consequently revenged myself in the only way possible to me; and enraged Joséphine by a careless and ill-assorted costume, which rendered me odious in my own eyes. I was, moreover, as pale as marble; and there was a dark circle about my swollen eyes that betrayed the tears I had so lately shed. I had nerved myself for a reprimand, for I was callous to all minor annoyances; but I ought to have understood my mother better. She had reserved for me a trial infinitely greater.

As I had delayed my appearance until after the second dinner-bell had rung, the party were all assembled when I reached the drawing-room; and I had scarcely crossed the threshold, when Lady Madelaine exclaimed in affected gaiety—"Oh! here is the bride elect at last. Eveleen is presuming upon her privileges already. You must not encourage such pretensions, Sir James, or she will be spoiled before the termination of the honey-moon."

I stopped abruptly where I stood; I could not move forward another step; and I looked helplessly around upon the groups before me, as if awaiting some further trial of my feelings; but for once I wronged them. The sarcastic nature of the baronet, his well-known admiration of my mother, his limited fortune, and the disparity of our ages, joined to the visible suffering imprinted upon my countenance, offered no inducement to their congratulations. A dead silence followed the sally of Lady Madelaine, and I felt grateful to those who had so spared me.

Sir James, as a matter of course, led me to table. Every one, indeed, gave back as he approached, evidently acknowledging his claim.

"Poor Eveleen!" he whispered, as he drew my arm through his; "your mother is, indeed, merciless."

I looked at him in astonishment, almost expecting to detect a mockery in his eye which would belie his words; but I was mistaken. His better feelings had evidently been revolted by an indelicacy in which Lady Madelaine had sacrificed her good breeding to her ruffled temper.

Throughout the whole of the time occupied by dinner, the baronet continued to devote his entire attention to myself; but, despite all his attempts to appear gay and unembarrassed, I could perceive that at intervals he was overtaken by some painful thought, from which he had to exert considerable effort to rouse himself. Once or twice I detected a smothered sigh, which he immediately endeavored to drown under a forced laugh, frequently got up

strangely *mal-à-propos*; and altogether, I rose from table embittered against my mother, mystified by my intended bridegroom, and dissatisfied and wretched in myself.

We had no sooner reached the drawing-room, than Lady Devereux, who, during the presence of the gentlemen, had only recognized me by a nod, beckoned me to her side upon a sofa; and, after touching my cheek with her lips, began to whisper out her surprise at the news which she had just learnt of my engagement.

"Who would have expected, Eveleen, that you, who were the toy of your mother's circle at Rooksley at the period when Sir James was, if not dangler *en chef*, at least dangler *en second*, would ever have consented that matters should be reconciled in this way!—Poor Sir James! Nothing can alter the fact that he was the first favorite, although Otterford proved the most successful. However, Lady Madelaine has shown herself to be an able general."

"I do not understand you," I said, coldly.

"Really! I gave you credit for a quicker apprehension; but, perhaps, it is better as it is. At all events, I cannot resist complimenting you upon a concession which must have been very agreeable to your mother for many reasons."

"That reflection is at least consoling," I remarked, with some haughtiness.

"*Consoling*, Eveleen!" echoed the particular friend of my mother, with an eagerness which proved that she had, at length, found her text-word. "What can you mean by consoling? You were no faded and forsaken beauty, driven to a matrimonial *pis aller*. You had other alternatives; at all events, another alternative," she added, correcting herself; "why, then, do you talk of needing consolation?"

This outburst, on the part of Lady Devereux, at once astonished and bewildered me. Hitherto, she had rarely condescended to remark my existence; and now, she suddenly assumed a confidential tone and position, which left me at a loss how to proceed. That she was piqued, was sufficiently evident. Could it be because the interests of her son would suffer by my marriage with Dornton? Nothing would be more natural; but, miserable and despairing as I was, I nevertheless remembered that, in the event of my being unable to disengage myself from my tacit promise to Sir James, I should never forgive myself, when once his wife, if I had ever shown sufficient weakness to bewail my fate to an indifferent person, and, far more, to the mother of the man I loved. How dare I tell her, that my heart was still full of her son, when she saw me quietly permit myself to be announced as the destined bride of another person? All these reflections passed hurriedly before me, and I answered, still more coldly than at first; "Surely, every woman needs consolation, who is about to stake her liberty against a chance."

Lady Devereux bit her lips, and looked keenly at me. She had not anticipated so much self-possession on my part, and she was evidently disappointed. "In any case," she resumed, as she threw herself back upon the sofa and closed her eyes, as if to intimate that our conference was ended, "you will be quite secure against the censure of the world, for it cannot accuse you of having married either for wealth or for youth; or, in all probability, from that unfashionable impulse, love. You will have contracted, in every point of view, a marriage of reason—and I sincerely wish that it may prove a happy one."

I accepted my tacit dismissal, with the same apparent indifference which I had sustained during the dialogue, but my heart was bursting. It was then palpable to every one, that I was a mere passive tool in the hands of Lady Madelaine. What did the words of her angry friend imply?—Simply, that I had been sacrificed to Dornton, as compensation for her own preference of Lord Otterford! Every pulse of my heart beat with agony and wounded pride, but I was like a lion in the toils. I had no outward strength: I had only power to suffer, not to strive.

I had seated myself upon a settee, occupying a recess, which was half concealed from view by an Indian screen, and I was thus able to indulge my tears without restraint. Was every day, almost every hour, to produce a new insult! And was I to bear them tamely, and, as though I had earned them by my own misconduct? And then I thought of the mysterious and contradictory manner of Sir James, and I asked myself, if it were possible that I should ever love him. The image of Devereux rose up as I put the question, and the answer was a fresh burst of tears.

The sound of voices in the hall warned me that I must no longer indulge in such feelings, and I hastily removed the traces of my weeping, and shrunk still closer behind my protecting screen.

Lady Devereux opened her eyes, and assumed a more graceful attitude; my mother desired Lord Chaffington to seek for a bottle of Hungary water, among the essences on a side table; two or three men, who had commenced a political discussion in the dining-room, collected upon the hearth-rug to pursue it; Lord Otterford established himself beside Lady Devereux, and immediately commenced a very animated conversation in an undertone; and Sir James Dornton, after one hurried glance round the room, hastily approached my retreat.

"I fear, Miss Tilden, that you are exasperated against me," he commenced, as he placed himself at my side; "and yet, I assure you, on my honor, that I do not merit this extreme displeasure. It is true, that I ventured, like others, to aspire to your favor; but you should do me the justice to remember, also, that I withdrew when I had ascertained, beyond all doubt, that my pretensions were displeasing to you. It was your own voice which recalled me; and although, for a few instants, my pride was at war with my tenderness, and I could not avoid reverting to the unnecessary mortification to which I had been subjected, still, I did not love you the less, because I betrayed how much I had suffered from your coldness."

"All this would be well, Sir James," I replied, proudly, "if you had not previously assumed so perfect a knowledge of all my former life. As it is, I beg you to spare me every mockery of the kind. We understand each other too well. If you could command

one generous impulse, you would refuse a hand which, as you well know, has been promised to you, not freely nor willingly, but by the force of another's will. Do this, and my dislike and avoidance will at once be changed into gratitude and regard."

Sir James looked at me, for a moment, as if in pity of my simplicity; and then, endeavoring to take my hand, which, however, I coldly withdrew, as soon as he had touched it, he said, in a low and impassioned accent: "It is easy for you to talk thus, Eveleen; you, to whom I am only, as you have yourself declared, an object of dislike and of avoidance; but, as it is far otherwise with me, I *cannot* do what you ask. Your possession is necessary to my happiness. For a long time it appeared unattainable, yet still I persisted to hope; and do you imagine, that I now possess courage, willingly to resign the boon for which I have so long sighed in vain?"

"And will the hand satisfy you, when the heart is withheld, I ask, in my turn?" I rejoined. "Truly, your pride is far from equaling your pertinacity!"

"I forgive your scorn, Eveleen," said Dornton, quietly; "ere long you will do me greater justice."

"My fiat will depend upon yourself."

"As my wife—"

"That will I never be, while one chance of escape remains."

"Miss Tilden!" exclaimed my listener, in astonishment; "what am I to understand? Do you intend that I should once more be made a mark for your caprice and coquetry?"

"Sir!" I ejaculated, in my turn, and would have risen, but he held me to my seat.

"Listen, Eveleen," he said, as his eye flashed haughtily down upon me; "all these recriminations are at once idle and ill-bred. Occupied by one vain and impracticable vision, you neither do justice to yourself nor me. Be warned in time. I am not a man whom you can exasperate with safety. You may make of me a tyrant or a slave; I am now in your power; do not, I beseech you, let me see you place yourself, recklessly, in mine."

"Am I not already there?"

"Not as I mean you to understand my words. You are too handsome to be obdurate—too well-bred to be unjust. Of what do you accuse me? Of loving you! Surely, I am not alone in the transgression; although, according to your favorite system,

> 'That in the leader's but a choleric word
> Which in the soldier is rank blasphemy;'

and, moreover, as you will only have to snow yourself in the world, for another season, in order to increase a hundred-fold the number of delinquents, I do not think it reasonable, that I should be the only one called upon to suffer for the sins of the mass."

I still pouted, but I was woman enough to be somewhat touched by the turn of his argument. I was, however, far from well-disposed toward him. He exhibited too perfect a feeling of security; and, in my self-tormenting thoughts, I began to decide that I was destined to suffer every distinct mortification of which my situation was susceptible. Indignant with my mother; irritated against Sir James, whom I mentally accused of tyranny and meanness; terrified at the bare name of Mr. Curties, which always sufficed to check every demonstration of independence on my part, and utterly abandoned to those whose interests were at war with my own, I became perfectly bewildered. Sometimes I began to ask myself whether Devereux had not indeed forgotten me, as Lady Madelaine had asserted; and whether I could not live happy as the wife of Dornton. There was no efficient rival at Woodville to throw a shade over either his moral or physical advantages; the men envied and the women feared him, and I knew this.

After the brief conversation which I have just recorded, Sir James affected never again to remark my coldness. He had evidently *pris son parti*. He assumed, with an ease for which I loathed him, all the privileges of a declared lover; he became tender, anxious, and devoted. Once more he put forth all the causticity and point of his never-failing wit; all the research and charm of his well-cultivated intellect. Every one was loud in his praise; and eager to ascribe to my influence his increased powers of pleasing. In my favor, however, he made little actual progress. Moments there were in which I was, like those about me, dazzled and fascinated. His personal beauty, his perfect self-possession, and the unhesitating ease with which he discussed every subject, and decided upon the merits of every person; the scintillations of satire, half-witty and half-malicious, which occasionally placed his listeners in the position of children, who, attracted by the beauty of the wasp, entail its sting upon themselves, when they merely seek the amusement of grasping it for a moment; all these definite attributes sustained my attention and mastered my indifference. I had resolved to hate him; I even believed that I should soon succeed in doing so; but my belief was in vain. In order to hate Sir James Dornton, you must have been slighted by him; and this was not my case.

Day after day he increased in wit, in amiability, and in devotion. He created, as it seemed, a new atmosphere about me. Even Lady Madelaine no longer ventured to disturb my gradually increasing equanimity. I soon saw the futility of endeavoring to nourish my vehement dislike, so I abandoned the project, and sheltered myself under a listless indifference. No idea of ever loving him entered into my imagination. Had I not another image shrined in my heart of hearts! I felt convinced that I could never look upon him more favorably; and I rather congratulated myself that I had overcome my extreme aversion. After all, had read more than once that indifference was the state most antipathetical to passion, and most hopeless for a suitor; and I satisfied my pride that precisely to that point I had arrived and that, come what might, nothing could now alter my feeling. Dornton, however, thought otherwise. With but little moral esteem for women, and a very high opinion of himself, his confidence in his own powers was unbounded. He had vowed that he would overcome my coldness and his ingenuity, prompted by a vanity which never slumbered, was constantly exerted for the purpose.

Time passed on, unheeded by me. I forgo

-nat, sooner or later, the day must ultimately -rrive on which I should be required to fulfil my promise, and to become the wife of Sir -ames. Not a syllable had for weeks been uttered to remind me of this fact; and I had lived day after day in a sort of moral apathy, avoiding alike all retrospection and all speculation on the future; I had existed only like the ephemeris, in the moment, and for the moment. I was first aroused to something like a suspicion of the truth, by the frequent visits to town which my mother suddenly found it necessary to make; and in which, while she was only occasionally accompanied by her husband, she was always attended by the baronet. No remark was, however, made before me upon the purport of their journeys; and, for the moment, their only effect as regarded myself was an increase of demonstration on the part of Sir James, to whom these temporary absences appeared to impart fresh passion; and the presence of a hundred pretty and expensive toys which gradually accumulated about me, and of which he was the unwearied donor. I was never consulted upon any point; and I was glad of it. I had taken up my position; and I considered myself already a sufficient victim, without being required to assist in heaping the fuel for the funeral-pyre of my own happiness.

The season was about to commence, and we were preparing to leave Woodville, when my mother abruptly informed me that she had made every preparation for my marriage, which was to take place immediately after our arrival in town.

"Sir James loves you too ardently, Eveleen," she said in conclusion, "to brook the idea of seeing you made a mark for the idle attentions of a host of empty-hearted and empty-headed coxcombs; nor need I remind you that you have yourself personal reasons for avoiding as much as possible any notoriety while you remain unmarried. As Lady Dornton you may defy all malicious comment."

Even at such a moment my mother could not show me mercy.

I retired to my room. For the last few weeks I had forgotten everything, save that I was about once more to enter the world; and that, in all probability, I should again encounter Devereux. I felt that his presence might still give me strength to contend against the fate which had been forced upon me; and, cowed as I was, while I despaired in myself, I had still a hope in him. My last prop was now torn away! My destiny was accomplished. This new anguish did not, as all my previous trials had hitherto done, find a relief in tears. My eyes were hot and dry, my temples throbbed, and a suffocating sickness came over me. I had just strength to totter to the bell, to pull it violently, and to attempt to reach the sofa. I failed, however, in my purpose; before I could cross the floor, I felt a heavy weight pressing upon my brain; and, with one long piercing shriek of terror and of pain, I fainted.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

I HAVE said that the season was about to commence, and that our guests were already preparing to depart; no wonder, then, that when it was announced by the physicians, who had been hastily summoned from the nearest town, that I was suffering from a violent attack of fever of a malignant description, the house soon became deserted. Carriage after carriage rolled from the door, laden with its imperial and traveling trunks; guest after guest shook my mother's hand in silence and well-acted sympathy; and then hastened to escape from a scene of danger, and probably of death. At the end of the second day, of all the gay party which had been at Woodville, buoyant with light and laughter, none remained beneath its roof, save Lord Otterford, who had, as I afterwards discovered, a sorrow of his own to nurse; Lady Madelaine, who dared not abandon me in my extremity, and Sir James Dornton, whose absence must have ruined all his hopes.

For six weary weeks I remained stretched upon a bed of sickness. Hope and indignation had both failed at last, and I had sunk without their support. For days I was delirious, and called upon Devereux to deliver me from the torments to which I believed that my mother was wilfully subjecting me. At these periods my violence was frightful; and the extreme after-weakness consequent upon the physical efforts which I then made, reduced me to a state of helplessness impossible to describe. I could not even think; I only sought to remain undisturbed and unquestioned, and thus to be allowed to pass out of the world unconsciously.

When for a brief space my intellect returned, and that I ventured to open my eyes to the dim light which was admitted into the room, they invariably fell upon Dornton, who appeared never to move from his station near my pillow For a considerable time the impropriety of this arrangement did not strike me; indeed, my ideas still continued so confused, that even when I fixed my eyes upon him, I could not determine his identity. His extreme paleness, his melancholy expression, and the negligence of his dress, were all so unlike his former self, that I experienced no painful emotion on seeing him. His silence and his sadness were soothing to my depressed spirits and prostrated strength. The sight of him did not disturb me from my moral lethargy; and I received from his hands, without opposition, the cordials which were given to me from time to time to sustain the principle of life. The fever had left me before I was conscious of his presence; and when I at length became convinced that it was really Dornton who had watched over me with such unwearying zeal, I no longer possessed either the power or the inclination to contend. The slightest exertion subjected me to long and painful faintings, which were always succeeded by an increased degree of languor and suffering; and I consequently shrank instinctively from every possibility of their recurrence.

At length I was declared to be out of danger; but I was still too weak to stand without assistance, and my chest was distressed by a hollow and racking cough. It was, however, a relief to be able to leave my room, and to watch from the window the first timid approach of spring. I had always derived my best and purest gratification from the contemplation of

nature · but after my long confinement to a sick-ed, I was more than usually susceptible to its attractions. For the first time I saw a smile upon the lip of Sir James, as he watched the tears which I shed over a twig of the flowering Judas tree which Joséphine had plucked for me in one of the shrubberies. From that day, I every morning found upon the little table which stood beside my sofa, a bunch of violets, or a cluster of wood-anemones, and I saw by the sparkle which lit up the eye of Dornton as I eagerly stretched out my hand toward them, to whom I was indebted for this simple but welcome act of kindness.

The exactions of a long convalescence are more stringent than those of sickness itself. In the hour of physical suffering, resignation and obedience are all that are required of us, and even to these we are not always equal; but as the moral and mental powers regain their tone, and become conscious of the bodily thrall by which they are held back, they create a thousand wants and wishes, which tyrannize, by their multiplicity, over the invalid; and an irritability which sets reason at defiance. Illness awakens the fears, and calls into action the sympathies of those about us—convalescence only wearies their good-will, and exhausts their patience. It is the real touchstone of affection.

Judged by this standard, Sir James was admirable. I could not form a rational wish, which was not gratified on the instant; I could not express an annoyance, for which he did not discover a remedy; he seemed to multiply himself, in order to suffice to all my caprices; was constantly on the watch to save me from casual fatigue or agitation, and silenced my mother by a look, when, by her weariness of the task imposed upon her, she was disposed to impress upon me the extent of the sacrifice.

All this was very attractive—very hostile to the undying affection which I had vowed in my heart to Devereux. I no longer understood my own feelings. Dornton had become necessary to me. I began to reflect, not certainly with pleasure, but assuredly without terror, on my engagement to him. I even asked myself, whether his continual assiduity and cheerfulness might not, perhaps, produce more home-happiness than the languid tenderness of Devereux; and the scale of feeling wavered with every new mark of affectionate attention which I received from him.

Such was the state of my mind when Sir James received a letter, which rendered it imperative that he should immediately proceed to Ireland. In the present day, such a journey would be too unimportant, and too speedily accomplished, to appear worthy of mention; but such was far from being the case at the time of which I am writing; and it was with a look of consternation that he placed the letter in my hand.

"Read it, Eveleen," he said, in an unsteady voice; "and, at least, tell me that you pity me."

I ran my eye rapidly over the paper, and then, glancing towards my mother, I strove to smile as I replied, "I feel almost inclined to reserve my pity for myself."

I had never anticipated that these few words would have produced so powerful an effect. I forgot, at the moment, how rarely I had suffered Dornton to perceive that he was essential even to my comfort; I had received, not welcomed his attentions, and this admission of his importance to my happiness overwhelmed him with triumph.

"Can you be sincere, Eveleen?" he asked delightedly, as he seized my hand, and pressed it to his lips.

"Do you believe that I am ungrateful for all your care?" I asked in my turn.

"And should you really miss me in my absence?"

"Really—and the rather that I know no one either able or willing to supply your place."

"Dare I then crave a boon in return for my poor services?"

"Assuredly, and if it be in my power to grant it, I will do so cheerfully."

"Will you pledge yourself to this?"

"Nay, now you are striving to alarm me," I said hurriedly, as a weight pressed upon my heart, and I felt my lip tremble; "name your desired reward, and I will tell you if it is in my power to bestow it."

"It *is* in your power, and your power only," answered Sir James, as he bent his knee before me, and again possessed himself of my reluctant hand. "Eveleen, you can no longer doubt either the depth or the sincerity of my affection. After living so long constantly in your presence, this threatened separation seems to me worse than death. I can imagine but one consolation—but that one—oh, Eveleen, if you have ever felt the torture of doubt, the misery of absence, you will at once understand the fulness of the consolation which I would entreat."

"I do not comprehend you," I faltered out almost inaudibly.

"Is your heart indeed so mute, Eveleen? Can it not prompt you to the truth? Were you only mine before I depart on this hated journey—would you only consent to become indeed mine—my own—my wedded wife. Speak, Eveleen, *do* I indeed deserve so great a boon?"

"It is a sorry jest, Sir James," I said, as soon as I could find breath for utterance; "would you lead me from the death-bed to the altar without a pause? Do I look like a bride, with this pale face, and this wasted form? No more of this, Sir James, if you really wish to see me one day yours."

"I dissent from you entirely, Eveleen," said my mother, suddenly looking up from a book upon which she had affected to be engaged; "and I at once declare myself in Sir James' favor. His proposal has, I frankly admit, relieved me from much embarrassment; for I have not forgotten, although it appears to have escaped your own memory, the terms upon which you have now been living together for the last three months. Do you imagine that the world has made no comment upon the circumstance? Do not deceive yourself. Your own absence during the season might not perhaps have been remarked; but with Sir James Dornton it is otherwise. His project is not only rational, but in every way expedient."

I could only bow my head, and weep.

"Let this wretched affair of Emily Vernon's teach you more wisdom," pursued Lady Mad

claime after a moment's silence, which Sir James did not attempt to break; "after wearing poor Mrs. Vernon to a shadow by making her drag her anxiety and her trouble from place to place, in order to ward off, if possible, an attack of what she quietly allowed her doctors to denominate consumption, she leaves as a bequest to her victimized mother the confession that she has died of a broken heart."

"Died!" I exclaimed convulsively. "Is Emily Vernon indeed dead?"

"She died at Nice, just as you were taken ill," coldly replied Lady Madelaine; "nor should I have mentioned the circumstance to you now, had it not been to draw the deduction, that, had she acted rationally, and not romantically, she would, in all probability, be still alive; and to remind you that there is a warning in her history."

"Dead!" I repeated once more, for my aroused memory had brought vividly before me the fair, fresh image of the gentle girl who had loved me in my childhood. "*Can* she be dead? She was so young, so fond, so loving!" And, regardless of the frown of my mother, I buried my face in my hands, and gave free passage to my tears.

"This is terrible!" said Dornton, glancing indignantly at Lady Madelaine; "at once terrible and ill-timed."

"Has Lord Otterford heard this cruel news?" I asked involuntarily, as I once more looked up.

"Of course. It is, long ere this, known throughout London. The Vernons are all exaggerated in their notions."

The secret of my stepfather's melancholy was now revealed to me. It was the working of remorse.

Nothing more was said on that occasion relatively to my marriage, and as I lay down to rest, I trusted that the subject would not be resumed until the return of the baronet; in this hope I began to reflect that perhaps our separation might prove a blessing to me in my present frame of mind, as it would enable me to judge, from the effect produced upon my feelings by his absence, of the actual state of my affections: and self-consoled by this argument, I gave another sincere sigh to the fate of poor Emily, and then resigned myself to sleep.

I was, however, a great deal too sanguine; for no later than the ensuing morning, it was again question of this hurried and ill-timed marriage. The subject was mooted by Sir James, followed up by my mother, and finally pressed upon me by Lord Otterford.

I have said little of the latter since his marriage, for, in truth, there had been little to say. The hand of Lady Madelaine had satisfied at once his passion and his ambition; and he had become a mere man of fashion, wasting his time on trifles; the best dresser, the best rider, and the least officious personage of his circle. The fashion and beauty of my mother flattered his vanity; and as he was too thoroughly conversant with her inborn egotism to have any fear that she would ever sacrifice her principles to a caprice, he left her perfectly free to avail herself as she pleased of both. Moreover, he was somewhat of a *bon vivant*, and an excellent judge of wine, and consequently exhibited a few symptoms of incipient gout, all which lowered him to the mere level of a worthy, well-bred, but by no means interesting personage.

Lord Otterford's salient quality had been his fascination, and his immense tact with "the sex;" and as he forswore all gallantry after he became a husband, although he continued to be an agreeable companion, he no longer possessed any distinctive social feature. It is a melancholy fact that the ball-room butterflies who commence life as "ladies' men," commonly close it as mere human nonentities. And it was only now—now when he had ceased all effort to render himself attractive—that the punishment of his former falsehood had come upon him—now, when the charms of the woman whom he had so long coveted had paled beneath long custom and companionship, that the vision of the fond girl who had loved him—who had trusted him—and who had died when that love became a crime, was brought against him in all its purity; and that conscience, when it rose before him, pointed with a rigid finger to her bier, and whispered that the ruin was *his* work.

In spite of the affection which I had felt for the unfortunate Emily, of the distaste which I had nourished of himself, and of my own better reason, I pitied him. He was evidently stricken to the soul, and wounded even in the midst of his self-indulgence. I alone suspected the cause of his depression; and he was so well aware that to me it could not long be a mystery, that his eye sunk before mine whenever I addressed him; and he scrupulously avoided on his part all further intercourse, than that trivial exchange of courtesies exacted by good breeding.

It was, consequently, with some surprise that I now heard him support the arguments of Dornton. He represented to me the useless cruelty of exposing the man to whom I was affianced, to the unceasing anxieties, and doubts, and apprehensions, by which he must necessarily be tormented, during an absence so little anticipated at such a moment; but there was no violence, no bitterness in his reasoning. He admitted the rationality of my objections, although he would not allow them to be of sufficient weight to counterbalance the arguments by which they were opposed. He brought before me the debt of gratitude which I had contracted—the untiring devotion of which I had been the object—the fact that I had received Sir James as a suitor—and, above all, that the period originally named by my mother for our union had long passed; and all these tangible circumstances were rendered more prominent, and more embarrassing, by the tender entreaties of Sir James, who, on his knee before me, protested that he would never rise from his position until I had consented to his happiness.

This painful and fatiguing scene endured so long that my strength gave way under the excitement. I pressed my hand to my forehead, which was throbbing almost to agony. "Be generous, Sir James," I said at last; "you know that I am unequal to this trial. How can you ask me to become your wife under such circumstances? The very movement which such an event must create about me, would, in all probability, plunge me once more into the fearful state of suffering and alienation from which I have only just escaped."

"All this, and more, has been alike anticipated and prevented, dearest Eveleen," inter

posed Sir James, as he pressed my hand to his lips and to his heart; "three days hence I must commence my journey; and, until the moment of my departure, I will not ask you to ratify my happiness. Lady Madelaine consents that the ceremony shall be performed here, in the saloon; she has already secured a promise that a special license shall be prepared against the moment in which I go to claim it; let me but call you my wife, but have the right once to clasp you to my heart before I am separated from you, and I will depart by the mail which passes Woodville in the evening, full of security in the present, and of trust and confidence in the future."

I listened breathlessly; and I instantly understood that all further opposition would be worse than useless. Everything had been prearranged and predecided. I had only to fulfil my destiny. What chance of successful competition remained to me? How could I, poor, timid, irresolute being as I was, oppose the indomitable will of a Lady Madelaine? or the passionate entreaties of a man who had for months devoted himself to my caprices?

I feel that, even now, I am endeavoring to excuse my weakness; as though the reader could not detect, in every detail of my life, the want of moral courage which made me alike the tool and the victim of every will with which my own came into contact! Enough that, as may have been foreseen, I yielded. Weary of resistance, bewildered by the arguments advanced, anxious to escape by any means from the persecution to which I was subjected; wilfully shutting my eyes to the fact, that, in order to spare myself present suffering, I was sacrificing by one word all possibility of future freedom, I at length murmured out my consent, in a voice trembling with terror and agitation.

"But remember," I said, breaking in upon the rapturous acknowledgment of my transported suitor, whose exhibition of ungovernable rapture was to me as fatiguing as his previous pertinacity; "remember, Sir James, that if I fulfil in good faith the promise which you have extorted from me, I expect no less from yourself."

"I have no alternative, and am compelled to verify it, kindest and most adored Eveleen," was his lover-like reply; "and thus, and only thus, I repeat my pledge unhesitatingly."

"And now leave me, I entreat you," I implored earnestly; "I must have time to think. My brain whirls with the excitement which our interview has caused. I feel as though my delirium would return. Have pity upon me, and leave me to myself."

My request was granted. My mother and Lord Otterford left the room at once, the latter only pausing as he passed me to raise my fingers to his lips. Sir James lingered for a moment; but, when he would have approached my sofa, I warned him away, and rang the bell for my woman. As she appeared, he looked toward me reproachfully, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Never was there so melancholy a festival as my marriage! The rector of the parish performed the ceremony, and his daughter officiated as my bridemaid. My simple morning dress of white muslin was half hidden beneath the folds of a superb shawl of Indian cashmere the gift of Sir James, and the only article of any value which I wore. Joséphine almost scolded herself into a fever for weeks afterward, whenever an allusion was made to the circumstance, while to myself it was a subject of the most utter indifference. Pale, depressed, and reckless, I must have looked to the worthy rector and his daughter, and an official-looking personage, who was presented to me as Mr. Thornton, when I entered the saloon leaning upon the arm of Lord Otterford, who had stationed himself at the door of my dressing-room, for the purpose of offering himself as my escort, more like a spectre than a bride. Sir James and my mother were already doing the honors to our reverend guest, and his pretty, happy-looking daughter; who, all blushes, smiles, and tremor, did not appear to the last thoroughly to understand how her present important office had devolved upon her.

I had been so painfully absorbed by my own fears and reflections, regrets and bewilderment, that I had taken no part whatever in the scanty preparations which were made for the marriage; and, consequently, when Dornton approached me, and placed a small casket in my hand, requesting me, in a suppressed voice, to present it to Miss Grenval, I did so mechanically with as cheerful a smile as I could summon to my lips; nor did I take the slightest interest in the action to which I had been prompted, until I was aroused from my state of moral lethargy by the delighted comments of the happy girl, who was soon occupied in adorning herself with the pearls which it had contained.

I looked at her in wonder and in envy. I had never known the joy which such a gift could produce, upon one unaccustomed to the costly toys which form a necessary portion of the existence of the wealthy and the idle; and, as she stood before a glass, arranging her newly-acquired treasures upon her person, I lingered over her glowing cheeks, her sparkling eyes, and her low, self-gratulatory expressions of wondering admiration; while I felt the tears rise painfully to my own hot and weary eyeballs, and glanced at my pale cheeks, my bending form, and my look of hopeless melancholy. Strange to say, I was calm, perfectly calm. My pulse beat steadily, and there was not a quiver on my lips. I had exhausted all violent emotion within the last two days. I had wept, and knelt, and wrestled with my misery; and I had sunk under the fatigue of so unequal a contest. I scarcely knew myself. I had no longer either a hope or a fear; I was simply passive.

Lady Madelaine was magnificently attired, and both Lord Otterford and Sir James were in full dress; but no attempt had been made on the part of my mother to induce me to exchange my simple wrapping-gown and close cap, for a costume more befitting the occasion. Content to carry out her great project, she affected to overlook all minor points; she had cleverly avoided subjecting me to any preliminary fatigue; and thus husbanded my strength and energies for the eventful moment which was to make me the wife of her *protégé*. Her

smile was radiant. Her triumph made her carriage almost regal. I watched *her* also; and felt a sort of vague astonishment that those around me should be so cheerful and so brilliant, when I was sad and faded.

Sir James was all animation, all suavity, all delight. I do not attempt to repeat his extravagant acknowledgments, his ardent professions, or his tender gallantries to myself. I scarcely remarked them at the time, and only felt that they distressed and overpowered me. The calm, gentle, and low-voiced congratulations of the rector were far more welcome, however ill-placed. His suppressed tones were soothing to my over-wrought nerves; and when I saw a tear glistening in his eye, I could have flung my arms about his neck, and wept out my grief upon his bosom.

In about a quarter of an hour, my mother took my hand, and led me toward a table, behind which the grave-looking stranger, whom I then discovered to be a lawyer, was seated, intently poring over sundry papers and parchments. I believe that I have elsewhere mentioned the fact of Lady Madelaine being the sole guardian of Adela and myself; and it appeared that on this occasion she appeared in her official capacity. Certain it is, that she informed me, as Sir James drew forward a chair for my accommodation, that there were some documents for me to sign before my marriage, which were in the keeping of Mr. Thornton. To hear was to obey. I was utterly ignorant of business in every shape, and equally careless of the consequences on the present occasion. So soon, therefore, as the parchment was spread before me, and the proper spot cautiously indicated by the lawyer, I wrote my name without comment or hesitation; after which Sir James, my mother, and Lord Otterford followed my example.

This done, a brief and desultory conversation ensued; and at its close, the whole party moved toward the spot where the rector had already taken up his station. There was a certain solemnity in the arrangement. I walked first, supported on the arm of my father-in-law; Lady Madelaine followed with Sir James; and Miss Grenval closed the procession under the escort of Mr. Thornton. My heart beat quickly for an instant, as I found myself kneeling beside my future husband; and a giddiness came upon me, which rendered me almost unconscious of what was passing before me, and of the scene in which I was an actor.

The ceremony was soon over. The servants, who had been admitted to the entrance of the saloon, disappeared; the folding-doors, which opened upon Lord Otterford's private room, were flung back; and Mr. Grenval had the happiness of handing Lady Madelaine to a table covered with a profusion of gastronomical luxuries. Sir James, happy and triumphant, supported me to the seat which had been assigned to me; and the pretty daughter of the rector followed on the arm of Lord Otterford. It was fortunate that the amiable divine possessed unwearied animal spirits, and a benevolence equally untiring, or our breakfast would have passed entirely in pantomime. Lady Madelaine was too full of self-exultation to be loquacious; and Lord Otterford made no effort to throw off the languor by which he was oppressed; while Sir James neither looked at nor spoke to any person but myself, save in monosyllables; and my solitary bridemaid was evidently dying to escape, in order to pour forth her delight to her family.

As everything must terminate, however, sooner or later, so our weary breakfast at length came to a close; and I believe that every individual of the party, not even excepting the worthy and amiable rector, felt glad of the release. Although the good clergyman had put a cheerful face upon the business, it was nevertheless evident that he suspected some mystery, of which he easily understood that I was the passive victim; and there was a fatherly interest in his look, and a kindness in his accents, when he took leave of me, by which I was much more touched than by the renewed congratulations which he doubtlessly considered it expedient and correct to offer.

CHAPTER XXXV.

We were no sooner alone than Lady Madelaine, instead of retiring to her dressing-room, as I had anticipated, and thus affording me a pretext to retire also, caused her fauteuil to be drawn nearer to the fire, and seated herself in all the glory of her brocade and jewels. I was about to make an effort to escape, nevertheless; but her first words arrested me, and I was compelled to resume my seat.

"Do not attempt to retire, Eveleen," she said firmly, although the smile which she had called up was intended to make the address somewhat less dictatorial; "we have an immensity of business to arrange, and our time is sadly limited. Although it is very easy for Miss Tilden and Sir James Dornton to get quietly married over a drawing-room fire, they cannot reënter the world with the same absence of ceremony, and, consequently, certain arrangements must be made, and certain plans judiciously carried out, in order that the exigencies of society may be properly complied with. Now these, Eveleen, you cannot, either in your character of bride—or, for the moment, if you will, widow—arrange, combine, or overlook in your own proper person; and I have therefore proposed to Sir James, to take these matters into my own hands, and to spare both you and himself all anxiety and fatigue."

I bowed my thanks. I felt no interest whatever in the arrangements to which my mother alluded, nor did I ask a question. I was pining to be alone. She paused for a moment, as if awaiting my reply; but, finding that I continued silent, she resumed: "In order to do this, I must, of course, leave Woodville, and this fact has occasioned great uneasiness to Sir James. Obliged as he is to absent himself this evening, he has ventured to take measures to prevent your temporary isolation, which, he trusts, will not prove disagreeable to you."

For the first time I listened attentively. I felt that the eyes of Dornton were riveted upon me, and that it was necessary I should say something.

"Whatever your ladyship and Sir James have decided, I am prepared to approve," I said coldly.

"Spoken like the very model of a wife!" exclaimed my mother, with a laugh, which was

not altogether one of gaiety. "Our minds are then relieved at once. You are too young and too pretty, Eveleen, to dispense with proper protection. I would not propose Lady Flora, for I knew that you had already enjoyed her society to satiety; and, as my taste does not lead me to cultivate the affections of elderly ladies in general, I was fairly at fault, and could not remove the difficulty. Sir James was, however, more fortunate; and, as you have given us *carte blanche* to act as we deem best, I am delighted to think that, during our compulsory absence, we shall have the satisfaction of feeling that we have left you under the guardianship of so unexceptionable a person as your husband's aunt!"

My husband! How the words jarred upon my nerves!

"Do you consent, my sweet Eveleen?" murmured Sir James.

"If it be your wish," I replied languidly, "and that your relative will consent to become the inmate of so dull a house and the companion of so sad and—" I was about to add—"desolate a being;" but I checked myself, and only terminated the sentence by my tears.

Dornton rose hurriedly from his chair, and began to curse the fate which compelled him to his odious journey. I witnessed his emotion with indifference, for I knew that go he must, and I only sighed for the moment of his departure. I was extenuated with fatigue, exertion, and misery. All that I wanted was solitude—absolute, unbroken solitude. I wanted to think, to breathe, and to suffer in freedom.

The events of the last few days had succeeded each other with a rapidity that had left me no time to reflect upon their overwhelming effect upon myself, or to look deliberately and calmly upon my present position and my future prospects. Alas! that future—what could I hope from it? I had never, upon one point, deceived myself for a moment; I did not love the man to whom I had given my hand; I did not believe it possible that I should ever do so. My vanity was flattered by his adoration, and my gratitude had been excited by his watchful tenderness during my convalescence. I well knew, however, that this was all—that he had no other hold upon my heart. How, then, could I look into the future with hope, or even with tranquillity? I had seen enough of Sir James Dornton to be convinced that in marrying him I was not about to become the wife of a man who, like Lord Otterford, would subside into a mere domestic husband. The world—the great world—the world of fashion, and dissipation, and luxury, was the only atmosphere in which he could long breathe freely. This was, indeed, the same world of which I had dreamt so fondly from my girlhood—but not the guide who was to pilot me through its mazes. The charm with which I had then invested it was gone, and, as I at that moment believed, gone forever.

I will dwell no longer on the memory of my marriage-day. The dinner was a counterpart of the breakfast, save that while it lasted Sir James did not attempt to sustain anything like a conversation even with me. His eyes scarcely ever wandered from my face; he did not even affect to eat, but he drank wine in a manner quite unusual with him. My mother talked of town; of the *fêtes* which she proposed to give, and the *artistes* whom she meant to patronize; affected occasionally to address me as Lady Dornton, and ultimately succeeded in depriving me of the slight degree of energy which I had hitherto preserved.

The consequence of this utter prostration was, however, a fortunate one; for when a servant at length announced the arrival of the mail which was awaiting Sir James at the park gate, and that I saw him hastily spring from his seat and approach me, I gave one suffocating sob, and fainted.

I afterward learnt that it required all the authority of Lady Madelaine to compel him to quit my side; but the necessity for his absence was so stringent, that he had no alternative save obedience. As for myself, when I again became conscious at once of existence and of suffering, I opened my aching eyes in my own quiet apartment, where, by the faint light of a night-lamp, I saw Joséphine and my old nurse watching beside my pillow. Such was the realization of the glittering and romantic picture which I had been used to draw of my wedding-day.

Restored to myself by the departure of Dornton, I was still unable to overcome the fearful lethargy which had taken possession of me. Feelings and events alike were so confused and untangible, that I could neither separate nor retain them. I was just in the position of the man whom Plato, in one of his undying dialogues, supposes to have been imprisoned in a cavern, with his back toward the light, where he could distinguish nothing save the shadows of men passing and repassing on the wall before him. My head was perplexed—my marriage seemed to be a dream; but, nevertheless, a sense of restraint was strong upon me. I no longer felt free even to look into my own heart. It was a waking nightmare.

Had I ever experienced the wish to feel grateful to Lady Madelaine for the gratuitous offer which she had made of sparing me the exertion of undertaking any arrangements for the future, it would have been impossible to do so, when, during the three days which intervened between the departure of Dornton and the arrival of his aunt, she permitted me, without scruple, to see at what an expense, both of temper and of patience, she compelled herself to remain at Woodville in order to receive her, and to preserve at least the semblance of an interest in my comfort. The season had long commenced—she was now untrammeled; my sacrifice had purchased her freedom, at least until she should summon Adela to her side—an event which I scarcely anticipated, although I could not explain upon what plea she could much longer keep her in banishment. No wonder that Lady Madelaine pined to escape from a sick-room and a deserted saloon.

I scarcely gave a thought to the new companion who had been provided for me. So long as Sir James continued absent, I cared not who filled his place—I was content. It was not, however, with utter indifference that I heard my mother, on one of the rare occasions when we were seated quietly together—she languidly employed at her embroidery frame, and I lying

back, half-dreaming, upon my sofa—commence a conversation of which the expected stranger was the subject.

"I trust that this Miss Dornton will prove endurable. I have such a horror of old maids, that I quite dread the time which I must spend under the same roof with her."

"Poor lady!" I replied, without unclosing my eyes; "she has more reason to shrink from the prospect of becoming my inmate. Your ladyship's torture will be brief; what you number by hours she may, probably, count by weeks."

"The thing will bear no comparison, Eveleen, and is too absurd. Miss Dornton is in narrow circumstances, and has for many years been residing in a country town, where, too proud of her ancient descent to associate with the petty gentry about her, and too poor to keep up her connection with the neighborhood, she has lived the life of a recluse."

I sighed, and the sigh was one of envy. The woman of whom my mother was speaking so disdainfully was free.

"Moreover," continued Lady Madelaine in the same tone of easy superiority, "will it not be an event in her existence to become domesticated with Lady Dornton? You really know so little of the world, Eveleen, that you do not make a proper distinction, even in a case in which you are yourself interested; and it is, perhaps, necessary that I should hint to you, in consequence, the propriety of asserting your own dignity with Miss Dornton. There is no set of persons on earth so encroaching, where their advances are tolerated, as poor relations."

I thought of Lady Flora, but I made no comment on my mother's words.

"I wish, at all events, that she would arrive," again she resumed, pettishly; "she might certainly have been here before this. It is ill-bred and presuming on her part to make so much unnecessary delay."

"She does not, in all probability, suspect that your ladyship is in such haste to leave Woodville."

"Is that an epigram, Lady Dornton?"

"I am in no mood for epigrams: I simply gave utterance to my thought."

"In that case I shall merely remark, that if [illegible] question has forgotten herself so far as to speculate upon my movements, she is too ready to identify herself with the family into which her nephew has married."

"The fault is mine, madam," I said, somewhat impatiently, "or the insolent egotism of my mother jarred upon my feelings, bowed down as I was alike by the past and by the present; "pray do not suffer me involuntarily to prejudice you against her. It was an idle suggestion, and one which I had, perhaps, no right to express. You must forgive me, for I am ill and sick at heart, and scarcely am aware of the exact purport of the words I utter."

"Ill and sick at heart!" echoed Lady Madelaine, as though she had not every reason in the world to believe that such must be the case; "really, Eveleen, you talk strangely for a bride. You involve yourself in the most fantastic annoyances, and then you assume the attitude of a martyr. If you had listened to reason, and become the wife of Sir James when he first proposed for you, as any rational young woman, under the circumstances, would have done, there would have been no necessity for this ill-timed separation, and he could have left you in town, under my protection, when he had been seen once or twice with you in public."

"You mistake me, madam."

"How so?"

"I am regretting neither the absence of Sir James, nor the impossibility which exists of my appearing in public."

"We will pursue the subject no farther in that case."

"As you please."

"One word more, however. If you are, in a fit of unbecoming romance, pining yourself away in memory of Mr. Devereux, it becomes my duty to remind you that you are now Lady Dornton."

"I know it, madam," I gasped out, as the blood rushed over my brow—"I *feel* it!"

"I hope so; and now we will select some other topic."

What that topic might have been, I was destined never to know; for at that very moment a carriage passed under the window, which we each felt must contain the expected guest. For one moment my heart beat quick. Was I about to meet a friend or a jailer?

The door was thrown open by a servant, Miss Dornton was announced, and she immediately entered, leaning upon the arm of Lord Otterford, who had assisted her to alight. My mother courtesied coldly and in silence, and then resumed her seat; while the look of surprise which I detected upon the countenance of the visitor hastened the movement which I was making to rise and receive her. Her first embarrassment over, Miss Dornton glanced from Lady Madelaine to myself; and immediately that she met the smile and the outstretched hand with which I was slowly approaching, she turned rapidly to welcome both; and then gently seated me once more among my cushions, and placed herself beside me.

"How shall I thank you, madam"—I commenced; but Lady Madelaine interposed.

"Miss Dornton will be kind enough to excuse your exerting yourself, Eveleen; she is already aware that you are an invalid, and that you remain in the country only because quiet has been prescribed for you. You must not imagine, madam, that Lady Dornton is naturally either valetudinarian or melancholy—quite the reverse; but she has had a very severe illness, and is still suffering considerably from weakness."

"Poor young creature!" was the kind-hearted rejoinder; "her marriage at such a moment must have been a great trial to her, and the absence of Sir James have made it doubly painful."

My mother coughed a little high-bred cough which superseded the necessity of a reply.

"I trust that you have not suffered from your journey," I said hastily, not well knowing how to frame an answer to her remark.

"You remind me, Eveleen, that we have been inhospitably forgetful," again broke in Lady Madelaine; "Miss Dornton will necessarily require both refreshment and repose. Lor-

Otterford, the bell, if you please. Miss Dornton will find everything provided in her dressing-room."

The well-bred old lady at once understood the motive of my mother, and rose. Joséphine was summoned to conduct her to her apartment, and our first interview was over

CHAPTER XXXVI.

On the following morning Lord Otterford and my mother departed. I saw them abandon me without a sigh; nor do I believe that their hasty disappearance caused one regret to my new guest.

Miss Dornton was very diminutive in stature, but had evidently been a pretty woman in her time. Her figure was still smart and well preserved; and there was a shrewdness in the expression of her countenance which gave assurance of the vivacity of her intellect, even tempered as it was by the benevolence which evidently formed the prominent feature of her character. She was the very perfection of fastidious and somewhat pedantic neatness. Her dress was rich, but somewhat scrupulously plain; and it formed no bad type of her moral nature. She was full of good, strong sense and womanly sympathy, but she possessed neither sentiment nor imagination. For the tangible sufferings which she could see and comprehend, she had always a tear or a word of pity; but for those which grew out of either moral or mental struggles she was impracticable and callous. She could understand a headache or a fainting-fit, but she could never attribute them to anything deeper than a mere physical cause.

Like all persons long accustomed to live alone, she was very taciturn and self-centred, pious, and occupied. She could better have dispensed with her shadow than her work-basket; and did not appear to have settled herself comfortably until she had ascertained the distance of Woodville from the parish church, the name of the rector, and the hours of the services. She was evidently a worthy, kind-hearted old lady; but, as regarded companionship, Sir James might with equal propriety have provided me with a portrait of one of his female ancestors.

I did not, however, regret this fact; Miss Dornton answered the purpose for which she was intended admirably. Her protection was unexceptionable for myself, and liberated my mother from an ungrateful duty, ungraciously performed. Well-bred, unassuming, and self-centred, she was the very antipodes of Lady Flora; and I was rejoiced that her taciturn habits enabled me to indulge in my own reflections without any solecisms in civility.

It was not until I had been for several days domesticated with the meek old lady, and become satisfied that I should meet with no interference from her in any way, that I began seriously to understand my real position. The undefined feeling with which Sir James had inspired me, the blended gratitude and admiration which, in his best moments, he had awakened in my heart, required his perpetual presence to assure its duration. While he soothed my hours of pain, and beguiled those of lassitude, I leaned upon him for support and companionship; but, as during his absence, these failed, so his charm failed with them. How different was this pale and borrowed light from the enduring flame which Devereux had kindled in my spirit! Circumstances had, indeed, somewhat quenched it, but it still existed; and might, as I was compelled to acknowledge to myself, be but too easily reillumed. I dwelt upon all that had passed between us; I recalled his every look, his every word, and his every gesture, during our short but eventful interview near the Wood Lodge; I made a few faint struggles to resist these dangerous memories, but I was too weak in purpose to wage successful war against my own heart.

This wrestling of affection against duty recurred so constantly, and created so painful a degree of depression, that it was a continual obstacle to the reëstablishment of my health. I was conscious at last that a less patient and considerate companion than Miss Dornton would have been desirable for me at such a crisis. She, poor lady, satisfied of the enviable fate of the woman who had secured so unexceptionable a husband as her nephew, never looked beneath the surface for a hidden evil; she never dreamed of that sickness of the mind by which the body withers; and so long as I punctually and obediently swallowed the drugs prescribed for me by my physician, she felt no further responsibility.

In my healthier moments I made a resolution to emancipate myself from the trammels of my own emotion, but I was soon compelled to own that I was powerless without assistance. In this dilemma my thoughts once again recurred to Adela. The hurry of my marriage had rendered it impossible that she should be present; nor, indeed, trusting to the last that I should be able to escape a union with Sir James, had I urged Lady Madelaine to summon her. Consequently, I felt myself to be blameless as regarded this apparent neglect; and as I imagined that now I had irrevocably sacrificed myself to my mother's will, she could have no pretext for refusing to me the society of my sister, at least while I remained in the country, I pondered over the idea until I became sincerely and earnestly anxious to see it realized. Miss Dornton, to whom I communicated my wish, appeared to be annoyed at the suggestion; but as she gave no reason for her objection, I resolved upon following out my project without any further appeal to her authority She was probably jealous that I should prefer the society of my own sister to that of my husband's kinswoman, and the companionship of a younger person than herself It was a little weakness for which I readily forgave her, but which it was needless to indulge.

The result of my deliberations was the following letter to Adela. It cost me some resolution, for I remembered the ill-success of my last missive; but I resolved to persevere.

"I have changed my name, my dear Adela, and I hope that the one which I now bear will insure the happiness of my life; but all is, as yet mere speculation. The absence of Sir James, on business connected with some Irish property, makes me dull enough, and renders my recovery very slow. Come, and help me to regain

alike my health and spirits, my dear sister. It will be a charitable act, for which I shall be most grateful. The pleasure of seeing you beside me will make me forget that I ought to wish for the presence of another."

This letter, short as it was, had cost me some study, and I looked upon it as a sublime effort of courage. My heart had assuredly little to do with the expressions which it contained on the subject of Sir James; but my pride was roused, and I piqued myself upon the manifestation of a little heroism, which might serve to secure me against the comments of my sister; while I did not doubt that Adela, glad at any price to escape from the tedium of Rooksley, would not hesitate to procure Lady Madelaine's consent to so simple and natural an arrangement.

Several days passed by before I received any reply, but, as I had calculated that such must inevitably be the case, I waited as patiently as could. At length two letters were delivered to me, of which one was from my mother, and the other from Adela. I tore open the latter with a beating heart. These were its contents.

"Dear Eveleen,

"I had been informed of your marriage, but was ignorant alike of your own feelings, and of those of Sir James. He doubtlessly loves you, as you talk of anticipated happiness. Enjoy so agreeable a prospect: I shall take more interest in its realization than you may, perhaps, feel inclined to believe. I can do no more. I should be the worst person in the world as your physician, either in mind or body. We so seldom think alike, and we, in all cases, act so differently, that I should be more likely to trouble your new-made felicity than to increase it."

My mother simply ratified in her note the refusal of Adela. She had, as she declared, left her free to act as she saw fit when my invitation was communicated to her by my sister; believing, after the reluctance which Adela had expressed to becoming my guest, that she should do me no kindness by attempting to overcome what was evidently a rooted repugnance.

And this was all; and I sat for a time lost in conjectures before these two cold, concise, and matter-of-fact epistles. To what cause was I to attribute so heartless an abandonment on the part of my only sister? That we had never either felt or professed an overweening affection the one for the other was undoubtedly true, but this was, under the circumstances, a proceeding on the part of Adela which almost betrayed aversion. I feverishly searched into the very recesses of my heart to discover, if possible, its cause. I well knew that my sister's feelings were extreme in all things; and, eventually, with a burning brow and a throbbing pulse, I decided that she had sought to manifest, in this cutting letter, her contemptuous censure of my infidelity to Devereux, and in her refusal to visit me—an unequivocal demonstration of her disdain.

The witness of their own conscience never suffices to the weak-minded; they require, in order to sustain themselves in their own eyes, and to retain their self-esteem, the approbation of others, especially of those decided and indomitable spirits who compel their respect. This was precisely the position in which I then found myself. I acknowledged the supremacy of her moral strength, and I required its support to pillow my own weakness—its fiat to justify my own acts.

Humbled and ashamed, I never sought for a moment to discover a counter-argument with which to combat the opinion that I believed her to have adopted. On the contrary, I once more wept over my cowardice—my everlasting custom when, by my own weakness, I had plunged myself into difficulty. The little edifice of virtue and duty, frail as it was, which I had occasionally striven to build up, was overthrown at once. I no longer sought to excuse myself, upon the plea of either gratitude to Sir James, or filial obedience to Lady Madelaine. I flung all such arguments to the winds as idle sophistries; and for a time dared to think that the heart could not, and should not, be controlled. I shuddered, but I clung to my dangerous theory. I saw the precipice at my feet; but I scorned to retreat a step!

So unwholesome a state of mind could not, however, endure long in a nature as yet undepraved. The storm of passion swept over me, and I saw my future path of life overstrewn by the fragments of past peace which it had rent away in its progress; but I felt grateful that I could look upon them without positive remorse, and I glorified myself on the conviction. Alas! had I, in that hour of returning reason, only known WHERE to turn for real comfort, how much after-suffering would have been spared to me! But I have already confessed that of pure, humble-minded, heaven-trusting religion I knew nothing. I sought for strength in myself, where I never found it; and virtue in my own heart, which was as unstable as water.

The terror of my sister's sarcasms aroused my temper. I began to ask myself why I should defer to the judgment of a mere girl, who only reasoned upon theory, and who knew nothing of the world which she professed to scorn, or of the feelings which she affected to analyze and to control! I could not, however, cheat myself in this way; as my anger subsided, my fears returned. My mind was mastered by that of Adela.

It seemed to me that if I could only induce her to listen to me; if I could only explain to her my reluctance, my opposition; if I could only tell her of all my tears, all my beseechings, my physical weakness and my mental fatigue, she would sympathize with my sacrifice, rather than blame me; but while I enumerated all my past struggles, and invoked their memories, I forgot that I was undermining my own peace, and assuming the attitude of a victim, when I should be endeavoring to gather strength for the performance of the new and imperative duties which had grown up about me. In a mental effort to justify myself in the eyes of another, I was rendering myself more faulty in my own.

And while all this tumult was warring within me, Miss Dornton sat by my side as calm and passionless as an automaton. There was something fearfully irritating in the ceaseless motion of the knitting-needles which she scarcely ever

laid aside. I have watched them at times until I have with difficulty suppressed a groan. We were together for weeks; and had she only once changed the aspect of the labor upon which they were employed, I could have supported even them with something like philosophy; but this poor relief, trifling as it was, never came; she was engaged upon a measureless length of what I think she called fringe; and with which she had a horrid vision of garnishing some old-world piece of furniture which had belonged to her grandmother. I never inquired what it was; but it appeared to me that its dimensions must be somewhat on a par with the limits of Salisbury Plain.

Let those laugh who will at this digression; but let them at the same time be assured that petty and perpetual annoyances, such as these, are to the suffering spirit what the rose-leaf was to the vase of water—the trifle which cause them to overflow!

Thus time crept on. The dreary, cheerless, leafless winter had robbed even Woodville of its charms. The lake was frozen beneath the windows; the birds were silent among the boughs; the rare shrubs and plants which, during the months of sunshine, made the grounds almost rival in their gorgeousness and variety the rich profusion of the tropics, were removed to the conservatories, or huddled beneath matting. To find beauties amid such a scene, the inmate should possess a light heart. To the unhappy, a winter of solitude is a mere season of suffering. To me this withering of nature was morally unwholesome. It appeared to sympathize in my hypochondriacism, and to encourage my mental lethargy. I would have given all the splendid and useless toys by which I was surrounded, and which seemed to mock the abandonment of friends and relatives, for one cluster of wild roses, or one bunch of violets.

Even a winter with Miss Dornton, however, could not last forever. The spring came at length; I could again wander unattended through the shrubberies, and indulge in dreams of the future which were never likely to be realized. Sir James had not explained to me the nature of the business which had detained him so long in Ireland. His long and eloquent letters were filled by passionate regrets and enthusiastic anticipations. I have hitherto made no allusion to our correspondence, simply because it jarred upon the train of feeling to which I had habituated myself. Each letter that I received broke upon my spirit like a discordant note upon the ear; and it was well that I at once decided upon answering these matrimonial epistles at the very moment of their receipt, while the influence of Dornton's harmonious and tender periods was still strong upon me, or I know not how I should ever have accomplished so difficult a task.

Thus, as I before remarked, I was in perfect ignorance of the causes which compelled Sir James to so prolonged an absence; while I was so well satisfied with their effects, that I did not care to ascertain their nature. I was still weak, and thin, and pale; and both my vanity and my indolence found their profit in the solitary existence which I was leading. The London season was, however, no sooner at an end, than Lady Madelaine hastened on the wings of maternal tenderness to the retreat of her invalid daughter; but it was to me a consolation to reflect, in my moments of bitterness, that the sacrifice was considerably lessened by the fact that she brought in her train a score of dear friends, all anxious, like herself, to replace the noise and smoke of town by the luxurious *villegiatura* of a well-appointed country-house.

Had I been weighed down by no latent grief, it is possible that nothing would have been more agreeable for me than the movement of the gay and reckless crowd by which I was suddenly surrounded; but their hollow and heartless trifling offered no remedy to my diseased and unsettled mind. At first I found it difficult to sustain so extreme a change. I was compelled to restrain my tears, to stifle my sighs, and to appear as free from care and from anxiety as themselves. I had not forgotten the indifference with which Lady Madelaine had made my love for Devereux the common theme of herself and her associates; and, thanks to the comments of these same individuals upon others of their acquaintance, I required no prompting to understand at once how much my peculiar position placed me in their power. I knew that, married while yet a mere girl, and contrary to my own inclinations, I should be an object of curiosity and speculation to all the high-born idlers among whom I was thus thrown into constant companionship; that I should be scrutinized, and criticised, and not always in the kindest spirit; and that I must keep an incessant watch, not only over my words and actions, but over my very thoughts.

Fortunately the constraint which I deprecated proved salutary to me; by dint of endeavoring to delude others, I ended by deceiving myself; by doubting if I had not exaggerated my trials; and whether dissipation and self-indulgence might not overcome the vapors by which I had so long suffered myself to be oppressed.

I resolved to solve the problem, and I succeeded. My melancholy would have experienced no sympathy; my satisfied vanity and ready partnership in pleasure made me welcome to every one. I became gradually less inclined, even when alone, to indulge in those long fits of weeping which dimmed my eyes and clouded my complexion; I found myself speculating upon my probable success in such or such a dress; endeavoring to recall certain words and looks of admiration which had been directed toward me during the preceding day; in short, although I occasionally sighed, partly from real regret, and partly from long-acquired habit, my woman-nature was once more thoroughly aroused; and although I am quite sure that I never should have been induced to make the acknowldgement, I was comparatively happy. The image of Devereux was not obliterated, but it had become much less distinct. The letters of Sir James were no longer a mere matter of course, but a necessary ingredient of my existence. They were filled with comments upon my own beauty and attractions; and they kept my vanity, and consequently my amiability, at the culminating point. On their receipt I regularly communicated them to Lady Madelaine; not from any principle of deference

or duty—I do not wish to affect a virtue which I did not possess—but in order that she might see and understand the price at which my personal merits were held by the husband upon whom she had compelled me to bestow them.

My good-humor returned; my accomplishments were once more exerted for the amusement of my mother's guests; I was declared to be more charming than ever, and Sir James the happiest of men, who could never be sufficiently grateful for the concession I had made. All this was charming. Lady Madelaine, adopting the tone of her company, was kind, and even confidential; Lord Otterford gallant and attentive. I was the lion of the house. No wonder that I rapidly regained my health, and, as a natural consequence, the freshness and beauty of which my previous languor had deprived me.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

I was awakened one morning by the unusually abrupt entrance of Joséphine.

"You have disturbed me," I said somewhat impatiently; "are there any letters?"

"No, miladi," answered the soubrette, unmoved by my pettishness; "but Sir James has just arrived, and I thought it my duty to inform miladi at once."

I ought not to have felt surprised; he had already informed me of the period of his return, but the effect of her words was painful. My feelings were so contradictory, so various, that I could not disentangle them. I tried to believe that I rejoiced at his advent; it terminated my singular state of bridal widowhood, and emancipated me altogether from my mother's authority; but still I could not conceal from myself that I had wilfully closed my eyes to its occurrence, and would gladly have deferred it. Fortunately for me, Lady Madelaine, conscious of the part which she had acted, suspected something of the truth, and contrived that I should have ample time to recover my self-possession.

My first meeting with Dornton took place in my dressing-room. He was all rapture and affection. He had succeeded perfectly in the business which took him to Ireland; and only returned, as he declared, to find me a thousand times more lovely than when we parted. My mother soon broke in upon our interview; she had never been more welcome. She congratulated Sir James upon the recovery of a property supposed to be lost to him; insisted upon his thanks for the care which she had taken of his melancholy little wife; and finally regretted that the influx of visitors at Woodville had driven away Miss Dornton; who departed to her country lodging, laden with a costly diamond ring, upon which she evidently set not the slightest value, and an embrace as cold as the jewel. I parted from her, as I had met her, without a sigh.

I was somewhat startled to hear that a large party were to meet at Woodville that very day, in honor of Dornton's return, when our marriage was to be publicly announced. The intelligence was evidently welcome to him; but it was far less so to me. After the agitation occasioned by his return, I should have preferred the comparative quiet of our home-circle. There was, however, no alternative, and I accordingly submitted with the best grace I could assume; only stipulating that, until the dinner-bell had rung, I should be permitted to remain undisturbed in my own apartments. As this arrangement also excluded Sir James, I had to combat for a while his lover-like expostulations; but as Lady Madelaine, anxious that I should appear to advantage, which she well knew could not be the case if my temper were too sorely tried, condescended to second my wishes, I soon dismissed him to the guests, and sat down to ponder in solitude over the trying position in which I was about to be placed, before the unsympathizing circle which had been gathered together at Woodville.

The first person upon whom my eyes fell, as I entered the dining-room on the arm of Sir James, was Mr. Curties; and I felt confused and disconcerted as he advanced to greet me. My delicacy was, however, palpably mistimed, for the worthy member for —— was as calm, as stiff, as rectangular as ever. He even smiled as he glanced from me to Dornton, and uttered a few words of congratulation. I was lost in amazement! I did not possess the solution of the riddle, and I was deeply mortified. This man, according to Lady Madelaine, had loved me, or at least, had been dazzled by my attractions, and under the influence of such feelings had sought my hand and been rejected; yet now, only a few months later, as if to convince me of the transitory effect of my personal merits, he met me as another's bride, with a smile about his lips, and a compliment upon his tongue. What a lesson did this appear to be to my vanity and self-love!

The annoyance was, however, soon forgotten in the flattering comments and congratulations of the other guests, among whom I was glad to remark the good rector and his pretty daughter, who was duly adorned with her bridal pearls. I could not forbear, even thus publicly, pressing my lips to her bright cheek, which crimsoned with delight; while Sir James, who appeared determined to discover a compliment to himself in every one of my actions, paid me back my courtesy by raising my hand to his lips. I could not forbear, from time to time, during the dinner, which to me seemed painfully protracted, glancing at Mr. Curties, in order to discover if he preserved his equanimity. I saw not the slightest change. He ate and drank in perfect composure, and occasionally condescended to address a remark to Miss Grenval, who sat beside him evidently in awe. There was not one symptom of uneasiness to console my ruffled vanity. It was altogether inexplicable.

The devotion of Dornton knew no bounds. He seemed to challenge the envy and congratulations of all around him. He thanked me in the most gallant manner for the magnificent toilet which I had made upon what he was pleased to call our wedding-day, affecting to forget that a woman finds such a duty at all times both easy and pleasant; and as both my mother and Lord Otterford were equally complimentary on the subject of my appearance, I was glad to be convinced that my dressing-glass had not deceived me.

For the first time I felt that I had attained

the object of my earliest ambition; I divided the suffrages of the circle with Lady Madelaine; and I had, moreover, the triumph of knowing that I had even over her the advantages of greater youth and greater novelty. I was no longer flattered and pampered as a beautiful child; I had taken my position in society, and my success must be henceforth based upon my womanly qualities. I thought not once of Devereux throughout the evening. The incense that was so profusely offered at my shrine oppressed my brain, and centred all my feelings in self. The past and future were alike shrouded in vapor, and I lived only in the present.

The whole of the evening, until the departure of such of our guests as resided in the neighborhood, was occupied in music, and in the examination of the numerous and costly marriage presents which were awaiting me in the saloon. In vain did I volunteer my services at the harp, and my voice in a trio: neither Sir James nor Lady Madelaine would permit me to use so much exertion in my invalid state. I had suddenly awakened in a new world—in a sort of gilded Utopia! So I remained throned upon my sofa, playing with the jewels and toys scattered around me, content to look and listen to the performances of those whose health was, for the moment, tacitly understood to be less valuable than my own.

We remained the whole summer at Woodville; but I had not been a bride more than a few months when I expressed to Lady Madelaine the desire which I felt to pay a visit to my sister.

"What will Sir James think of so strange a whim?" she asked drily.

"Do you, then, consider it extraordinary," I demanded in my turn, "that I should wish to see Adela after the change which has taken place in my situation? You are aware, madam, that I endeavored to induce her to become my guest, which, for some reason of which I am ignorant, she declined. I confess that I felt deeply hurt, but still I cannot forget that she is my sister, and that, in her present exile, she may well expect so simple a courtesy from me."

"Your delicacy is somewhat wire-drawn, Eveleen," retorted Lady Madelaine; "however, you are yet a bride, and must, consequently, I suppose, be indulged in your caprices. Fortunately, the long and fatiguing journey to Rooksley will be spared, for Adela has been for the last few weeks the inhabitant of my villa at Putney."

"And why was so simple a circumstance kept secret from me?"

"Because it grew out of a speculation of a graver nature. Because Adela had just conceived one of those extraordinary whims which cannot be explained by any rational argument, but to which, young as she is, she adheres with a tenacity that my will has entirely failed to weaken: and as, I confess to you, the fatigue of so wretched a contention is greater than I am willing to encounter, I have at last consented to yield—under certain restrictions."

How well I recognized the iron nature of my sister in this immutability of purpose.

"And what, then, is this strange fancy?" I asked eagerly.

Lady Madelaine shrugged her shoulders. "In the first place, I believe you are not yet aware that the relative who inherited the title and estates of my poor father has formed the somewhat Quixotic project of disencumbering the property of certain rather extensive mortgages; and, in aid of this endeavor, finding that his obligations both as a peer and a landlord were greater than he wished to encounter, he purposes to live abroad with all his family for the next few years, and to let the castle during that time, retaining the land under the superintendence of a bailiff. Now, Miss Adela Tilden, having, as it has since appeared, through the medium of Lady Flora, been in correspondence with the earl, and ascertained that to one of his own connections, who will, of course, appear only as his guest, he will cede Glenfillan Castle at a very small rent, has, child as she is, been continually, from the period of your betrothal, when she found that all chance of your returning to reside at Rooksley was at an end, importuning me to hire the place, and to allow her to make it her home, under the guardianship of Lady Flora."

"Her home!" I exclaimed, aghast; "can she seriously ask you to allow her to bury herself alive at her age in so remote a spot? Does she forget that there will be a long future, and that her proper home, while she remains unmarried, is under the roof of her mother?"

"I have both said and written all that and much more," coldly replied Lady Madelaine, "but I made no impression upon her stubborn nature. She answered I know not what—that I had never been a mother to her—that she should never have a home while it was called mine—that she had lived for years without the affection of her family, and that she had now ceased to wish for it. In short, you can understand her style of reasoning."

I could, indeed.

"Nevertheless," pursued my mother, perceiving that I continued silent, "I still refused to listen to her—"

"Of course; you could not do otherwise. The project was absurd and impracticable—I am almost tempted to say insane!"

"And yet, Lady Dornton, there are circumstances—"

"Oh, no, no; it is impossible that any circumstances, however stringent, could justify so monstrous an arrangement. Had she been five years younger, although such an exile must have condemned her to comparative ignorance, still her bodily health might have been pleaded as a reason for so extreme a step; but now—at the precise period when she should be introduced into the world, in which she will soon be called to play her part—"

"Allow me to interrupt you in my turn at this point of your argument," said Lady Madelaine. "You are just touching upon the circumstance which I was about to explain. How will you laugh, Eveleen—you, young, rich, courted, and beloved, when I tell you that the mere girl who calls you sister, and who shares or might share, all your advantages, save, indeed, as regards beauty, firmly believes that she has taken the world in abhorrence—or rather, to follow her own text more closely—that she holds it in contempt; and when I even

went so far as to hint that I might possibly, in a few months, when I had seen you fairly settled at the head of your own establishment, call her to town, and give her every advantage of which she is susceptible, she peremptorily declared that she would never be taken to London alive, to be introduced to the frivolous and heartless society of what was called the fashionable world—that it was not made for her, nor she for it, and that, consequently, she put it to myself whether she should not be less obnoxious to me and less burdensome to herself at Glenfillan than at Rooksley."

"She must be mad!" I murmured, unconsciously.

"Perhaps so. At all events, she is incomprehensible. Nothing will bend her will. Sick of the struggle, as I have already told you, I have at last yielded, and she is at present at Putney with Lady Flora, making purchases of spelling-books and grammars for a school which she is to found, and committing sundry other follies of the same description. As I have declined all farther interference with so impracticable a young lady, I have offered neither comment nor hindrance to her last request that she may be allowed to proceed to Scotland early in the ensuing month."

"I must lose no time, then, in reaching Putney," I said, involuntarily rising from my chair, as though preparing to depart on the instant.

"Resume your seat," said Lady Madelaine, calmly motioning me again to her side. "Are you quite sure that Adela partakes your eagerness for this meeting? Do you feel satisfied that you will be a welcome visitor?"

"Why should I doubt it? I have never injured my sister."

Lady Madelaine bit her lip, and for a moment appeared disconcerted; but she soon conquered the feeling, from whatever impulse it arose, and continued, with an arch smile: "You know the Italian proverb—

'Chi cerca quel che non dovrebbe
Trova quel che non vorrebbe:'

however, I will make no attempt to dissuade you from your purpose. One thing, nevertheless, you must remember, Eveleen—"

"What can prevent my performance of what I now consider actually as a duty?" I exclaimed; "who can say, even young as we both are, that we may ever meet again?"

"I repeat, Lady Dornton, that in so far as I am concerned, I advance no objection to your wish; but you are quite forgetting that you have a husband, and that he may not approve of your repeating your advances to a younger sister, by whom they have already been repulsed."

"Sir James object!" I retorted, with all the scorn of a spoiled beauty; "oh, no; that is, indeed, improbable: I am by no means prepared for any such opposition."

"Possibly; and yet such things are."

"Not in a case like mine. I assuredly did not become the wife of Sir James Dornton to be consigned once more to the nursery. I shall request him to be ready to accompany me to town the day after to-morrow."

"To town!" echoed the voice of my husband, who at the instant entered the room; "do I hear the fair and fashionable Lady Dornton threatening to go up to town, when no one is to be seen there but drapers and dustmen!"

"Why, not precisely, not completely, not avowedly," I answered in the same gay tone; "my fair and fashionable ladyship contemplates only the negative enormity of Putney, to visit her somewhat moonstruck sister, and to endeavor, by a less adventurous journey than that of Orlando, to win back her wits again."

I expected at least a smile in reward of my banter, but, to my extreme surprise, as I raised my eyes to meet it, I saw Sir James exchange an alarmed and rapid glance with my mother, while for a moment the blood forsook his cheek and lips. Lady Madelaine, however, was as calm as ever. She had not been taken by surprise.

"Is it not a wild whim?" she asked, with a smile.

"But Eveleen will not persist;" and he began playfully to smooth down my ringlets.

"Do not mistake me, Sir James," I said, perfectly restored to seriousness; "I feel that I ought to see my sister before she leaves England. She is not happy—"

"Not happy?"

"Assuredly not, or she never would have formed so extreme a resolution. She does not understand what she so lightly rejects. I am resolved to use the influence I possess—"

"The influence you possess!"

"Even so; not only in dissuading her from a project so extravagant, but also by inducing her to confide to me—"

"Confide to you!"

"Really, Sir James," I exclaimed, rather pettishly, "one would imagine that we were rehearsing a scene from Othello: you echo all my words."

"And no wonder," said my mother, coming skilfully to the rescue; "Dornton, knowing what he does of Adela, may well be astonished on hearing you talk of possessing an influence over her, and of inducing her to make you her confidant."

"I am, indeed, thoroughly amazed," acquiesced Sir James; "for I believed her to be utterly invulnerable to either advice or sympathy."

I was not satisfied with this well-acted explanation. It was evident that there was some mystery connected with the removal of my sister, which was to remain a secret from me. I even suspected that it was not voluntary, but had grown out of the scarcely-disguised and invincible dislike which I had long known Lady Madelaine to entertain toward her. All that had passed, therefore, only the more firmly determined me not to yield. I could derive no advantage from this concession to my sister's pride, and of this she must be aware. I was consequently, not without hope that this consideration on my part might, indeed, induce her to unbend, and to explain to me her real motives for so strange a resolution as that which I had just heard attributed to her own free will. Judging from my own experience, I knew that there were moments in which the heart was relieved by imparting its grief; might this not be her case now, when she was on the eve of separation from her family? The mystification

which I had detected irritated and disheartened me; I felt as though it involved a return of the mental vassalage that I loathed, and I pledged myself to my own heart to be on this occasion as firm as Adela herself.

"You will accompany me, Sir James?" I said, suddenly, in a tone completely devoid of doubt.

"I regret that it will be utterly impossible for me to do so," answered my husband, in an accent as decided as my own, "and in that fact, my sweet Eveleen, lies the whole secret of my annoyance at your project."

"I thought that you were an idle man, with no more serious business on hand than that of obliging your wife."

"Would that it were so; but that vile Irish affair 'drags its slow length along,' and will admit of no neglect on my part just at present."

"Fortunately," I said, considerably provoked, "I am no coward. With my own maid, and a couple of men-servants, I shall be perfectly and correctly attended."

"Eveleen," exclaimed Sir James, "not for ten thousand worlds would I consent to such a scheme."

"You shall not be asked to do so," said my mother; "I will accompany Lady Dornton."

He thanked her somewhat gravely, for he evidently desired that the journey should be abandoned altogether. He complained of my coldness in leaving him to visit a sister who had never shown me the slightest affection; talked of the ungenial season, and my recent illness; in short, tried all means of altering my resolution, but without effect. Had not my suspicions been aroused, he would probably have succeeded; but, as it was, his multiplied objections only strengthened my purpose. My pride revolted when it whispered that, in some way or other, I had been made a dupe.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

I DID not thoroughly recover my temper until I found myself in the carriage which was to convey my mother and myself to Putney. During the brief interval which had elapsed between making the arrangement and seeing it realized, Sir James had exhausted himself in affectionate attentions, which I received coldly and with suspicion; for I at once discovered that he still entertained the hope of changing my resolution. I felt like a mariner about to explore an unknown shoal; and I looked to my sister to supply the sounding-line.

Once in the carriage, even before we had left the grounds, and while the touch of Dornton's lips was still warm upon my cheek, I recovered my equanimity, and commenced a conversation with Lady Madelaine, by sincerely thanking her for the consideration which had induced her to become my companion; a concession to which I was the more sensible, as my husband had failed to emulate it.

"You are unreasonable to expect so much, Eveleen," she said in reply. "Men detest the lachrymosities of *soi-disant* broken-hearted young ladies; and Sir James, charming as he is, is nevertheless only mortal."

"But if Adela be, as you imply, broken-hearted, you must surely also be aware of the cause of her sorrow."

"A purely false deduction. I only know that she has succeeded in making her very name odious to me; and that I shall rejoice when I know that she is safely housed at Glenfillan."

"How long ago was it, did you say, since she first made the request?"

"Several months; I really forget the precise period; it was about the commencement of your illness."

"At the time of my betrothal?"

"Somewhat later; and it was to endeavor to make her hear reason, that I urged on your marriage, and left you so abruptly at Woodville. Instead of proceeding at once to town, Lord Otterford and myself traveled to Rooksley, ill-affected as I was toward such a journey; and as I found that nothing but coercion would enable me to overcome her wishes, and that I did not possess the slightest authority over her, unless I condescended to have recourse to force, we decided that she must be treated like an embryo-lunatic as she is, and indulged in her whim until she herself wearies of it. Having come to this determination, Lord Otterford consented to remain a week at Rooksley, while Lady Flora and her amiable charge made their parting arrangements, in order that they might have his protection upon the road; and, as their domestication in Grosvenor Square during the season was of course not to be thought of, we decided upon settling them at Putney until their departure for Scotland."

"You think, then, that it is a mere temporary caprice?"

"I judge like a rational being, and cannot imagine otherwise."

"It is, at least, very singular," I remarked, "that such an extraordinary circumstance should never have been mentioned to me. Has no one, save yourself and Lord Otterford, been made acquainted with it?"

"You must have seen that it was known to Sir James."

"Ah, true! it was evidently no secret to him; and may I ask if he favored your compliance with the wishes of my sister?"

"He very properly declined to offer any opinion whatever upon the subject."

"And Lord Otterford?"

"Very naturally felt with, and for me; as did all the friends whom I considered it expedient to consult. It would, as a matter of course, have been named to you, had I not been anxious, during your illness, to save you from annoyance of every description; and subsequently also, but that I thought it likely to throw a gloom over your meeting with your husband."

"How was it calculated to do this, and why should it produce such an effect?" I asked, earnestly.

"On my honor, Lady Dornton, *vous excédez!*" exclaimed my mother pettishly; "you catechise like the teacher of a Sunday-school, and seem to forget that my nerves are not made of iron. Pray let me sleep off the irritating effects of our abrupt and uninteresting dialogue. Believe me, your sister will soon convince you that she is not worthy of such a waste of words."

Of course I was silenced, for I still stood in too much awe of Lady Madelaine to brave her

displeasure; and although I felt convinced that she only sought to avoid an explanation, I was, consequently, compelled to content myself throughout the remainder of the journey with the companionship of my own thoughts; for while we were upon the road, she perseveringly 'ept, or affected to sleep; and when we alighted, she flung herself into an attitude of languor which rendered her altogether unapproachable.

Contrary to my expectations, Lady Madelaine 'd not drive at once to Putney, but ordered the arriage on to town; and as the dismantled ansion in Grosvenor Square was naturally out of the question, we alighted at a fashionable, out now nearly deserted hotel, whence a messenger was dispatched to inform my sister of our arrival, and our intention of visiting her on the morrow.

When I awoke on the following morning, a feeling of positive sickness crept over me! How would Adela, indeed, receive my visit? and what was I about to learn? With my usual cowardice, I even began to regret that I had subjected myself to the trial; but, nevertheless, I, after some time, found strength in my curiosity, and resolved to conceal my emotion from Lady Madelaine, lest she should take advantage of my folly, and compel me to return to Woodville unsatisfied.

Having come to this doughty resolution, I took unusual interest in the adjustment of my plain but costly morning-dress, aware that there is a *prestige* about a labored toilet, which is never without its effect upon the young. When this frivolous care was at length over, I amused myself by arranging in a small casket a few fashionable trinkets which I had selected as my marriage gift to my sister; and I was still engaged in so doing, when Lady Madelaine entered the room.

"For whom are you preparing those presents?" she asked, as her eye fell upon the ornaments.

"For my sister."

"It is useless," she said gravely; "Miss Tilden is too high-minded to find pleasure in such toys: do not draw down an affront upon yourself."

"Surely I need apprehend no insult where I mean only kindness?"

"Do as you will—take them in your hand; you will be the most proper judge of the expediency of suggesting their acceptance."

I was already half convinced that it would be useless. I knew how easily my sister's pride was roused; and, with a sigh of regret, I silently consigned them once more to my dressing-case, and followed Lady Madelaine down stairs.

Not a word passed between us, until we reached Putney. I was all dread, curiosity, and agitation, and in no mood for conversation; while my mother had doubtlessly her own memories to occupy her thoughts.

Despite all the coldness with which she had treated me since we parted, my sister, when she entered the room on our arrival, was so pale, so wasted, and so changed, that I could not control my emotion, and the tears streamed from my eyes.

"Are you weeping over me, Lady Dornton?" she asked calmly. "You are fortunate if you can afford to weep for others."

"Oh, Adela, why have you urged Lady Madelaine to allow your banishment?" I exclaimed, as I seized her hand; "I have but just learned the unwelcome news of this intended departure; and even now can scarcely credit that it is in compliance with your own wish."

"Why should you not believe it?" and as she spoke, she seated herself quietly beside me; "you are not ignorant that the human heart is subject to extraordinary changes."

I felt the point of the remark, and my cheek flushed. Lady Madelaine, who saw that I was hurt, addressed some commonplace observation to my sister, who made a brief reply, and a pause to me more painful than even the most bitter sarcasm ensued. I could not speak. Adela sat in silence, as if awaiting the purport of a visit which she had evidently not desired; and my mother threw herself back upon her sofa, and closed her eyes. The spell was at length, however, broken by Lady Madelaine herself, who, wearied by the constraint to which she had for a moment submitted, suddenly rose, declaring that she had some directions to give to Lady Flora.

This was, as I thought, the crisis of my fate. I was dying to interrogate Adela, and trembling at the idea of being questioned in my turn.

We were no sooner alone than my sister turned upon me a long and searching look which seemed to penetrate my very heart.

"Are you happy?" she asked abruptly.

"I have submitted to circumstances, and my reason tells me to deduce what profit I may from my submission.'

"Answer me more frankly—are you happy?"

"Yes—almost—at least I am not otherwise."

"Sir James loves you then!"

"Devotedly; of that, at least, I am convinced."

"And you?"

"Me!—I—"

"Why do you hesitate? Does not the husband whom you have chosen appear to justify your affection?"

I was perfectly unprepared for such an attack as this, and knew not with what arms to repel it. The difficulty roused my temper, and anger lent me courage. Not only did I acknowledge the love which I believed that I felt for Dornton, but I exaggerated his good qualities, and the devotion and self-abnegation which he had displayed in the indulgence of all my tastes and wishes. I was almost eloquent.

"Spare me the details of his perfections," said my sister impatiently, when I at length paused for breath; "you are excusable. Moreover, my opinion is already formed."

Again we were silent. My eyes were riveted upon the floor, while my sister's wandered over the apartment, evidently unconscious of every object on which they looked. I was in agony. The opportunity which I had offered to her sarcasms was so tempting that I every instant anticipated she would overwhelm me by some bitter allusion to Devereux, it was, therefore, necessary that I should take advantage of her silence, in order to prevent it; and I compelled myself to make the effort.

"My dear Adela," I said, "we are for a moment alone; we may soon be disturbed; do not, then, think me abrupt if, without further pre-

face, I beg of you to relieve me from a painful suspicion. Explain to me, I entreat, the true reason of this exile to which you are about to be condemned. Can it be that our mother has compelled you to it?"

"Our mother!" she exclaimed scornfully. "Do you indeed so utterly misunderstand me as to believe that I shall ever act upon compulsion?"

"I do not misunderstand you, Adela; but I know that even the strongest resolutions are sometimes rendered nugatory by a will still more absolute."

"Ha! you imagined that such was my case."

"I did."

"You reasoned upon your own experience; nothing could be more natural. Nevertheless, you were wrong, as you will ever be when you try my actions by the same test. Lady Madelaine has employed no authority to induce what you have somewhat romantically termed my 'exile;' on the contrary, I decided on the step which I am about to take at the moment when your life was considered to be in imminent danger, and when, consequently, my determined estrangement from my mother would have rendered her morally, if not actually, childless; and her remonstrances were comparatively vehement."

"I am lost in wonder!" I said dejectedly; "how unjust have I been in accusing Lady Madelaine of the sacrifice to which you have wilfully consigned yourself."

"There are sacrifices of all kinds," was the reply; "that which I have made is assuredly not the contemplated sojourn in Scotland."

"Can I, in any way, or by any exertion, induce you to abandon your design?"

"No."

"I seem to be surrounded by mystery. Oh, Adela, I beseech you—"

"To do what? To explain to you my motives? Never. My secret is my own, and shall remain so, until—in short, in my turn, I entreat you to respect it—Learn it when you will, you must repent the knowledge."

"Be it what it may," I retorted vehemently, "I condemn it. You have overrated your strength. The existence which, as a girl, was tolerable and even pleasant, will, at your present age, wither you by its hopeless monotony."

"I should have judged so once; but I then mistook my true means of happiness."

"Happiness! Do you hope to find it at Glenfillan?"

"I shall find what I seek; the only benefit which can henceforward avail me."

The words of my sister were so obscure, that they only increased my curiosity. I redoubled my efforts to induce her to confide in me, but she was impenetrable, and at length lost her temper.

"You are indelicate, Eveleen," she said, haughtily; "why do you harass me with entreaties, when I have declared that they will be unavailing?"

"I will do so no longer, since you do not consider me worthy of your confidence; but let me at least entreat you not to take so serious a step without earnestly considering what may, and indeed must be its effect upon the whole of your future life. You know nothing of the world, or of its pleasures; you are ignorant of the happiness of loving and being beloved, save in theory—and remember what bright visions you used to evoke—"

"Enough!" she said sternly; "I want no advice; and even were it otherwise, you are the last person to whom I should apply for counsel."

As all my expressions had been affectionate as well as earnest, I felt offended by the tone which my sister had assumed; and had not Lady Madelaine at that precise moment returned, accompanied by the happy Lady Flora, who walked into the room as though she were already treading upon heather, I fear this so much desired interview with my sister would have terminated in anger on both sides. Our mutual agitation did not escape my mother, and she appeared uneasy and irresolute, when I rose, and proposed that we should return to town. She offered no opposition, however, and with a cold embrace, and hearts more estranged than ever, Adela and I parted.

We had no sooner left the villa than Lady Madelaine, with an anxiety which she vainly strove to conceal, hastened to inquire what could be the nature of the conversation which I had held with my sister, and by which we had both evidently been so much moved; I told her frankly.

"Why did you persist in so thankless an interference?" she asked, impatiently; "pray, permit Miss Tilden to make herself ridiculous in her own way, since she has determined to do so. Setting aside the consideration that your fortune may, hereafter, be greatly benefited by her obstinacy, there are a thousand other reasons which must make her wrong-headedness advantageous to you. Do you not yet understand that your sister's disposition, tastes, and prejudices are all calculated to annoy and injure you, were you to mix in the same society? I will even warn you, moreover, that private conversations, such as this for which lately you were so eager, and which has only tended to wound and exasperate your feelings, can conduce to no favorable result; and are only calculated to produce very disagreeable effects. You will be wise to avoid them for the future, whenever you are flung together, and to make the most of the brilliant position you have secured, without troubling yourself with the sickly fancies of an ungracious girl."

I was quite in the mood to believe that she was right; and I accordingly pledged myself to follow her advice, and to leave Adela to her discontent. The alternative was, at least, an easy one; and the rapture of Sir James on my return to Woodville assisted me wonderfully in the effort.

It was really, therefore, from curiosity at the moment, and not from any lingering remnant of affection, that I one day inquired what had become of Devereux; and as a proof of the perfect composure with which I was able to put the question, I addressed it to my husband, who, with the tact and taste which did him honor, answered as calmly as myself. He had just obtained promotion in his regiment, and

was extremely zealous in his military duties, to the great edification of Sir Herbert, and the amusement of his mother. I received the intelligence coldly enough, for I still felt sufficient interest in him to be piqued by his marked and studious neglect; and to experience a little bitterness at the thought that his love for me had been superseded by the poor vanity of rising in his profession. Nevertheless, I rejoiced to perceive that it did not affect my feelings; and my heart bounded as it whispered that I conquered a weakness, for which his fickleness now made me blush.

His fickleness! How amusing are the one-sided judgments of those who will only see one phase of a question! I accused Devereux of fickleness—I who had become the wife of another man, and, moreover, of the very man whom I had long professed alike to dislike and to despise. I knew that Lady Madelaine had closed her doors against him, and I was still her guest; and yet I accused Devereux of fickleness, even after I had parted from him with an injunction to forget me, which my marriage had since rendered imperative.

A few weeks after our return to Woodville, Lady Madelaine and Lord Otterford proceeded to town, in order to expedite the departure of Lady Flora and my sister; but on this occasion, I made no proposal to bear them company. On the contrary, when my mother inquired my intention on the subject, I declared my distaste to another interview with Adela. And as Sir James had thoroughly reasoned and rallied me out of all my suspicions of mystification, and declared his willingness to remain at Woodville until I should desire to follow my mother, I saw her depart with thankfulness that so ungracious a task was spared to me.

A fortnight flew rapidly by. Sir James was all animation and amiability, and exerted himself as strenuously for my amusement as though he lived to no other purpose. I began to exonerate my mother, and to believe that she had guided me aright; but, nevertheless, I occasionally sighed for a wider field of action; nor, as I had reason to suspect, was Dornton altogether indifferent to the same advantage. He never addressed a compliment to me, and he was not sparing of them, but it terminated by an assurance of the effect which I should produce in town, or an expression of curiosity as to how the rivalry of my beauty—and such beauty—would be borne by the *blasées* belles of the last two seasons. At length on one occasion, I ventured to say timidly—

"Why should we not essay the experiment?"

"Are you serious, Eveleen?"

"*Pourquoi pas?* I imagine that we cannot remain at Woodville forever."

"I am glad that you have made the observation, dearest," replied Dornton, eagerly; "I will confess to you that it is irksome to me. In short, it is not *home*. We have not yet tasted the delights of home, Eveleen."

"You are right. We will only remain in Grosvenor Square while we decide upon a house; and then, Sir James, we will assert our independence and emancipate ourselves."

"Admirably decided! And when shall we put our project into execution?"

"Now—this moment, if you wish it."

"Nay, nay, not so fast," laughed Dornton "we must first acquaint Lady Madelaine with our intention, and name to her the precise day on which she may expect us."

"So be it. Let me see—this is Saturday. Tell her that we will be with her on Thursday."

"Suffer me to suggest an amendment, and to propose that we should say Friday; not that we will leave Woodville the later, but we may make two days of the journey. I cannot bear that you should arrive in town, pale and worn with fatigue. Will you oblige me in this?"

I could not reasonably object, and it was consequently so arranged. We made our few parting visits in the neighborhood; and on the Thursday, at noon, bade farewell to the scene of our honeymoon. I was not, however, inclined to be sentimental on that subject. London was before me, with the admiration of the men and the envy of the women. Visions of splendor and triumph rose brightly in the distance; I was about to commence a new life. I undoubtedly talked an infinity of nonsense on the subject of the future; but Sir James was too well-bred to allow me to suspect that he perceived it. How differently did I now perform the journey, which, when I had been accompanied by my mother, was full of tediousness and *ennui*. I only wonder, when I look back, how my spirits sustained themselves throughout so many hours without flagging for an instant. Dornton looked at me in astonishment. He had never before seen me in such a mood; and he was evidently pleased by my animation, and the effect which it produced upon my appearance. Nevertheless, at the conclusion of the day's journey, I congratulated myself upon the prudence and forethought of my husband, for I was fairly exhausted by my exertions; and while Sir James was still deprecating the insufficiency of the arrangements which had been made for my accommodation, I fell asleep, only to renew in my dreams the bright fancies that had sustained me throughout the day.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The period of marriage is the one great epoch of a woman's life. It is a condensation of courteous deceit and flattering promise, which require months, and sometimes even years, to annihilate their effects. Custom has ordained that every man should commence his wedded career by a tissue of self-abnegation and devotedness, of which the sex is utterly incapable for any length of time; while the world, never slow to claim its share in any glozing cheat, helps on the illusion of the bride by a species of general and gracious worship, which, just as it wanes to a close, has become necessary to the happiness of its idol, who seldom fails to discover, amid the intoxication of the incense, that its fumes are directed elsewhere. Custom has timed the duration of the sacrifice; and when, at the close of the given period, the bride has degenerated into the wife, the *prestige* ceases—the married dame is no longer more than a mere unit in the great sum total of the

wor'd, and she is quietly handed down from her pedestal to make way for a new victim.

These are trite truths; but they, nevertheless, deserve more and deeper reflection than are commonly accorded to them. How many women, during their period of courtship, stop short in all their anticipations of the future, at the indulgences, and triumphs, and congratulations of the honeymoon! How many wilfully close their eyes to the long years which are to succeed it! It is the fashion to smile, and nod, and felicitate the poor, inexperienced, self-deluded girl who is about to commit matrimony, however ill-advised her selection may appear to her acquaintance. Beyond the pale of her own family, it is rare indeed that she possesses one friend gifted with sufficient moral courage to bid her pause. She might find a warning against any other imprudence; but who would counsel an acquaintance not to marry? A marriage is a feast for the idle gossipry of the circle in which it takes place, and what trifler would destroy its own aliment for so puerile a reason as that of urging prudence upon the party from whom it is to be derived? We have no right to expect so Utopian a sacrifice from the butterflies who, as they cannot live without sunshine, so they care little whence it comes; and the effect of all this folly and false feeling is fatal to its object, who has neither opportunity nor inclination to recollect that the smiling flatterers, who seek only their own amusement in an event which must affect the after-happiness of her whole life, would, although they gladly participate in the festivities of the marriage feast, not waste one hour of their own existence in sharing her sorrows or her tears.

I have often thought that marriage resembled a sky-rocket. How brilliantly and aspiringly it commences, grasping another element in its ascent, as though this flat, dull earth could not content its aspirations, nor afford space for its display; then how dazzlingly it blazes for a moment; and, that moment past, how, one by one, its starlike fires go out, until at length, down-tumbling, dark, and dangerous, falls back all that is left of the false meteor, a few floating ashes and a smoking stick.

Perhaps it is well that young people should not look so gravely upon realities as their elders, for they naturally hunger and thirst for the pleasant things of the world, and might turn away with disgust at its very threshold, were they at once to lift the covers of the tempting banquet spread out before them, and discover that, as at the table of the Barmecide, they were bidden to a feast of empty dishes. I am only quarreling with those who unnecessarily deepen their delusion, and thus render their after-experience more bitter.

In my case I had certainly been spared all idle and anticipatory comments. I had completed a sacrifice, not volunteered a folly; but I was not doomed to escape the after-delusion to which I have alluded. Every bride, situated as I was in the world, must necessarily commence her married career brilliantly; and, moreover, the novelty of my position, the comparative freedom of action, the feeling, or the belief that I was beloved, the natural clingingness of my disposition, the chimera of independence, and the consciousness of increased importance, all naturally tended to impress me favorably toward the individual to whom I was indebted for these advantages. Dornton, moreover, was beside me, anticipating every thought and wish, and blending his own image with every picture of my newly-awakened fancy.

I have said how patiently he encouraged my wild, and, no doubt, unreasonable anticipations, and I was grateful to him for his show of sympathy in my feelings; to me such sympathy was as new as it was welcome. Herein, at least, he had an advantage over Devereux, who had possessed no opportunity of displaying a similar deference to my tastes and wishes; and this fact, coupled with the consciousness that all farther struggle was useless, now that I was irrevocably his wife, helped the cause of Sir James better than a score of arguments. I had been cowed and crossed so long, that I panted to be free and to be happy; and, as I had not yet heard the clanking of the fetters which I had so lately assisted to rivet, so I willingly nursed myself in the belief that the burden would be light, and might even prove ultimately rather a pleasure than a trammel. In short, who cannot guess the hopes and the feelings of a weak and vain young heart, panting for admiration and for liberty?

It was dusk in the evening of the second day after our departure from Woodville, when we reached town; the lamps were already lighted, and the tall dark avenues of houses appeared gigantic in the closing light. I leaned eagerly from the window of the carriage, and inhaled the murky atmosphere with delight. This was to be the arena of my conquests, the theatre of my triumphs. My heart bounded with delight. Suddenly the carriage stopped, and Sir James sprang out and lifted me with great care into the house, whose open door seemed to invite our entrance; but in the hall I paused, for I did not recognize the objects before me. Strange servants, in a livery which was not familiar to me, were busied in receiving us, and the staircase toward which Dornton led me was equally unknown.

"Where are we?" I asked, anxiously; "and why do we not go at once to my mother's?"

"We are *at home*, sweet love, and Lady Madelaine is here, waiting to welcome you."

Never was surprise more pleasant. I pressed the hand of my husband tenderly in my own; and although my lips were silent, he could read my thanks in the look which I turned upon him. One cause, at least, of his long absence from Woodville was explained, and a portion of the time had been spent in my service.

When the doors of the drawing-room were flung back to give us entrance, a flood of light inundated the staircase, while, instantly that we were announced, Lady Madelaine appeared upon the threshold, superbly dressed and radiant with smiles; and in her suite appeared all such of her friends as she was anxious should extend their countenance to myself. The whole party were in full dress, and, as I glanced rapidly around me, a blush of annoyance rose to my cheek when I remembered my own traveling costume. I was not long suffered, however, to experience this mortification, for before Sir James had made the tour of the room, and replied to the greeting of the guests,

my mother approached me, and, with a meaning smile, offered to do the honors of my house while I went to my room to remove my bonnet and shawl. I obeyed without comment, happy to escape from a scene in which I must have appeared like a dark spot in a sea of light, when, guided by a comely-looking housekeeper and attended by Joséphine, I soon found myself in a charming dressing-room, which seemed to have been furnished by the hands of fairies, it was so fresh, so gay, and so luxurious in its arrangements. Nor did I find less pleasure in contemplating half a dozen exquisite dresses, temptingly spread forth to await my selection, and a case of magnificent diamonds, which the housekeeper reverently informed me were the family jewels of the Dorntons, reset under the superintendence of Lady Madelaine, and which her ladyship particularly requested me to wear on that evening.

I was enchanted! I think that Cinderella must have had very similar feelings after the arrival of her beneficent godmother, on the occasion of the ball given by the prince.

I could have amused myself very pleasantly for an hour in examining my new possessions, but Joséphine reminded me of the expectant guests, and I forthwith commenced my somewhat elaborate toilet. In a short time my glass reflected a face and figure which I contemplated with considerable complacency. Never had I been so magnificently attired. Blazing with jewels, clad in white silk brocade, richly flowered, and wearing rouge for the first time, I was enraptured at the effect which I was about to produce, and this feeling alone gave me courage to tear myself away from the friendly mirror. All memory, all regret, were absorbed by vanity; at that moment, the present sufficed to satisfy my heart.

When I entered the drawing-room, I was greeted by that low and flattering murmur which outweighs a score of compliments, and never fails to convince a woman of the exact extent of her personal advantages. Sir James advanced to meet me with eyes beaming with proud delight; and I was too well pleased with myself not to be equally so with him. It was through his agency that I had achieved this triumph; and, as a natural consequence, he became to me an object of increasing interest and consideration. The dinner was *recherché* in the extreme; and as, for the first time, I presided at my own table, I felt that I was at length independent of the shackles under which I had so long writhed. All the conversation around me turned on the various engagements of the different individuals—on the necessity of my immediate presentation at court on my marriage—on the situation of my opera-box and the importance of securing a ticket for the ball of the beautiful Duchess of D——, which was to take place in a fortnight. I was surrounded by assurances of the admiration and envy which I was certain to excite in the court circle—to all of which Sir James listened with evident gratification

Our party separated at an early hour, for several of the guests had sacrificed other engagements in order to assist Lady Madelaine in welcoming me to my new home; and all were expected elsewhere in the course of the night. Gratified as I had been, I was, nevertheless, not sorry to see them depart; for I was fatigued from excitement and exertion; and although my mother lingered to the last, in order to receive my acknowledgments for the very effective assistance which she had rendered to Dornton, and the expression of my satisfaction at the arrangements which had been made for my reception, both of which I tendered freely and earnestly, she also departed in her turn, and I again found myself *tête-à-tête* with my husband.

My heart was overflowing with happiness, and I poured forth my thanks to Sir James with an energy for which he was evidently not prepared, and which appeared to produce a great effect upon him.

"You do not then regret, Eveleen," he said, "that you have been induced to intrust your happiness to my keeping?"

"I were indeed ungrateful to do so!" I replied. "And so you were really thinking of me, and of my gratification, during your absence from Woodville?"

"Was it not a duty, as well as a delight?"

"Oh, not a word of duty," I exclaimed laughing. "It is too chilling a consideration for such a moment as this—a blight upon the flowers—a shadow over the sun."

"And yet your duties will be light, my sweet wife; all I ask is to see you happy, fashionable, and idolized; and all this is in your own power."

Nothing could be more charming. And at the close of this little dialogue, we proceeded matrimonially, arm in arm, to explore our new habitation. Even accustomed as I had been, from my childhood, to taste and luxury, I was compelled to admit that I had seen nothing to compare with the residence of which I had become the mistress. The golden wand of wealth had been guided by the hand of elegance; and there was repose as well as splendor in all around me.

Those were the palmy days of boudoirs, and mine was perfect. Lady Madelaine had excelled herself. Her egotism had placed me in a perilous position; and it was necessary to dazzle and amuse me, in order to blind me to the fact. She could not have succeeded better. Admirable tactician as she was, she was well aware that I could be led through my vanity alone to forget, or at least to forgive, the past; and she acted upon that conviction. All assumption of authority was laid aside; she counseled and assisted, but never controlled me. I was plunged suddenly into a vortex of dissipation. My presentation took place under the most flattering circumstances; the queen condescended to congratulate me on my marriage, and the princesses on my recovery. At the ball of the Duchess of D——, I walked a minuet with the Prince of Wales; and on the following day the journals teemed with descriptions of my dress, my grace, and my fashion. All London left their names at my door; and no entertainment was considered perfect at which I was not present. My box at the opera was the resort of all that was great and gifted in the capital; even royalty itself was my frequent guest. Poets were eloquent in my praise; and politicians forbore to argue when I smiled. I had not a moment unoccupied; not a moment

for a calm and rational survey of those serious duties, and that awful responsibility, which I had taken upon me. I was a mere feather on the summer breath of the world, wafted hither and thither by the current of every idle fancy, and every puerile ambition. More than once I had listened, not only to the accents of flattery, but even to the withering words of passion; but they had passed by me unheeded, and without quickening a single pulse. Herein, at least, I played an equal game with the world, for I was simply living in myself, and for myself, and had no sentiment to bestow on others.

Dornton, meanwhile, was the very model of a high-bred husband. Ever ready to second me in any scheme of pleasure or expense; ever willing to share in my amusements, and equally satisfied to seek his own when I did not require his attendance, he was never either negligent or intrusive; while his undoubted fashion and unequivocal popularity, flattered my vanity, and satisfied my self-love.

So passed the season; and, on the invitation of Lady Madelaine, we proceeded to spend a couple of months at Rooksley, which, since the departure of my sister and her guardian, had resumed all its wonted elegance. I have since thought that my mother urged this arrangement in order to convince herself that I had thoroughly conquered my passion for Devereux. Be that as it may, however, it is certain that it was not without emotion I once more found myself amid scenes so familiar to me, and so redolent alike of happy and painful recollections. Nevertheless, I can truly assert that my first memory was of my sister. How utterly had the giddy round of pleasure obliterated her image from my mind! I had, indeed, been informed casually by Lady Madelaine, that she had arrived safely at Glenfillan, and expressed her perfect satisfaction at the realization of her project: but this was all that I knew, or had cared to know; and it was only on my arrival at Rooksley, when I was endeavoring, by the repose of an hour, to overcome the fatigue of my journey from town, that I remembered, and dwelt upon her faded look, and the hollow cough which, despite her efforts to suppress it, had escaped her several times during our last brief interview. My reflections were, however, very slightly tinged with self-reproach. Adela's estrangement had been her own work; she was self-exiled from her family; she had not addressed one letter to me since her arrival in Scotland; and if I had been equally silent, I felt that I had only to revert to my last attempt at correspondence with her, in order at once to find my justification.

Of Devereux I scarcely thought at all; and in the dignity of my new character I even tried to smile at the folly of my girlish fancy. I was not prepared to comprehend that the lingering and most happy effects of that fancy, had been to render me insensible to the dangerous homage of less scrupulous admirers. Such a suspicion never crossed my mind. I never dreamed of looking beyond my own will for my strength.

A fatal error, fatally expiated!

CHAPTER XL.

Doubtlessly Lady Madelaine was satisfied with the success of the test to which she had subjected me, when, at the close of a fortnight, she found me as exacting, as self-centered, and as indifferent as usual; for, on descending to dinner on the termination of that period, she congratulated Lord Otterford, in my presence, on the promotion of his nephew, who had just obtained a company in his regiment; and as she did so, I felt that her eyes were fixed steadily upon my face. Sooth to say, this information interested me but little: I believed that the world had done its work upon me, and that I was no longer the fond and feeble girl I had once been; while so long a time had elapsed since we parted, that I was careless on the subject of meeting him again. I imagined the wound in my heart to be healed; I knew not that it was yet too freshly scarred to be safely handled.

Resolved therefore to parade my indifference—and was not this affectation enough of itself to teach me the necessity of caution?—I raised my head from the beads which I was stringing, and said with a polite smile, "Suffer me, my lord, to add my congratulations to those of my mother, on the subject of Colonel Devereux. Sir Herbert must be enchanted." Lady Madelaine glanced triumphantly at her husband; but I suspect that he was less easily convinced than herself upon the subject of my present feelings. From the period of Emily Vernon's melancholy death, he had occasionally given way to fits of depression, which I never failed to attribute to his memory of the past; and it is probable that experience of the power of a real passion had taught him more rightly to appreciate my self-delusion. He had sacrificed his better feelings to the wealth he wanted; I had buried mine under the rose-leaves of vanity, and the glittering pall of dissipation and frivolity. Wretched alternatives both; the one as ineffective as the other, when divested of the *prestige* of novelty.

The first dinner-bell had rung, and I was still lingering in the drawing-room in order to finish the bracelet which had been the occupation of my morning (and in which Lady Madelaine had, to my great surprise, evinced so extraordinary an interest that she remained beside me to witness its completion), when the door suddenly opened, and Colonel Devereux was announced. The abruptness of his entrance threw me off my guard, and I uttered a faint scream, and suffered the coral beads to scatter themselves over the carpet. My mother, by whom he was evidently expected, skilfully covered the accident by receiving him with flattering felicitations, to which, however, he replied in a brief and agitated manner. Compelled, at length, to approach me, he faltered out a few words of which I could not seize the sense, and which he did not, in all probability, himself comprehend; bowed low without raising his eyes, and then turned abruptly to shake hands with Lord Otterford, who had not risen from his chair; and who did not appear altogether satisfied of the expediency of my mother's present experiments.

Gradually, however, he recovered his gaiety, and overwhelmed his nephew with questions, to which the latter replied "yes" and "no" with

apparent unconsciousness of his own utterance, and occasionally in the wrong places; as for me, I affected to be diligently collecting the beads which had fallen, glad to escape, on so innocent a pretext, the searching glances of Lady Madelaine. Nothing was wanting to render the whole scene insupportable, but the presence of Sir James; and five minutes afterward he entered the room with his gun in his hand, to apologize for his delay, and to give us an account of his prowess.

I saw at once that he was prepared for the presence of Devereux, for he did not even attempt to affect surprise, but met him with an extended hand, and a bland smile, as though he were the individual of all others who was most welcome at this moment. The feeling was, nowever, not reciprocal. Devereux, indeed, took the proffered hand, but his repugnance was almost visible, and his coldness beyond mistake.

Affecting not to perceive the chilliness of our new guest, Sir James persisted in lavishing upon him the most flattering attentions; after which he turned to me, expressed his overpowering uneasiness at my paleness, and implored me to be more careful of myself, lest I should bring on a relapse of my illness. All this unnecessary parade of anxiety was torture to me, for at that particular moment I would have given a year of life to have become invisible upon his entrance. I felt at once that my imagined indifference to Devereux had vanished like an icicle in the sunshine, when he was again actually in my presence.

He was surrounded by an atmosphere of fond and pleasant memories. I saw him the same, indeed, whom I had loved, but increased in manly beauty, grace, and self-possession. The world had done its work lovingly upon him, and the period of our separation had been to him one of both moral and physical gain. I had reason to believe that such had also been the case with myself; and, even then, when I ought to have hoped that, like me, he had found an alternative for his early passion, and would now meet me with indifference, I felt my heart beating proudly with the conviction that, once more thrown into contact with me, it was at least improbable that he should do so.

I had never before seriously remembered that Sir James Dornton, handsome and high-bred as he undoubtedly was, had nevertheless numbered forty summers! It was an untoward moment to register the fact. Fortunately for all parties, Lord Otterford, to whom the ceremony of dinner had become by no means unimportant, reminded us that the second bell would ring in a few moments, and that we were still unprepared for the summons.

I had risen from my seat before the words left his lips, anxious to escape, and to find myself alone for an instant. I did not comprehend the revolution which the mere presence of Devereux had wrought in my feelings toward both myself and my husband; nor did I understand the meaning of his own manner. That he was embarrassed was sufficiently evident; for not only had he not addressed to me one intelligible word—that I could readily have forgiven him—but I had not even detected one look turned toward me. What did this fact imply! Did he fear my power over him? Or, did he seek to shun me that my influence was at an end?

I tried to hope that the latter might be the case. I tried to hope so, but I did not: my vanity would tolerate no such wish—no such credence. My principle and my woman-pride were at war. The one was built up on expediency, and the other wrought and throbbed through every pulse of my being; I could not even deceive myself as to the result of my mental struggle. I did not: but as Joséphine arranged my hair, and expatiated upon the "*superbe beauté*" of Colonel Devereux, I vowed to myself to maintain, not only my dignity as a married woman, but also the supremacy of my attractions, by once more bringing my old suitor to my feet—of course in all honesty and honor. As a lover, I could consider him no more; but I could not brook that he should vow to another woman the allegiance which had been mine. I remembered Lord Otterford before his marriage, and during the life of my father. Neither Lady Madelaine nor Sir James had seen cause for blame in the bond of admiring and devoted friendship which had united them. Neither Lady Madelaine nor Sir James, *et pour cause*, could demur to the existence of a similar tie between myself and Devereux.

The argument was specious—but, could any one have read my heart, and asked me what indeed it was which I proposed to myself in this compromise with my conscience, I am quite sure that I could have given no rational reply. In short, I did not venture to look into the future. I forgot how weakly and unworthily I had behaved to the man whom I was still plotting to enslave and to secure as the victim of my vanity; and I placed my mother's example before me, as the screen which was to be my protection from the animadversions of the world, and the reproaches of my own conscience.

I profited by the previous delay to remain in my dressing-room for several minutes after the second bell had rung; and nearly exhausted the patience of Joséphine by the caprice which I exhibited with regard to my toilet. We had lived so utterly *en famille* since our arrival at Rooksley, that I had become somewhat negligent upon this point; and the *soubrette* was not prepared for so sudden a demonstration as that with which I now favored her. At length, however, all was arranged to my satisfaction. The affectation of simplicity which I had judged it expedient to exhibit, was skilfully calculated and displayed the quiet consciousness of a beauty which required no assistance. I wore neither rouge nor ornaments. I knew that Lady Madelaine dared not risk so extreme a step; and thus the diplomacy of the dressing room was perfect, and all rivalry rendered impossible between the beauty in her first development, and the beauty on the wane.

How often had I promised myself this practical triumph; and how much would it be enhanced on this occasion, by the fact that Devereux would be present to institute the comparison. For a moment I almost forgot the embarrassment of my position.

When I entered the drawing-room, Lady Madelaine alone was seated. The gentlemen were collected in a group, discussing some

question of politics, or sporting. No one moved as I appeared. Sir James was gradually slackening in the extreme gallantry of his attentions, although still affecting marked courtesy and affection.

"I am glad that you are at last arrived, Lady Dornton," said my mother, as her eye traveled rapidly over my person; "Colonel Devereux must be famishing after his long journey, and Sir James after his shooting. Colonel Devereux, will you give me your arm to the dining-room!" and, as he obeyed, without once glancing toward me, she swept by in the proud dignity of her matronly beauty, crushing, as she did so, the light drapery of my muslin robe beneath the heavy folds of her black velvet dress.

At table, I found myself seated nearly opposite to Devereux; but so far as concerned himself, he might as well have been established at the antipodes. He did not even appear conscious of my presence: or so, at least, I interpreted the resolute avoidance which he exhibited. Attentive and gallant to Lady Madelaine, he had neither eyes nor ears for me; and, in fact, the dinner was half over before anything beyond a casual remark had been addressed to me by any of the party. My heart was swelling with mortification and wounded vanity.

Was Devereux then always to see me only as the chidden child? Was I never to be permitted to assert myself in his presence? And, was he, too, to adopt the tone of my mother—that mother whom he once professed to dislike and to avoid,—in order to wound my self-respect!

I felt the tears rising to my eyes, and scalding the lids upon which they hung; and I trembled lest they should fall; when, during a sudden pause, Lady Madelaine remarked ironically:

"Lady Dornton is fond of surprises, even in small matters, it would seem. By the time which she consumed at her toilet, I anticipated something brilliant in the way of costume; and, lo! she has made her appearance in her dressing-gown."

"You are a strange little girl, Eveleen," followed up Sir James. "How are we to interpret your pastoral attire? Are we to attribute it to a modesty which disclaims admiration, or to a vanity which demands it, despite all drawbacks?"

"I will not venture to estimate the extent of your generosity," I said, forcing a smile; "but I believe that I have seldom deviated from this same simplicity of which you accuse me to-day for the first time, since we have been a family party." As I ceased speaking, I glanced at Devereux. His eyes were fixed upon me, nor did he withdraw them until I had met the long, sad look with which they were filled. Their expression was beyond mistake. He loved me still—he regretted my loss—he was unhappy: and unhappy through my means!

What a singular problem is a female heart!—Although at that moment I felt as if I could have been happy in his happiness, I was nevertheless rejoiced to feel that he had suffered for my sake, that he was still in the toils—that we were not utterly separated.

From that instant I became gay even to folly; I jested with Lord Otterford, and paid back every epigram, which Lady Madelaine launched against me, with a point which, before the close of the evening, taught her greater caution. I became dazzling from the consciousness of my success, and exhausted all my powers of pleasing with a lavishness worthy of a crowd of listeners. As the brow of my mother darkened, my own became more radiant. She felt my triumph bitterly, and I knew it. Little did she guess the source of the wild spirits by which I was inspired, or her envy would have ceased at once.

My secret saved me while I could retain it. I was in the position of one mortally wounded by a dagger; while the weapon still remains in the wound he can live and pour forth his thoughts, and gaze around him upon the beautiful world which he is about to leave; but the instant that the dagger is withdrawn, death fills the vacuum it has made, and the destruction is complete.

As I laid my head upon the pillow that night, I began to marvel what would be the result of our second meeting on the morrow. There must necessarily be some moment during the day in which we should find ourselves alone; when the restraint under which we had passed the previous evening would be removed; and when he would be at liberty to pour out to me all his regrets, his sufferings, and his reproaches. How should I justify myself? How should I excuse my weakness, my vacillation, my infidelity? Then came the question of ought I to do so, even to him? Ought I to admit that I became the wife of Sir James by coercion? That I went to the altar a loveless bride? That I carried his image in my heart, while my hand was clasped in that of Dornton? How would he receive such an avowal? In what position should I myself stand after so humiliating a revelation?

Ere I at length slept I came to the decision, which those who have studied my character with attention will at once have foreseen. I resolved to leave all to chance, and to be decided by circumstances.

It was cutting through the Gordian knot. When Josephine appeared with my chocolate the following morning, I chid her for having suffered me to sleep so late; and she excused herself by asserting that, confident that the noise of *monsieur's* departure must have disturbed *miladi*, she supposed that *milady* had afterward desired to rest, as she had not rung her bell.

"*Monsieur's* departure!" I exclaimed in surprise; "who has left Rooksley this morning?"

"*Monsieur* Devereux is gone, *miladi*; and Sir James has accompanied him to the post-town on horseback."

"Did Colonel Devereux receive letters by the early post?" I asked anxiously.

Josephine could not inform me. The letter-bag had, as usual, been carried to Lord Otterford; and having ascertained that it contained nothing for me, she had not waited to see its contents distributed. I felt as though I had been hurled from a height: I was stunned with mortification and surprise. No, no; I had deceived myself. Devereux had ceased to love me; and my levity of the previous evening had excited his contempt. I was miserable

All these may appear puerile details to those who care only for the broad outline of actions and events; but such as love to study the intricate details of the human heart, and to unwind the tangled threads by which its impulses and passions are directed, will not so deem of them. Now, as I sit at my desk, with my hair gray, and my brow wrinkled, I feel convinced that had Devereux lent himself to the romantic folly by which my own feelings were governed, his weakness would have worked my cure. I should have discovered among the adulating crowd by which I was generally surrounded, a score of individuals as handsome and as attractive as himself.

It is astonishing with what false tints solitude can invest a man. Had I a score of daughters, I would sooner trust their happiness to the whirl of a London life, under proper *chaperonage*, than to the quiet of the country with one ineligible suitor; just as, upon the same principle, I utterly dissent from the old and accepted axiom of the danger of a girl of fifteen or sixteen committing some foolish act, and requiring constant *surveillance* to keep her in the path of prudence. Everyday experience proves the fallacy of this time-worn assertion, which has been repeated so often that it is taken for granted without examination. As a general rule, a woman is never less likely to mar her own happiness than just as she makes acquaintance with the world. Idleness is the germ of all mischief in a woman's heart; and show me the being more busy than a young girl just bursting into womanhood.

The great kaleidoscope of society is newly revealed to her, and she is never weary of watching its combinations. Her whole heart, her whole being, are in full activity: her moral vision, although not obscured, is confused. She is full of aspirations, full of hopes; but, far from centering upon one solitary object, they are distributed and intertwined, and, as a natural consequence, negatived by their own discursiveness.

It is without a single dread of contradiction from those of my own sex who have passed through the two phases of existence under notice, that I declare my firm belief, that at no period does a woman do herself less justice, or dispose of her happiness more recklessly, than during the few years while she is what our Gallic neighbors courteously term "on the return;" when the bloom of early youth tarnished, the light figure become less buoyant, the hopes which once filled her heart crushed or evaporated—still reeling within herself all the faculties of happiness as freshly as she did ten years before—she sees the children whom she petted in their nursery elbow her in the world's crowd as her successors; and feels that the change, which to herself has been almost imperceptible, must be traced in indelible characters to those by whom she is surrounded. Then it is, that, as she thinks of the future—a future which can only deepen the decay, and increase the moral solitude of her own heart—she is unjust to herself. A morbid dread of utter abandonment by that world to whose smile she had been accustomed, creeps upon her. She looks round upon the younger and the happier of its present favorites and shudders at the solitude which, like the darkness of a polar night, is gradually gathering around her. Then it is, I assert, that her peril comes; then it is that, grateful for the interest which she may inspire, and of which she almost despaired, she wilfully mistakes her own feelings. Her want of self-appreciation and that yearning for support and companionship inherent in woman, delude her into the belief that she loves at last. Differently, indeed, does the passion develop itself from the experience or the imagination of past years; but she mistakes the calmness for depth of feeling; and the same system of delusion blinds her to the imperfections of the individual who is rather the alternative of her moral isolation, than the object of her choice.

Here is, indeed, the real triumph of weakness over reason. Hope and ambition are alike extinct, and her strength of purpose sinks with them. In the girl of sixteen, *all* is hope and ambition, and they are the life-buoys by which she is maintained safely on the surface of the world's waves. Exceptions may be quoted against me. I admit them without dispute; but, as a general rule, I maintain my position.

CHAPTER XLI.

The apparition of Devereux had made strange havoc in my peace of mind, as well as in my self-appreciation. It taught me at once to reflect and to doubt. Because I had listened with indifference to the flatteries of a score of fashionable coxcombs, I had quietly fallen into the belief that marriage had rendered me impenetrable to all attractions from without. I had never taken the trouble to reflect, that if the cowl could not make the monk, so neither could the ring make the matron.

I was awakened with a start to the fact. Whence had I derived my safety? Not from the presence of Sir James, but by the invisible potency of a deep, although smothered passion; and at what a mortifying moment did the truth burst upon me! Just as the novelty of our union wore away, Dornton was beginning to find it possible to derive amusement from pursuits in which I had no share: to enjoy a bachelor's dinner at his club, and a bachelor's stall at the opera; a sporting party, or a boat-race. Not, be it understood, that I repined at this gradual and almost imperceptible change. Had I been less self-centered I might possibly have been wounded, because every handsome young woman imagines, when she marries, that she must inevitably work a revolution in matrimonial habits, and exhibit to the world a model husband, created by the magic of her individual charms. She forgets, poor fool! that custom and possession never fail to rend the diadem from the brow of the divinity; and that, not unfrequently, the most romantic lover degenerates into the most commonplace partner.

In my case, I was spared this mortification, for I had so lively an opinion of my own merits, that it was almost matter of indifference to me; although suddenly aroused to a perception of the fact, the conviction became fatal in another way. I began to remember the circumstances under which I had become a wife: to ask myself wherein I had profited by the alliance which had been thrust upon me; to contrast my sev

enteen summers with the forty well-told years of Dornton; to dwell upon the *éclat* which my beauty and fashion had thrown around the *blasé* man of the world, and the consequence which my large fortune—for even this baneful reflection of money came at last—had obtained for him among his associates.

I looked at Lord Otterford, and thought how widely the past differed from the present; and with what charming indifference Lady Madelaine had supported the change. The world was with her, and the world's plaudits were the one great ambition of her life. She was not dependent on home. So long as all wore a surface of intact and irreproachable polish, she cared little how cold and ungenial might be the under-current.

This was at least a convenient, if not an encouraging temper of mind, and could I have attained to it, I should at once have dismissed the subject from my thoughts; but such was far from being the case. As the image of Sir James paled and diminished in my mental vision, that of Devereux brightened and expanded to fill up the vacant space; and I flung aside the hard penetrating chisel of reality, to assume the soft and facile pencil of fancy.

Full of youth, and love, and noble aspirations, still upon the threshold of that life into whose inner temples Sir James had already penetrated; what violent contrasts could I not create in my own mind, between the lover of my choice and the husband of my fate! These are the weak speculations, the idle comparisons, by which women lose their dignity of character; and I spent hours in creating and instituting them; nor did the circumstances of Devereux's sudden departure make me less ingenious in this self-torture. I had come back upon the conviction that he still loved me, and I consequently attributed his abrupt retreat to fear. Here I might have paused, and asked myself how I should receive so equivocal a compliment; but I avoided the reference, and only clung to the fact.

The result of all this moral weakness was an increased indifference to Sir James, an added appreciation of my own merits, and a restless anxiety respecting the movements of Devereux.

Company crowded to Rooksley. Lady Madelaine had wearied of the pastoral picture of the family group, upon which she had expatiated so gracefully amid the throngs of London; while I, fully occupied by my own visions, had never breathed a wish for change. The men, when they returned to the saloon after dinner, played high, and discussed political questions; the women flirted and passed in review the personal and moral merits of their absent friends; and I believe that few of these could have complained with justice of being forgotten.

In these evenings at Rooksley I learnt one fact, which I have ever since retained, and of which the experience of each succeeding year has sufficed more fully to convince me: that when a woman emancipates herself deliberately alike from charity and from decency, it costs her no effort to be a wit; nor need she open her mouth without giving utterance to something brilliant. I leave it to casuists to decide which of the two sisters of the fairy tale she most resembles—the one who spoke gold and diamonds, or the other, who cast forth toads and vipers: I only know that many a woman's —I was about to say, *reputation*, but I retract the word, and substitute—celebrity, has depended, and does to my knowledge depend, in the present day, upon what the French have wittily called a *flux de mots*—the one more unfeminine than the other.

But, *vogue la galère!* I am talking of others, and forgetting that my legitimate subject is myself. It may be remembered that Sir James had tranquilized my mind, even before our marriage, on the subject of his utter want of jealousy; and I am bound to admit that he acted in accordance with his professions. Whether he had so truly read the secret of my heart, or so utterly despised the weakness of my nature, that he calmly committed me to the safeguard of my vanity, it is needless now to inquire, while it is certain that he saw all the idle guests of Lady Madelaine at my feet without comment or expostulation. I laughed more than once in my secret thoughts, as I found myself playing the same *rôle* in the Rooksley saloon which my mother had played during my early girlhood, and which I had looked upon with envy. I had, as a natural consequence, brought with me to the country all the *prestige* of my success in town; and I played the *beauté par excellence* without mercy or misgiving. My mother's forbearance was wonderful. She had necessarily fallen back into a *demi jour* which it must have been difficult to tolerate, yet she did not seem to see it; and, satisfied with the adoration of her own immediate circle, she left to me alike the triumph and the trouble of forming a bright centre to the general group.

Such was the state of things when I suddenly remembered Lady O'Halloran; and I had no sooner done so than I directed Joséphine to dispatch a messenger to the Hall without delay, to ascertain if the family were in the country. I was seated in my dressing-room when the memory of the kind-hearted old lady rose up before me like a reproach, and with it were linked a thousand associations and a thousand regrets. What would the single-hearted, honestly-minded friend of my father now think of the dissipated, reckless Lady Dornton? Would she look on me with pity, or with blame? Had I been wicked as well as weak, the question would have given me no uneasiness; for good old Lady O'Halloran existing, with the tithe of an establishment, in the empty and echoing hall of her husband's ancestors, in order to preserve his memory from dishonor, and the fortunes of her son from ruin, was an object very unlikely to interest that world of which I had now become a votary. But the spell of the past was over her; and, as was habitual with me, her good opinion was essential to my comfort and self-appreciation. Here was another hope of help, though I could not have explained the manner in which it was to be rendered available.

That Lady O'Halloran had not appeared at Rooksley, by no means implied her absence from the country. Lady Madelaine's greeting on a former occasion had been prohibitory of all further intercourse; and the old lady was too

high-hearted to incur the risk of a new affront. I therefore awaited with considerable interest the return of my messenger; and had no sooner ascertained that Lady O'Halloran was indeed in the neighborhood, than I ordered my carriage, and hastened to assure her of my continued regard and gratitude. During the drive, I lost myself in a sea of doubt and irresolution. Should I pour out all my feelings before her? *Dare* I? Could they all be justified? And wherefore should I subject myself to the ordeal of her shrewd and searching judgment? *Cui bono?* And yet I wanted her pity. I thirsted for her advice, for her support. I did not ask myself if her advice would separate my thoughts from Devereux, or support me in my duties as a wife. I only reflected that I had no resting-place for the sole of my foot, and trusted that the good plain sense of my old monitor would enable me to establish a rock amid the sands.

The first thing which roused me from my reverie was the sudden stopping of the carriage at the gates of the Hall Park; and I was immediately struck by the amended aspect of every object around me. The gothic lodge, which had formerly been in a state of partial ruin, was restored with care and skill; the great avenue, which was the lion of the estate, had been cleared and leveled; deer were grazing over the glades; clumps of young timber, picturesquely grouped, and protected by fences, were to be seen on all sides; and, finally, as I reached the house, the finger of renovation had been so busy that I scarcely recognized the details which met my eye.

Within, as without, the same change had taken place; while the bevy of powdered menials who received me, and who replaced the one grayheaded domestic who had served Lady O'Halloran with all the stately affection of long habit, were clothed in neat but rich liveries. I forgot the lapse of time which had intervened since my last visit to the Hall, and looked around me in astonishment.

I was shown into the library, which, like the rest of the establishment, had assumed an air of opulence and comfort; and where I was courteously received by a stranger, the veriest vision of girlish beauty upon which I had ever looked. Small and slight as a sylph, her eyes were of the deepest blue, and the magnificent masses of hair that fell around her face, and to her shoulders, were of that golden brown which flashes in the sunshine, and darkens in the shade; the smile that played upon her lips appeared habitual to them; and as she rose upon my entrance, and courteously motioned me to the seat which a servant had advanced, I thought that I had never beheld so perfect an embodiment of innocence, sweetness, and polished grace. She was evidently as young as myself, and although easy and graceful in her manner, it still retained a simplicity which mine had long lost. Her dress was as girlish as her person, and was remarkable at a period when the rich massiveness of the materials employed upon the costume of all women of a certain rank was almost oppressive. A plain gown of slight white silk, falling in voluminous folds from her waist, where it was confined by a thick silken cord; hanging sleeves, which were open to the elbow, and revealed an arm of consummate beauty; and a rich collar of Spanish point which covered her throat, and reached to her shoulders, composed her whole costume. She wore neither paint nor powder; and during the few minutes which elapsed before the entrance of Lady O'Halloran, I endeavored in vain to convince myself of the position which she occupied in the family. Her self-possession was so perfect that it was impossible to assign to her the station of a dependent; while the gentle unobtrusiveness of her bearing was, to my judgment, equally incompatible with the assumption of her being other than, at most, a needy relative, adopted by the kind-hearted mistress of the mansion.

I was still undecided on the point when Lady O'Halloran entered the room.

"Is it Eveleen, or Lady Dornton, whom I am to welcome to the Hall?" she asked, as she extended her hand with a gravity which was not habitual to her.

"One and both, my good friend!" I exclaimed, rising to carry the offered hand to my lips. "Eveleen who comes to thank you for your past friendship, and Lady Dornton who ventures to ask for its continuance."

"So far, so well," was the reply; "and in this proceeding, and the feeling by which it is dictated, I recognize the prompting of the well-meaning but unstable heart of my poor friend Tilden's daughter. You are welcome, Eveleen, very welcome in both characters. I have often thought of you with affection and anxiety, my dear child. And now let me make known to you the wife of my son; the beloved Margaret, who has become as dear to me as her husband; and who has by her tenderness given an added value to the close of my struggling and stormy life."

I almost uttered an exclamation of surprise as the beautiful young creature before me bowed and smiled her greeting. All was now explained. It was evident that her wealth had restored the faded honors of the ancient family of which she had become a member; that her extreme loveliness had not been her only dowry; and that beneath the sweet simplicity by which I had been impressed, must nestle the proud consciousness of having shed happiness and peace upon the path of him she loved.

What a contrast did she not offer to myself! We were both young, both wealthy, both handsome; but hers was not the commanding and almost arrogant beauty which distinguished me; it was a loveliness, so pure, so ethereal, so spiritualized, that all idea of rivalry was annihilated as by the stroke of a magician's wand; and I felt no reluctance in admitting the charm under which I bowed.

"And thus, Eveleen," pursued Lady O'Halloran, when our mute but cordial recognition was accomplished; "I have subsided into a happy, indolent, world-shunning dowager; and have little to tell you of myself; but such is far from being the case with you. Are you still sufficiently unspoiled by fashion to open your heart to me? Nay, do not leave us, my child," she said, as the younger Lady O'Halloran rose to leave the room: "you are aware that there is not now between us even the affectation of a secret. And you, my dear Lady Dornton, fear nothing: Margaret is discreet; and I will even admit to

you that she is *au courant* of your early history, and has more than once shed tears over my simple story of your unloved youth."

I instinctively stretched out my hand to the fair girl, who pressed it gently in silence.

How easy was it for me to pour forth to the sympathizing listeners near me all the history of my strange, hurried, and compulsatory marriage. The threats of my mother, my terror of Mr. Curties, my gratitude for the attentions of Sir James. Nay, how comparatively facile was it to admit the vacillation of my own feelings; the uncertainty by which I was beset; the chimerical fears under which I labored; and even the deplorable weakness which accompanied me to the altar! I narrated with a glowing cheek, my triumphs in the world, and the splendor with which Sir James had surrounded me in my new home. Fevered and breathless, I passed on from one phase of my married life to another; until my eloquence was suddenly checked by the memory of the late apparition of Devereux at Rooksley.

When the time is come in which we fear to give utterance to all the secrets of our hearts, the very effort that we make to shroud them reveals the mystery; and thus it was with me. I had been talking hurriedly, impetuously, as though the hours would be too short to hold all that I had to tell, when suddenly I stopped short, with a forced laugh; and folding my mantle about me as a pretext for withdrawing my eyes from those of the dowager, I said flippantly:

"And thus, my dear Lady O'Halloran, I, in my turn, have subsided into a mere wife, with a staid, middle aged husband, with nothing more to hope or to fear; 'content to dwell in decencies forever;' and patiently to watch the refrigeration of the matrimonial fever which is gradually progressing in the feelings and affection of Sir James; as I suppose that all reasonable wives must sooner or later submit to do."

"My dear Lady Dornton!" exclaimed the young creature beside me, in an accent of sad expostulation; "you terrify me—"

"And wherefore, Margaret?" asked her mother-in-law with sudden seriousness. "Can you not perceive that the assumed indifference of Lady Dornton is only intended to conceal some feeling of which she deems it expedient to make a mystery? Remember that she is not here in a confessional, and that we cannot compel her confidence. We must be content with a partial trust. He is a bold patient who applies the probe to his own wound."

I pressed my hands upon my eyes, and the warm tears trickled through my fingers.

"Am I not right, Eveleen? Is not the waning of Sir James Dornton's love, a subject of indifference—even a relief to you? Have you not allowed yourself to look upon your marriage as a martyrdom inflicted upon you by others, when you should have remembered that by proper and prudent firmness, and calm womanly dignity, you might have rendered it impossible? have you not sacrificed the peace and self-respect of the future to the indolent enjoyment of the present? I understand that gesture. You admit the fact. But is this all, Eveleen? Is this all, poor misguided child of my dead friend? Throughout the whole of your story, you have told me only of yourself and of those who were antagonistical to you—I have not heard one word of Herbert Devereux—of the object of your first, and as you declared, of your unalterable love. Why is this? Have you in truth conquered your girlish, and now sinful passion? Have you never met Mr. Devereux since your marriage?"

"But once, madam; but once, and then only for a few hours, scarcely a week since, at Rooksley."

"And what has been the moral effect of that meeting, Eveleen?"

"Lady O'Halloran!" I exclaimed in agony; "have mercy upon me! I cannot answer that question to my own heart. I can only promise to wrestle with my weakness, and, if possible, to overcome it. You can dread no dishonor for the daughter of my father. To more than this I cannot pledge myself. I must bear my burthen as best I may. My girlhood and my womanhood are alike lonely and loveless. For a time I was deceived into a belief that it was otherwise, but my eyes are now opened. I have built up the ruined fortunes of my husband; I have worked out the mysterious will of my mother; and the same chill, unsympathetic atmosphere is still about me."

"Dismiss such morbid fancies. Have you not expatiated to me on the patient care and splendid attentions of Sir James?"

"I do not deny it; but the heart is never long the dupe of such counterfeits. I can understand, comparatively inexperienced as I am, that a woman may tolerate even ill-conduct in a man who really loves her, and may submit to a thousand neglects and mortifications almost without a murmur; while she who is conscious of the growing indifference of her husband, will at last glory in proving to him that she can reciprocate his want of affection, even when he seeks to purchase a love of which he is unworthy, by words and actions as false as his marriage-vow. I do not envy the feelings of the individual who experiences this retorted falsehood, neither can I pity him when he is repaid in kind."

"Eveleen, you make me shudder!"

"And wherefore? Of what value can be the devotion of a wife when it is not deemed worthy of return? Rather desire for me, my dear Lady O'Halloran, a state of mind which will substitute calm, for an impossible and unattainable happiness. The world need know nothing of the fact. How, indeed, in my case, could it arrive at such a conclusion? I feel that Sir James will never fail in his duty as a well-bred and perfectly courteous husband; that he will replace the passion which he is tired of affecting, by the most conspicuous attentions, the most unlimited indulgence, and the most demonstrative respect. The world will not therefore, I repeat, suspect the shallowness of the vase which contains my draught of home-happiness; and to that world I confidently look to revenge me."

I was abruptly silenced by the fixed and frightened gaze which the younger Lady O'Halloran had turned upon me, and which I accidentally encountered. It was as the look of a good genius rebuking an evil spirit. I bowed my head, humbled and heart-struck, before the wondering purity which, wounded and aswe-

dered, seemed to ask itself if it had heard aright.

"Eveleen," said the old lady, in a choked and smothered voice: "come to us often. Your state of mind is fearful. Come to us, and learn to encourage a calmer and a better feeling. You are now deluding yourself bitterly. Beware, lest you accuse others of imaginary wrongs, toward you, in the unwilling consciousness of your own off-falling. Remember, my poor child, that the faults of others are no justification of yourself. Your errors will stand out in as strong relief among those of your fellow mortals as though they stood alone. Remember this, and be warned in time! I do not, I cannot for a moment suspect, that one thought of evil has entered into your heart; but you have talked of reprisals, and of making the world the instrument of your revenge. Believe me that the woman who imagines she can err to a given point, and there pause, deludes herself to her ruin. The first step she takes, is taken at her own discretion, but all after-progress is beyond her personal control; the descent is easy, but the backward path is hard to climb; and few indeed succeed in regaining the way that they have lost. She will find many to lead her down the precipice, but none to lend a helping hand to draw her back. Dear Eveleen, reflect!"

"I do! I will! And now let me leave you, Lady O'Halloran, for I am unequal to further excitement. Do not judge harshly of me; my fate has been a cruel one. If I can conquer it in conquering myself, I shall in a great degree owe my success to your admonitions. Farewell."

"Farewell, my child. Be just to yourself, and all will yet end happily."

My heart was full, as I threw myself into the carriage. It is full now, as I recall that never-forgotten visit. The aspect of the pure and gentle girl, who, like a beam of sunshine, had crossed my feverish and fitful path; the moral worth of the friend in whom my father had confided; the calm and peaceful look of every thing by which they were surrounded, as though their own qualities were reflected by all about them; these objects which, in a different frame of mind, would have imparted to my own feelings a portion of their blessedness, now only served, on the contrary, to ruffle and embitter my pride and my repinings. Such also might have been my fate. What was it now? And what might it become?

I reached Rooksley in time to dress for dinner, and to learn from Joséphine that Colonel Devereux had returned.

CHAPTER XLII.

Now commenced the eventful period of my life. Hitherto my errors had been rather mental than actual; I had plotted, planned, and promised myself a shadowy vengeance which I had possessed neither power nor courage to execute, and even now, I felt that there was a point beyond which, for my own sake, I must not progress. My self-respect and the approbation of the world were necessary to me, and these I resolved never to forego; but still, without doing this, I had much in my power. I could repay slight by slight, tyranny by tyranny I could assert myself. How many a woman has mentally made the same resolve while utterly unable to define her own meaning for the words!

Had Devereux seconded me in the advances which I made to attract his notice, and to invite his gallantries, it is more than possible that, in the then temper of my mind, I might have committed some reckless act of folly which would have drawn down upon me the reproaches of Lady Madelaine, and the remonstrances, or even displeasure of Sir James; but far from affecting to do so, his coldness and indifference were unconquerable; he scarcely appeared conscious of my presence when I was putting forth all the artillery of my fascinations. He neither smiled at my sallies, nor was moved by my complaints; indeed, I might have believed that he had altogether forgotten the former tie between us, had not the pertinacity with which he avoided every occasion of finding himself alone with me, been a convicting proof to the contrary. This was, of all positions in the world, the most trying to a vain and flattered woman, conscious that time had only heightened her attractions. The obsequious devotions of the frivolous and fashionable men about me became vapid and distasteful. I sought only for the admiration and homage of the one who seemed resolved to deny me both; and I became but the more determined to lay the rebellious spirit.

To the society of Dornton, Colonel Devereux was obviously averse; and it appeared to me somewhat singular that Sir James should force it upon him with so much pertinacity, knowing, as he did all the antecedents of his history. such was, however, the case; and from time to time I saw the young guardsman leave the room in order to escape the protestations of regard which he felt unable to return in kind. Living under the same roof, and participating in the same occupations and amusements, it was, however, impossible for Colonel Devereux to avoid me altogether without a decided breach of good breeding, and of that he was incapable; but these casual approximations produced no decided result. He treated me with an excess of respect which was oppressive; with a ceremony that almost exceeded my patience. I had prepared myself for complaints, for reproaches; for all the violence of a passion which had been unjustly sacrificed; and I had resolved to oppose them with arguments of expediency; but all my plans were disconcerted. the cold and consistent bearing of Devereux mortified and stung me to my heart's core.

Reduced to doubting the existence of an affection which had hitherto appeared to me to be beyond dispute, I began to ask myself how I could ever have believed in its sincerity. I looked back upon the past, and strove to find in his former professions of attachment equivocation. Anything was easier, anything was more endurable, than to admit that where I had been loved I was loved no longer.

To lose our conquests is a fate to which we must all, sooner or later, submit with as good a grace as we can assume. It is the penalty of the one sex, enforced by the selfishness and fickleness of the other; but to confess to ourselves that we have done so, is a harder task than many women can achieve, even in the

face of the clearest evidence. Hence so many superannuated coquets!

Something more bitter than anger made me resolve to ascertain the fact. I determined to leave no pains untried to ascertain the real state of Devereux's feelings toward me. Had I possessed as much principle as pride, I should have shrunk from such an inquisition; but I have already frankly acknowledged that mine were only the principles which are commonly acquired in the great world, and which seldom interfere with the will of their possessor. They are like a rootless oak, making a noble show until resistance is required of them; but once lean upon them for support, and they give way, and roll their leafy honors in the dust.

I pursued my resolution. I affected the tastes which I knew to be agreeable to my lost lover. I wore the colors he preferred, I avoided the habits which I chanced to hear him condemn; but all was useless. He neither looked nor commented. My ill-success made me nervous and irritable. It was a struggle which I was compelled to bear alone, for I dared not confess to any one the extent of my vain and guilty folly. This fact doubled my suffering; for, naturally expansive, I should have found a certain solace in pouring out all my hopes, and fears, and weakness, to another. The enervating atmosphere of an unbroken solitude of spirit is to that spirit like constant tension to a bow; the spring of each becomes injured by the useless and unprofitable strain upon its strength. Thus it was with me; constantly striving to effect one object, and constantly foiled in my attempts, my temper at last gave way, and I became sullen and imperious.

Dornton expostulated with me. My answer was haughty and impatient. I expected that I should compel a retort, but it was not so. He only smiled compassionately, as he would have done at an exhibition of impotent anger in a spoiled child, and this civil contempt exasperated me. I reproached him with his indifference to my happiness, and even shed tears. I pitied myself that I had become the wife of a man too old to enter into my tastes, or to comprehend my feelings; I profited, in short, by his unpremeditated outburst, to pour forth the full tide of my pent-up emotions; but Dornton remained placidly by my side, unmoved by all the extravagance of my accusations.

"Listen to me, Eveleen," he said at last, "and endeavor to recover your good-humor, without which even your pretty face loses its charm. Look at me! Despite all your reproaches—and you have not spared them—I have remained calm. I am, as you have truly said, too old to enter into your feelings, though perhaps understand them even better than yourself; and it is precisely because I am so much your senior that I cannot afford to hurry on the destructive progress of time, by the withering blight of temper. I am, as you know, a man of the world, and I owe it to that world to be careful of its worshiper. Look at me!" he repeated, assuming an air of playfulness; "why do you turn away your eyes so impatiently! What! a blush, which is not timidity but anger—what means all this?"

I disdained to answer. Sir James drew a chair forward, and seated himself beside me.

"We are in a ridiculous position, Eveleen," he continued, after a short pause; "and one which I would fain have treated more lightly than you now compel me to do. As it is, I will be as serious, if not as energetic as yourself for we have, in truth, a grave subject to discuss."

I shrugged my shoulders, and threw myself back upon my cushions. I was resolved not to yield an inch.

"To be candid with you, my dear girl," pursued my husband, as calmly as though he had been giving an account of his day's shooting; "you have acted very absurdly of late; and if you are not more careful you will compromise yourself terribly. You should consider the imprudence of your system. If you are compromised at your age, you will be superannuated at five-and-twenty; and for what? Nothing, or less than nothing."

I looked up aghast.

"I am quite aware," he resumed, in the same monotonous and unexcited voice, "that the unexpected appearance of a man whom you have loved, and not yet quite forgotten, must necessarily be a trial to you; but you should struggle against so unprofitable a weakness, for your own sake; you should avoid drawing upon yourself the attention of those about you by exhibitions of sullenness and absence of mind; you should have more command over yourself, and more consideration for your husband."

"You insult me!" I exclaimed passionately

"Impossible!" was the reply; "for I do not wrong you. Eveleen, in all that relates to knowledge of the world you are still a child Devereux has piqued your pride; he has over acted his part, and you have emulated him in his folly. There must be an end to this."

"Have you forgotten having once gratuitously informed me that you were not jealous!"

"Jealous!" repeated Dornton, in a tone that would have been contemptuous, had it not been dashed with pain. "And I told you the truth, Lady Dornton. Had it been otherwise—but that is not what I wished to say. You require the counsels of a friend interested in your respectability and happiness; and I am ready to offer them."

"The office of a mentor is doubtlessly more agreeable to you than that of a husband," I said bitterly; "but I will not impose upon you so onerous a task, as that of teaching your wife to disguise her sentiments and play the hypocrite, in order to preserve her honor from the malice of envenomed tongues."

"My anxiety to save you simply proves that I am a rational being; that I foresee the dangers to which your imprudence exposes you; and that I wish to do you a service by preserving your reputation, which, once blighted, can never be restored. Were you more reasonable than you are, I should speak more plainly; but, as it is, we should never understand each other."

"I have already understood too much," I exclaimed indignantly. "You have said with truth, sir, that you are a man of the world; but, knowing this, why did you marry? Why did you place a helpless woman in a position to blush alike for you and for herself?"

"I will not recriminate," said Dornton, with a taunting smile; "and I will add no more than this:—You are entering upon a dangerous career, of which the perils are unknown to you, and of which I possess the clue. I have offered to guide you safely through the labyrinth, and you reproach me for the offer. Would you prefer that I should watch your actions, and listen to your words, in order to discover in them subject of suspicion and discord?—that I should embitter both your life and my own by a ceaseless and senseless jealousy?"

"Yes," I replied angrily, "yes, sir, I should prefer it a thousand times. Your very injustice would be a proof of affection; and anything is preferable to indifference."

"You are a little goose!" laughed Sir James; "you neither know what you say, nor what you wish. The day will yet come, in which you will congratulate yourself upon what you now consider a subject of complaint. Appearances, Eveleen, appearances are the current coin of the world. Watch over them, as the miser watches his hoarded gold. You have wit enough to comprehend that, so long as you can flaunt them in the face of society, your dear five hundred friends will care little for what lies beneath. You are warned—be wary!"

And at the close of this extraordinary and revolting harangue, Sir James rose from his seat, and with an "*addio bellissima!*" left the room, before I could sufficiently recover myself to utter a word in reply.

I felt stunned. My conviction of the lax morality of my husband had come upon me so suddenly that I was crushed; but, after a time, there rose upon the ruins of respect and gratitude which I had hitherto entertained for him, an emotion of the most withering contempt. This is the most hopeless of all feelings toward a husband. Every other adverse sentiment may be obliterated, or at least ameliorated by time; but contempt is like rust in such a case; the longer it grows, the deeper it eats into the metal, and the more impossible it becomes to remove its trace.

I was no longer a wife in heart, and Dornton was not long in discovering my coldness, but he made no comment upon my conduct. Meanwhile, in the eyes of the world, we were a singularly well-assorted couple, and worthy of envy. We never interfered with each other's avocations or amusements; we were wealthy, and regardless of expense; I was young, fashionable, and admired; Sir James popular and witty. What more could be desired! Who cared what might lurk behind the veil, which, like that upon the altar of Vesta, hid the secrets of the oracle? As my contempt for Sir James deepened, so did my passion for Devereux increase. I became alarmed at last, and tried to believe that I was deluding myself with a spectre, and that when he left Rooksley I should once more cease to be occupied so entirely by one object; but I could not maintain the cheat. The return of his regard was necessary to my happiness; and I eventually came to a compromise with my conscience, and decided that it would suffice to me to secure him hereafter as a friend—only a friend—we could never again be more to each other than friends—but this, at least, we might, and must be. The more I reflected upon this subject, the more distinctly I saw not only the propriety, but even the expediency of the arrangement. We were at present in a false position. Our former attachment was no secret and what did our present marked estrangement imply? The world is censorious. Might it not misinterpret so extraordinary a demonstration of avoidance? I eagerly answered myself in the affirmative. We accept so readily all sophistries which flatter our own wishes.

My resolution was formed. Devereux must be made to comprehend this truth. So far all was easy; but how to effect my purpose was still the question. Lady Madelaine had affected not to perceive the coldness which existed between us; it was consequently evident that she was satisfied with the present state of things, and that no assistance could be expected from her. The mediation of Sir James was equally hopeless, for he would have made the first hint at such an arrangement the subject of a distasteful jest. I could come to no decision.

An expedition to some ruins in the neighborhood had been suggested by Lord Otterford, and eagerly seconded by the guests, when it chanced that, on the morning chosen for the excursion, I awoke fevered and unwell, and found myself compelled to decline so fatiguing an attempt at amusement. The party consequently departed without me, leaving a few civil regrets to replace their society. As I heard the carriages roll from the door, I rejoiced in my temporary solitude; and felt so much relieved by the reflection that I should be alone with my own thoughts for a few hours, that, after luxuriating for a time in this conviction, I resolved to rise and wander through the park. I accordingly made a hasty and careless toilet, and folding my shawl about me, left my room.

As I descended the stairs it struck me that I should do well to provide myself with a book, that, when weary of my own society, I might be sure of a resource; and I accordingly turned toward the library for that purpose. The door stood open, and I had advanced some steps into the room before I became conscious that it was already tenanted. The blood rushed to my heart. Devereux was seated at a small reading-table, placed in the bay of the window. His left hand supported his head, and in his right he held a pen; but he was not writing; he was buried in thought.

"Pray pardon me, Colonel Devereux," I said hurriedly, "I was not aware that you were here."

My voice roused him from his reverie; he rose precipitately, and advanced to meet me like a person suddenly awakened from a deep sleep, who had not yet recovered the control of his actions.

"You have not then been tempted to join the exploring party?" I said, endeavoring to conceal my agitation.

"No, madam."

"And why?"

"What interest could I have taken in an excursion whose —— but you doubtlessly came here in search of something. Can I be useful?"

"Yes, Colonel Devereux; you can join me in a stroll through the park. I was about to take a book as a companion. I will accept your society as a substitute."

He bowed, without making any reply; caught up his hat, offered his arm, and in the next instant we had left the house. For the first few moments we walked forward in silence. Then we talked of the wind, the heat, the picturesque grouping of the forest timber, the tame state of the waterfowl upon the lake,—and while we held this puerile conversation, I felt his arm tremble as it supported mine, and my own heart beat as though it would fain have made its pulsations audible.

Once or twice I almost met his eye as it was hastily averted from my face, and I felt glad of this, for I was conscious that in my simple cambric wrapper, and my close straw bonnet, I must remind him more thoroughly of the Eveleen of former times—the Eveleen whom he had loved—than in the elaborate toilet which I had affected since my marriage. Still, however, he continued silent, or only replied to my observations by a monosyllable. At length I could endure this chilling constraint no longer. My resolution rose up before me, and I determined to take the initiative, since it was evident that he had decided on an opposite course of action.

"Colonel Devereux," I said, with all the calmness which I found it possible to assume; "we have sufficiently discussed both the weather and the beauties of Rooksley; and now we can surely find some more interesting subject of conversation. We are not strangers. Let us be frank toward each other. Why are we so thoroughly estranged? You, without doubt, consider the past more harshly than—perhaps—"

"I have never reproached you, Lady Dornton!"

"You have not. But it is possible that I should have preferred even your reproaches to the cold and cutting displeasure and avoidance that you have exhibited."

"Have I, indeed, made a parade of such feelings? If so, I owe your ladyship an apology for my presumption, and venture to offer it at once."

Tears of mortification started to my eyes.

"Colonel Devereux," I said, somewhat bitterly, "as this is a subject to which we must never again recur, let us, at least, understand each other now. You are strangely altered, and I fear that I have been in some degree the cause of a change which all who regard you must deplore. Believe me that, however circumstances may appear to condemn me—"

"Pray spare alike yourself and me, Lady Dornton. You did not deceive me, I deceived myself. I knew enough of the pliability of your nature to be prepared for all that has occurred. Had it been otherwise, nothing should have induced me to play so supine a part as I have enacted since our separation. Had I been able to trust to your firmness, and to calculate on your coöperation, I would have sacrificed my whole life in the struggle to obtain your hand; but this necessary faith was denied to me; and I was too proud to pursue the heiress, when I was not secure of the affections of the woman."

"Is this generous, Colonel Devereux?"

"I think so; I should be sorry were it otherwise. Am I not borne out in my argument?"

"Can we not forget the past, and be friends?"

"In the eyes of the world? Undoubtedly; although the attempt will appear but a mockery to ourselves."

"In that case let us leave it untried," I exclaimed, as the blood mounted to my brow; "I know not why I am weak enough to hope that my forlorn and cruel destiny can be changed. I should be grateful to you, Colonel Devereux, for completing the bitter lesson which I have studied since my childhood."

"Lady Dornton! Eveleen!" cried Devereux, suddenly grasping my hand, "are you the only victim of the destiny which you deprecate?"

There was an expression in his voice that startled me. I had weakly and wilfully placed myself in a dangerous position. I had advanced to the brink of the precipice knowingly and recklessly; and now, when I felt the ground giving way under my feet, I trembled.

"Listen to me," I said hurriedly, "before you reject my proffered friendship. You are unhappy; you have fits of melancholy, which are not natural either to your age or to your temperament. Need I tell you that I also have my hours of bitterness? The idle triflers by whom we are surrounded have no sympathy with sorrow; they do not guess how grief is sometimes lightened by participation. Like the ephemera that sport in the sunbeams, they disappear on the setting of the brightness to which they owe their being. But we are not like these; let us be friends: the trials of the one will be lessened by sympathy in those of the other. You look surprised—indignant. What can there be in such a proposition to induce either wonder or annoyance?"

"All, Lady Dornton; everything! I congratulate you upon the composure with which you can contemplate the arrangement: I, unfortunately, do not possess an equal share of self-government. I have, indeed, compelled myself to meet you daily, almost hourly, and even to reside under the same roof with you—but my stoicism will scarcely extend further."

"I am to understand, then, Colonel Devereux, that henceforth, save in the interchange of the formalities of society, we are to be strangers?"

"We have no alternative."

I was confounded. There was a shade of sorrow in his accent which checked the words that were rising to my lips, and I instinctively stood still. Devereux paused also, but remained silent. I had withdrawn my hand from his arm; and in order to disguise my agitation I began to tear away the leaves of a shrub beside me. I might have spared myself the subterfuge; for when I at length turned once more toward my companion, he was tracing figures upon the gravel with his cane, as if unconsciously. I felt the necessity of extrication from this self-sought dilemma.

"After your last assertion," I said, "I can no longer affect ignorance of your estimate of my character. All further discussion is needless. When I requested your society I did not

anticipate insult; and, least of all, that insult should reach me through you."

"Insult, Lady Dornton! Insult!—Are you making a jest of my struggle to act worthily?"

"Enough, Colonel Devereux, enough!" I interposed with vehemency, "there was no possibility of mistaking your words. And you are right, sir, perfectly right. I have within the last hour heedlessly given you, through a romantic fancy that friendship still existed in the world, an opportunity of misconstruction from which it is your pleasure not to suffer me to escape unscathed. My idle dream is now, however, over; and henceforth I will compel you to respect me."

As I ceased speaking, I bent my head haughtily, and turned toward the house.

"Lady Dornton—Eveleen! You will drive me mad!" exclaimed Devereux, seizing my shawl to detain me; "do you not—can you not understand, that I dare not accept the offer of your friendship—of your confidence—dear and precious as it would be to me? Will you not believe me incapable of indulging a thought which would give you pain? No—you cannot; you do not seek to do this, because you can reason calmly upon the past, and look steadily upon the present. I can do neither; and of this you make a crime."

My heart beat quick; my brow burned; my shawl was still in his grasp.

"You are enigmatical, Colonel Devereux," I remarked coldly, making a second attempt to escape.

"Eveleen—merciless Eveleen! do not abuse your power. You have already made me sufficiently wretched. Spare me now."

"We are both acting childishly," I said, affecting not to remark his emotion; "and have each something to forgive in this interview."

"Much, much," murmured Devereux in a smothered voice. Then, suddenly turning toward me, he added, "Let me at least make expiation for my errors. Let me assure you, Lady Dornton, solemnly assure you, that in all the words which I have uttered this day, there has not been one of which the true meaning was calculated to offend you; and then let me add that I now crave, humbly and earnestly, the proffered friendship, which I was just now mad enough to reject. I will learn of yourself to exercise it with honor and usefulness. Will you not give me your hand!"

I felt that I should have refused to make so sudden a concession, but I could not. All my anger, all my alarm, gave way before the low and earnest tones in which he had addressed me. I laid my hand in his: he carried it respectfully to his lips; and then once more drew it through his arm, and turned to pursue the path which led toward the lake. It was a moment fraught with agitation to both of us. To me it was one of mingled bitterness and triumph; I felt that I was still beloved! The conviction should have made me tremble, but I was too confident in myself to fear. I only whispered mentally, that all the authority of my mother, and all the machinations of my husband, had merely sufficed to sever our hands—over our hearts they had possessed no power!

Meanwhile, as we slowly walked forward in silence, I felt the arm of Devereux press my hand more closely to his side. He, I thought, is, perhaps, at this moment exulting over the same conviction; and I longed to ask him if it were not so; but a feeling of constraint and irresolution had come upon me, and I dared not trust myself with words, although the silence had continued so long, that it had become painful and embarrassing. At length, perceiving that my companion was resolved to render me no assistance, I was about to attempt a renewal of the conversation, when the sound of approaching wheels announced the return of the party, and we at once hastened toward the house.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Lord Otterford, shortly after his return home, opened the letter-bag, and among others, handed a somewhat voluminous packet to myself. My surprise was great to find the superscription in the handwriting of Lady O'Halloran, while the post-mark which it bore was that of Edinburgh. A fortnight had scarcely elapsed since my visit to the Hall, upon which occasion she had made no mention of such a journey. Still painfully agitated by my interview with Devereux, I was glad to retreat to a distant sofa with my letter, marveling, as I crossed the room, what it might portend. It was dated from Glenfillan. My sister was a confirmed and hopeless invalid; and by one of those caprices so usual with the sick, she had written to entreat the presence of Lady O'Halloran in Scotland. The warm-hearted dowager had at once complied with her request; and had obeyed her wishes to the letter, by leaving the neighborhood without informing any of the family of her movements; but, on her arrival at Glenfillan, had found Adela so greatly changed, that she considered it her duty to apprise me of the fact; and also to insist that Lady Flora should write to my mother to the same effect.

"My poor sister is dangerously ill!" I exclaimed, when I had reached the close of the letter, and approached Lady Madelaine. "Have you also heard from Glenfillan, madam?"

"Yes, I have a letter from Lady Flora; she appears to be uneasy about Adela; but old maids always exaggerate evils, and consequently—"

"I assure you," I interposed eagerly, "that there is scarcely room for exaggeration. Lady O'Halloran, who is at present with her, assures me that she has wasted to a shadow; that her physician is almost fearful of administering remedies lest they should consume her slight remains of strength, and that she pertinaciously rejects all his advice."

"Ha! indeed—that intelligence is more serious," replied my mother, looking more annoyed than anxious. "Lady O'Halloran's judgment is not, however, infallible. What on earth could have taken that extraordinary person to Glenfillan! Some people are inexplicable. Adela is always complaining, and creating a sensation in the family. Girls of her age are forever fancying themselves dying, when they are only fostering their own absurd whims. However, Lady Flora will, of course, write again immediately, and if she does not announce any

amendment in your sister's health, I must consider what to do."

The idea of sickness and death was so repugnant to me, that I am afraid, under other circumstances, I should have endeavored to share my mother's comfortable self-consolation; but the intelligence had come upon me in a moment of agitation and anxiety, and I felt relieved by the tears which it enabled me to shed. Bad news are almost welcome in such a case, for they form a pretext for the emotion which must otherwise provoke both curiosity and comment; and we consequently feel no inclination to rob them of their just tribute. I wept bitterly, and for a time I cheated myself into the belief that all my tears were shed for my sister. I was no sooner alone, however, than I discovered the fallacy of such a credence, for my thoughts at once reverted to Devereux.

Our recent interview had again plunged me into a state of uncertainty. He had said too much, or not enough. In reviewing my own conduct I was not altogether satisfied, while his appeared to be capricious and enigmatical. I *dared* not examine too closely the meaning of all his words, and I resolutely dwelt only upon such as might imply either affection, anger, or jealousy, as they were differently interpreted by his listener. I forgot to ask myself what warrant he had for either toward Sir James Dornton's wife.

A few days brought us, as Lady Madelaine had anticipated, fresh letters from Glenfillan.

"You will soon be sisterless," wrote my own correspondent; "each day the disease, be it what it may, becomes more hopeless. Adela no longer looks like a creature of this world. Every tinge of blood has forsaken her cheeks and lips. She moves with difficulty, and cannot walk across the room without support. It is a sore trial to look upon her now, and to think what she might have been; but, for your worthy father's sake, to whom she will so soon be united, I will not leave her till all is over. As for herself, she is perfectly calm, and declares that she desires nothing so much as the moment which is to free her from a world of which she is weary, only on report."

Here, then, was frightful confirmation of our fears; and, despite the considerate declaration of Lady O'Halloran, that Adela looked forward to her death almost with impatience, I could not overcome the horror of the anticipation. I glanced around me upon the luxury to which I was so habituated that I should have heeded it only by its absence, and then on the gushing sunshine which folded all nature in a robe of glory, and lastly on the reflection of my own face, radiant in youth, and health, and beauty, and upon which the tears that were now trickling down left no more trace than does a summer shower upon the blossoms and the leaves.

"No, no," I murmured to myself; "she may bear her yoke bravely, but she cannot wish to leave all these. Poor Adela! so young—scarcely nineteen—how terrible to be struck down, just as she might have learned to cherish life. Surely, surely, there must yet be hope!"

In her letter to my mother, Lady Flora mentioned that their guest had suggested to the invalid the expediency of requesting her presence and my own at Glenfillan, but the resolute manner in which she had replied "Not yet," had convinced them that we should do well to defer our journey for a time. As this arrangement accorded with Lady Madelaine's wishes, she did not hesitate to express her acquiescence in their request, and all my own expostulations were useless.

The season had commenced; and within a week after the receipt of this melancholy intelligence, our party had dispersed only to meet again in town. One of my earliest guests was Devereux; but I was surrounded by morning visitors when he entered the room, and he did not await their departure. As he moved in precisely my own set, I, as a matter of course, met him everywhere; and although no opportunity of recurrence to our last conversation at Rooksley offered itself, and that he was still guarded in his manner, and seldom ventured to show me even those slight attentions which, when there exists no secret consciousness between the parties to lend them a language, signify little or nothing, still I felt that there was no longer so wide a gulf between us. My own house was the one in which he was the least frequently to be found; and he was always careful to come at those hours when, if I chanced to be at home, he was aware that I must be surrounded by guests. Into my opera-box he never ventured, unless he saw that I was attended by Sir James; and this soon became so unusual a circumstance that I doubt if it were remarked when he dropped the habit altogether.

The *prestige* of the honeymoon was over. The Bride had become a Wife. Sir James was a member of three clubs, where he could lounge all the morning and play all the evening; and it was pleasant to be assured that he had gained the plaudits of all his club-fellows by returning to them *unspoiled* by his marriage. It is always flattering to a wife to learn that she has worked no reform whatever in the habits of a dissipated husband!

Ere long, I saw little or nothing of Dornton. In the country he had merely fallen off in gallantry; in town he emancipated himself bodily from the thraldom of a married home. He liked to know that his house was frequented by all that was most desirable in London society, and that it was esteemed a favor to be received there as an *habitué*; but he preferred to ascertain even this fact as news to convincing himself of it personally.

There can be no doubt that my smothered affection for Devereux proved a safeguard to me at that period, and prevented the commission of more than one imprudence, into which my idle vanity would otherwise have hurried me. The language of adulation which met me on all sides, and at all times—the impotent malice of half a dozen fashionable beauties, whom I had, without one effort, bereft of their admirers—the giddy race of pleasure and frivolity which I was running—all conspired to intoxicate my fancy and to delude my heart. Constant letters from the north had satisfied us that, although Adela was slowly and surely sinking, there was no immediate danger of her dissolution; and, as she still resolutely refused to see either Lady Madelaine or myself, I was only too happy to be enabled to turn away from

so melancholy a theme of thought, and to sun myself in brighter scenes.

My mother triumphed; five weeks had gone by since we left Rooksley, and Lady O'Halloran admitted, that although the decay of my sister's strength was certain, she had ceased to anticipate so early a result as she had at first looked for, while Lady Flora even talked at random of her youth being enabled ultimately to triumph over the languor under which she was suffering; in short, my mother began to complain, as new letters arrived, of the annoyance of these constant communications on a subject so unimportant as a fit of girlish vapors; they destroyed her comfort and distracted her ideas. Her cause for complaint did not, however, endure much longer—she was not fated to have her nerves worn bare by the unnecessary croaking of two querulous old women, for thus did she always describe the evil under which she declared herself to be martyred. The suspense was not destined to be interminable, nor the martyrdom a lingering one.

While the season was at its height, their majesties signified their intention to visit Drury Lane Theatre in state, and I, in consequence, assembled a party on the day fixed, the whole of whom were to proceed with me to witness the performance. As Sir James declined to participate in the project, my mother and Lord Otterford were among the guests, and our dinner was unusually gay. Lady Madelaine, in high beauty, and conscious of the fact, even exerted herself to fascinate and amuse; and, amid laughter, flattery, and coquetry, we were just about to throw on our cloaks and descend to the carriages, when a servant advanced toward me with a letter. I was about to wave him back, when I perceived upon the superscription the word "Immediate," and I saw at a glance that Lady O'Halloran was my correspondent. I seized the letter, and hurriedly tore it open: "Eveleen," thus it ran, "if you, indeed, wish once more to see your sister in this world, lose not a moment. She now entreats your presence and that of her mother. Do not delay an hour, or you may arrive too late."

In my agitation and horror I read these few fatal lines aloud, and then I turned to ascertain their effect upon Lady Madelaine. For a moment she stood speechless and aghast, the jewels sparkling upon her pallid brow and the velvet shivering above her trembling limbs; then, suddenly throwing herself upon a sofa, she buried her face in her spread hands, and continued silent.

This silence alarmed me. Even overcome as I was by the sudden shock, I had been for so many years prepared for the most extraordinary proceedings on the part of my mother, where her own convenience and comfort were involved, that I augured ill of the pause which had followed so immediately upon the reading of this letter; and, fearful that she would disobey the summons (strong in her horror of death, and her aversion to my dying sister), I hastened to forestall her purpose, should she have contemplated such a refusal. I scarcely knew myself; I did not shed a tear; but calmly and earnestly I issued all the necessary orders for our immediate departure; and I was about to dispatch messengers to the different clubs in search of Sir James, in order that he might accompany us on our journey, when Lord Otterford interposed:—

"It is useless, my dear Lady Dornton," he said, in an accent of perfect conviction; "send to inform Sir James, if you will, of your proposed departure; but make no arrangement for his own. He will not leave town upon such an errand."

I was too much agitated at the moment to remark the singularity of this assertion. I only felt the awkwardness of the fact.

"Are we, then, to travel to the north alone?" I asked, in some alarm.

"I will be your escort; but we must rouse your mother, in order that she may hasten home, and put on her traveling dress. We will be ready for you when you drive to the door."

During this short scene, which passed even more rapidly than it can be described, my guests had begun silently to depart, while Lady Madelaine still sat supine upon the sofa. Her face was so completely concealed that it was impossible to decide under what nature or degree of emotion she was laboring. While Lord Otterford advanced toward her, I met the eyes of Devereux, who had been one of the last to retire. They were full of acute grief. Involuntarily I extended my hand toward him, and he held it for a moment as he murmured, "Poor Eveleen, could not this, at least, have been spared to you?"

These few words unlocked the channel of my tears. As he left the room I looked after him in anguish. Would he have abandoned me at such a moment? Surely, surely, if I had wronged him, he was now revenged.

When my mother rose, and, leaning heavily upon the arm of Lord Otterford, prepared to leave the room, she was as pale as marble, and trembled painfully; but there was a strange expression in her eye which made me shrink. It was evident that she had not shed a tear. She was about to pass me in silence, when I ventured to request that she would endeavor to rally her energies for our long and rapid journey, and to assure her that I would be in Grosvenor Square within the hour.

"I do not doubt it," she replied, in a harsh voice, totally unlike her usually musical accents "You are evidently too eager for this ill-timed undertaking to throw any impediment in the way of its commencement; but you have been somewhat hasty in compromising me in so marked a manner, without waiting to ascertain, in the first place, my own pleasure upon the subject."

"I thought, madam, that you would not refuse the dying summons of my sister."

"Perhaps so; but you should first have satisfied yourself of this fact, or have permitted me to issue my own orders. I do not believe that Adela has expressed a wish to see me. I am satisfied of the contrary. Old women are fond of scenes; it is their revenge upon the habitual monotony of their dreary existence. It is those about her who have committed this act of folly. However, thanks to your want of caution, I am now the slave of circumstances and must submit. Be at my door when you will, Lady Dornton; you shall experience no delay through me."

After this unsatisfactory dialogue, she swept from the room, and I heard her drive off as I reached my own apartment. The more I pondered on her extraordinary conduct at such a crisis, the more inexplicable it appeared. I even doubted at times if she could, indeed, be the mother of Adela. I had, however, little leisure for mental speculation; the grumbling Joséphine augmented most carefully all the little difficulties of a prompt departure, and created a thousand unnecessary delays; but, despite all these, and the fact that the horses had been at the door above an hour before I could effect my departure, I saw nothing of Sir James. He had, probably, been engaged in a rubber of whist, or involved in a heavy stake at *rouge et noir*.

As I at last stepped into the carriage, I thought of Devereux, and sighed.

CHAPTER XLIV

In the midst of a vast and lofty chamber, hung with faded tapestry, and heavy with its ponderous cornices, its carved doors, and its gigantic mantel of dark oak, stood an antique bedstead of the same material, curtained with the voluminous folds of a crimson satin damask which had once been regal in its richness, but upon which the hand of time had long impressed its touch. These gloomy curtains were drawn aside to admit a flood of sunshine, which, after bathing a range of heathery hills in the distance, and making the surface of a far-off loch shimmer like a myriad of golden stars, came, glorious in the fulness of its power, to peer into that ancient room, and to invest it for one brief hour with all the brightness of which it had been bereft by the withering waste of a century.

That sun-flood fell upon antique porcelain and grotesque ornaments of another age, and without even a name in ours; while, strangely blent with these, it threw out into broad relief a few plain, modern articles of usefulness, evidently selected without any regard either to their beauty or their luxury. A reading-chair, a desk, a book-case, whose pigmy proportions were almost ludicrous in that spacious room, a few fine engravings in frames of ebony, but all expressive of some subject of suffering or terror, were among these. But not a flower, not an instrument of music, not a vestige of female occupancy could be discovered there; and yet, upon the damask-curtained bed, and fully exposed to all the fervor of the bright May sun, lay a pale girl, just at that lovely age when hope and joy should be the sister-twins of life. Her eyes were closed, but it was easy to see that they were not closed in sleep: her long hair was swept back from her brow, and was scattered like threads of gold over the pillow; her hands were tightly clenched above her head, and the long livid fingers looked as though they no longer retained strength to free themselves from their self-sought grasp. Her breathing was convulsive, and her hot breath had parched the thin blue lips through which it forced its passage; at times her features were distorted by a spasm of pain, and her eyes opened instinctively, but the transparent lids fell once more over them as the convulsion weakened.

Beside the bed knelt two aged women, one of whom was frantic in her grief; and who, had she not been restrained by her companion would have disturbed, by her clamorous wailings, the silence of the death-room; the other, tearless, but bowed by sorrow, passed from time to time, with a gentle hand, a handkerchief across the brow of the dying girl, upon which dank drops of moisture gathered after every struggle.

"Adela, my love," whispered this tender nurse, as she leant softly toward her, just as she had performed this careful office; "have you strength to bear the exertion? Your wish is granted; Lady Madelaine and your sister are here."

The effect of this announcement was electrical. My sister—for it was indeed she—suddenly opened her eyes, which were dilated, and full of a strange brightness that was almost scorching. She unclasped her fleshless fingers, pressed her hands convulsively upon her bosom, and for a moment appeared to be struggling with an emotion which almost overcame her waning strength. But as Lady Madelaine approached the bed, and would have taken her hand, she waved her off imperiously; and, in a deep, harsh, laboring voice, she said bitterly:

"Not now, madam, not here; this is my death-bed that you have come to look upon; and all acting is over—approach, nevertheless: come and contemplate your work—come and gaze upon your victim. It was for this I bade you here—it was for this that, for the first time in my life, I have wished and watched for you."

"Adela, my dear Adela—" expostulated the shuddering Lady O'Halloran.

"Let me speak," persisted the dying girl. "Even you, my more than mother—if, indeed, the name of mother *can* imply tenderness, and patience, and affection, and self-abnegation—as I have read in books that it should do—even you I can no longer obey. Bear with me only for a few hours more, and I shall have done with this world."

From the moment of my entrance into the death-room I had remained concealed from my sister by the curtains of her bed. I felt riveted to the earth, and had not courage to advance a step. I might, perhaps, after a time, have overcome this emotion; but the words to which I listened, and the unearthly tones in which they were uttered, rendered me powerless.

"You have been at least consistent, madam," resumed Adela, so soon as she had recovered from a violent spasm which appeared to rend her chest; "you have been no fickle spirit, no weak hater! I will say nothing of my childhood—but when that was past, did you not wring my heart as never heart was wrung?—did you not thrust happiness upon me, and, when I almost clutched it wrench it away with a withering smile, and bid me bear the trial as I might! you left me no alternative save an early death, or a life of bitterness and humiliation. I have made my choice—it is that which will the best suit your views and wishes—I am about to die: but, madam, I die fearlessly, because I know that there is another world for you as well as for myself."

As the panting girl paused to take breath, Lady Madelaine sank into a chair beside her with a deep groan

"A world of justice," pursued the failing voice, "where the Lazarus of the earth will have the sores of his spirit healed—where the great ones of this life will find their purple and fine linen rent away, and their hearts, with all their miserable, petty passions, laid bare—that world awaits even you, madam,—you, the unloving wife, and the unnatural mother; you, and the tool of your selfishness; the weak and unstable being who has helped you on in your unholy work. May his falsehood be visited upon himself; and may she to whom—"

Thoroughly exhausted by the efforts which she had made, the power of the dying girl abandoned her at once, before she could render the remainder of her sentence audible; the few additional words which fell from her lips were disjointed and meaningless; and, as she sank back heavily upon the pillow, a frightful spasm convulsed her features and distorted her limbs for a few seconds, during which I firmly imagined that she had ceased to exist; but it was not so. When the terrible paroxysm had passed over, she once more opened her eyes; and as they rested on the form of Lady Madelaine, who still retained her attitude of horror-stricken immobility, an expression of intense hatred passed over her features.

"Let her leave me," she gasped out, addressing Lady O'Halloran; "let her leave me —I would, at least, die in peace."

The kind-hearted dowager approached my mother with an extended hand: "Let us retire, madam," she whispered; "your child has need of rest."

Passively and mutely Lady Madelaine obeyed. She took the proffered hand as if to secure its support; and, without once looking toward the death-bed, she left the room, in which nothing was audible save the low and labored breathing of her last-born child. I followed with a tottering and uncertain step.

The near neighborhood of a dying bed would at any time have shaken my nerves—while this was not only that of my sister, but what a death-bed! The peace of spirit, the tears of tenderness, the words of consolation—all had been absent. The spirit hovering between earth and heaven, and which must, ere long, appear before the tribunal whose dread fiat involves an eternity, had elevated itself into a judge; and I had seen the haughty nature of my mother quail and shrink before it. The words of Adela, which were vividly impressed upon my memory, filled me with a vague and undefined terror. My blood, frozen by the spectacle of decay and ruin which my first gaze into the death-room had revealed to me, and chilled more and more by the fearful tones of the invalid, suddenly, as I escaped from her presence, rushed to my heart, and circulated so rapidly that it appeared to suffocate me. That voice of bitter despair—of unyielding vengeance—was still in my ears; that pale and unearthly face was still before my eyes. When I threw myself upon a seat in the room which had been hastily prepared for me, I felt as though the awful memories of the last hour would embitter all my future life. My horror was not lessened by the fact that I could not comprehend upon what the reproaches which my sister had addressed to Lady Madelaine were based; while my astonishment at the patience with which they were supported by her imperious nature, was beyond my power to explain. I could only attribute it to the agitated powerlessness of surprise, or to that solemn respect which is always conceded to the dying.

So soon as I was able in some degree to control my feelings, I desired to be conducted to the apartment of Lady Madelaine. I found her seated, pale and tearless, in the attitude of a person more indignant than depressed At the sound of my approach she turned toward me, and a deep flush spread over her brow, while her eyes flashed with animation. She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then averted her head, and appeared to hesitate, as though she had not altogether decided upon the line of conduct which she should pursue.

"This has been a bitter trial to you," I said, as I placed myself beside her, and would have taken her hand, which was haughtily withdrawn; "I fear there is no longer any hope."

"Hope! of what?" she asked bitterly; "do you mean a hope of the recovery of Miss Tilden? You are well advised to wish it. But I have no inclination to waste time upon your weak romance. Are you satisfied now that you have exposed me to the frightful scene through which I have just passed?—that you have subjected me to insult before a groveling relative, a distasteful acquaintance, and my own child? A secret instinct forewarned me—I would have obeyed it. It was not your pleasure that I should be spared. You placed me under the necessity of condescending to this annoyance, or of becoming the mark for a thousand envenomed surmises. It is you whom I have to thank for all—you, and your odious precipitation. So long as I have life I will never forgive you this!"

I was so accustomed to the violence of my mother, that this strangely-timed outburst would scarcely have surprised me, had it taken another tone; but I was altogether unprepared to be made its object. Already weakened, both in mind and body, by the different emotions which had agitated me so painfully, all my remaining strength gave way before this tide of accusation; and I sank to my knees, crushed and quailing, as though I had indeed been guilty of some crime for which I needed the pardon of a parent. I sobbed out I know not what. I talked of the tie between us, of my dying sister, of my own bruised and blighted heart; I sought to appease my mother by promises, by caresses, and by submission; but I humbled myself in vain: for some time she maintained a resolute silence, while her heaving bosom, her burning cheek, and her flashing eye gave evidence of the tempest that was raging within her. At length she rose, and flinging from her the hand in which I had clasped her own, she said, haughtily, "Be silent and leave me—I wish to be alone."

There was no disputing a command uttered in such a tone; and, wondering as I did so at the violence of the impulse which could have compelled me to such an act of self-abasement, I rose from my knees, and quitted the room in

silence. I heard Lady Madelaine ring her bell before I had crossed the antechamber; and as her woman obeyed the summons, she desired that Lord Otterford should be requested to join her in her apartment. It was not, therefore, silence which she coveted.

It was some time before I could recover myself sufficiently for thought; but, when the power of reflection did at last return, I felt as though I were under some strange and unholy spell. All that had taken place within the last few hours was so extraordinary that I lost myself in the wildest and most irrational conjectures. Why did Adela accuse Lady Madelaine of her death, when the exile to which she had submitted herself was voluntary? What meant this death, which she asserted to be her own choice? This happiness of which she declared herself to have been treacherously deprived? This perfidious and weak being by whom she had been abandoned? Who, finally, was that third person whom want of strength alone had prevented her from including in her anathema? Why had Lady Madelaine, even while she was loaded with reproaches, borne all in silence? Had terror and compunction stifled the voice of resentment? Was it natural that a child could have acquired so much power over her impetuous nature if her conscience did not whisper to her the justification of those reproaches?

These were the questions which rose rapidly to my mind; but which remained successively unanswered. I was in the midst of doubt; fearing alike to misunderstand what I saw, or to understand too much, when a slight sound caused me to start and look up. Lady O'Halloran stood before me; and I was about to fling myself upon her bosom, when I was struck by the extraordinary expression of her face.

The truth flashed upon me instantly. "All is then over!" I murmured, while a cold shudder ran through my veins.

"Yes! all is over. Her sufferings are at an end."

"Alas!" I exclaimed, as I sank back powerless upon my seat; "dare we indeed hope so? I am still quailing under the impression of her last mysterious words. Did you, dearest Lady O'Halloran, did you—see her die?"

"I did not. A heavy faintness came over me after I had led your mother from the room, and I was consequently absent, for she did not long survive the awful spirit-struggle in which she had engaged; but I already knew all her wishes, and had promised to perform them."

"Can I assist in the solemn duty?"

"You are, at least, particularly concerned in it."

"What does she desire me to do? I pledge myself, be it what it may, and at whatever sacrifice, to obey her bidding."

"I expected no less from you, Eveleen; and feel convinced that you will not falsify your words. I know not the subject of her anxiety, but this packet will inform you." And as she spoke, she placed in my hand a voluminous letter, which was evidently composed of several sheets. I was about to tear it open upon the instant, when by a hurried gesture she prevented my breaking the seal, and pointed emphatically to the superscription, upon which I read: "To be opened only under her own roof, as she values my memory."

"She shall be obeyed," I said, as I placed the letter in my dressing-case, and then carefully withdrew the key. "But have you no suspicion of its contents?"

"None. Adela told me no more than that it contained information on points of interest with which it was necessary you should be acquainted immediately that she had ceased to exist. I respected both her secret and yours, and asked no questions."

I could thank her only with my tears.

"Do not weep for her, Eveleen, weep for yourself," said Lady O'Halloran, compassionately. "It is now too late to grieve over her trials, for they are ended. Yours, my child, I fear, are but beginning. May she so resolutely have expended her little remaining strength, in order to comfort you with a sister's love, and a sister's counsel. That last token of her remembrance occupied many, many of her latest hours of comparative ease and health. She appeared to forget alike her languor and her sufferings while she was engaged upon it. It was in vain that her physician, Lady Flora, and myself warned her of the probable effect of such continual exertion; her constant reply to all our expostulations was an assurance that she should live to complete her task, and that she desired no more."

"Poor Adela!" I murmured, wringing my hands in remorse of spirit.

"Poor Adela!" echoed my companion; "she is now united to the only parent who loved her."

"She is happier than myself," I sobbed painfully.

"But she purchased her happiness dearly, Eveleen. A long life of bitterness was crushed into her nineteen years of blighted existence."

"I know it—I know it; and I did so little to alleviate her sorrows—I so soon forgot her absence."

"The world's lessons are readily learned," said the dowager; "but I must leave you now. My usefulness is at an end, and I am sinking with fatigue. Lady Madelaine has been already informed of the melancholy event, and her horses are ordered for to-morrow at daybreak, as she has declined attempting to obtain some rest. You will accompany her."

"And yourself!"

"Adela exacted that I should see her laid in the tomb of her ancestors. I promised, and I will perform. Lord Otterford remains to share in the pious task, after which I shall accompany him to town."

"And why should I not also follow her to the grave? Let Lady Madelaine depart alone, if she is anxious to escape."

"And the packet?"

"True—true—I know not what it may contain, nor the duties which it may enforce Perhaps the delay of a day may be fatal to her wishes. I will be ready at daybreak."

"Farewell then, my dear Eveleen; I have already taken leave of your mother, and am unequal to another interview, even with yourself. Farewell; and should you ever want a friend, remember me."

She extended her arms, and I threw myself

into them. I could not utter a syllable; but she understood my emotion; and after having pressed her lips affectionately to my forehead, she replaced me gently in my chair, rung for Josephine, and left the room.

CHAPTER XLV.

My journey back to town was a wretched one. Prostrated by the emotions I had so recently experienced, and haunted by the memory of the fearful death-bed from which I had only just escaped, I could not have been condemned to a more trying companionship than that of Lady Madelaine. By turns conciliating and threatening, at intervals she fulminated against me the most bitter reproaches for the trial to which she had been subjected by my hasty presumption; and at others she reminded me that Adela had never been either a daughter or a sister to herself and me, and hinted at the immense increase of fortune which necessarily accrued to me through her death. The last argument was powerless. Had I not already experienced the insufficiency of wealth to secure happiness?

I thought incessantly of my hidden packet. It was evident that my mother knew nothing of this bequest; for I learned from Josephine, that immediately after the death of Adela, she had demanded her keys and her writing-desk, and had read and destroyed all the papers that it contained. I was doubly anxious, therefore, to ascertain the contents of that which I possessed; and exhausted alike by the inconsistent humor of Lady Madelaine, my own feelings, and the thirst for opportunity to learn the last wishes and sentiments of my sister, I fancied every minute an hour until we at length arrived in London.

To my great relief my mother suggested that I should leave her in Grosvenor Square, and at once proceed to my own house, alleging, as her reason, the necessity of forthwith making arrangements for our mourning, and adopting some resolution regarding our future movements, until the period when we could again appear with propriety in public. She said something, also, of the inconvenience of a death in the family just in the height of the season; but as I did not perfectly hear the remark, and was, moreover, anxious not to enlighten myself further upon the subject, I made no comment upon her words, querulously as they were uttered.

On entering my home I was by no means surprised to learn that Sir James was absent; but I was not the less satisfied with the assurance. I hastened at once to my dressing-room, threw off my traveling attire, ordered chocolate and lights, and then, having dismissed Josephine with strict injunctions not to suffer any one to intrude upon me, even should Sir James himself return, as I was overcome by fatigue, and felt the necessity of being alone for a time, I threw myself back in my chair, and was for several minutes unable to summon sufficient courage to open the packet which for so many hours I had been pining to read. My dressing-case stood near me, and in it was contained this mournful communication—this voice from the grave—this last solemn declaration which my sister had not deigned to make from her own lips.

What was I to learn? Would she reproach me with my coldness, my carelessness? Or had she, chastened by her approach to that mysterious world toward which she had, during the moments in which it was written, been so surely tending, bequeathed to me the one outpouring gush of tenderness in which she had concentrated the sisterly sympathies of her whole life? I felt as though I were alone with the dead—with the cold, wasted, livid corse of her upon whose dying lips there had quivered neither blessing nor prayer; and I shuddered as I glanced tremblingly about me. But my eyes rested upon no object in unison with the gloominess of such a mood of mind; all around me was luxurious, costly, fresh, and cheerful; and, at length, I shook off the feeling of mental and physical weakness to which I had yielded, and withdrew the papers from their envelope. I must transcribe them as they lay before me. Any attempt at a description of their contents would be still more painful even now, though long and weary years have elapsed since they were put into my hands, than to follow them word by word, and line by line, with a faithful pen.

I broke the seal with quivering fingers. I had argued myself into a state of doubtful courage: I had tried to believe that they would enable me to dwell with greater tenderness upon the memory of my sister, more than ever darkened by that last fatal scene to which I had been a trembling witness; but, as I felt the wax give way beneath my touch, this trust abandoned me.

It is through the most trifling agencies that deep sorrow generally enters into the heart of a woman; from the most inconsequent springs that the full consciousness of her unhappiness is filtrated into her entire being. An indistinct whisper—a word overheard by chance—a gloom upon the countenance of a friend whose usual greeting is a smile—all these become prophecies by an intuitive faculty, incomprehensible even to herself, and which is called into existence on the eve of a misfortune destined to give its color to her future fate; and she murmurs to herself, "I am about to be wretched," with the same innate conviction as that of the wild bird, to which the trembling of the foliage, and the wail of the wind as it sweeps over the high grass and along the surface of the water, reveal the approach of the yet unseen storm.

No wonder, then, if trifles such as these can obtrude their warning, that as I unfolded the papers which were to reveal to me alike the present and the past, and to make the future a blank, no wonder that I trembled.

"I am standing upon the brink of that grave in which my youth and my sorrows will soon be alike buried; but not, as I have reason to believe, alike forgotten. You intruded your confidence on me, Eveleen, to the ruin of all the happiness which this earth might yet have yielded as a requital for the trials of my youth. I am now about to pay the debt. I also will reveal the secret of my life to you; and the result will in your case be without doubt the same; if, indeed, the world to which you have vowed yourself has not quite done its work."—

My agitation increased with every sentence. I could scarcely breathe from terror! What was I about to learn! What meant this ominous threat to reveal a secret which was to plunge me into misery! I swept back the hair from my forehead. The moisture which had risen to my eyes had disappeared. I was fevered by a terrible anticipation. Again I fastened my eyes upon the writing. It was firm and flowing—not a pulse of the writer had quivered. I proceeded.

"Fear and hatred were the first feelings which were taught to expand in my young heart. When I became old enough to comprehend my position, I found myself an alien from my family—branded like Cain—but, unlike him, guiltless of the crime, while suffering its penalty. I learnt to pronounce the name of my mother only to shrink before the idea that it called up—of my sister, only to quail before a humiliating and bitter comparison. The victim of injustice and disregard, I soon began to look into my own heart, and to pay back in distrust and indignation, the wrongs of which I was keenly susceptible.

"The frivolous, but dazzling advantages which you had received from the education bestowed upon you; your luxury, your indulgence, and the insolent vanity which was their fruit, contrasted with my own privations, continued to do their slow but certain work; and when we met at Rooksley for the first time, I know not which was the most distasteful to me, yourself, or she whom, in its wrath, heaven gave me as a mother.

"After a time your advances toward friendship, and the consciousness that my own acquirements and character were very superior to those which I had so long held in jealous dread, almost reconciled me to a trial of your real feelings; but I was not long in discovering that you were a mere puppet, whose wires were in the hands of Lady O'Halloran; that your lip-deep courtesies to your only sister were simply a concession to the friend of your father; and that your heart was, as it ever had been, centered in self, and totally independent of your words.

"You know that I never on my side cheated you with false seeming; you know how frankly and truthfully I told you that you were incapable of real affection. Oh, that I had retained that belief strongly to the last; and that your idle words, and still more idle tears, when you compelled me to become the confidant of your fancied passion for Devereux, had not led me to believe that even you could love another than yourself. Why are certain expressions made only to be profaned? Why are you, and such as you, who are not formed for the higher and holier impulses of our nature, permitted to bandy words and tones, of which you can neither estimate the force, nor comprehend the value? But these are questions beyond my own reach, and I will not look to you for a reply. In my delusion, I began to love because I pitied you; but the arrogant triumph of your farewell, when you were summoned from our common exile to appear once more beside Lady Madelaine in the gay world for which you panted, soon destroyed the charm.

"Do you remember that in expatiating upon your love for Devereux, you scouted with contempt the suggestion which I made, that your mother wished to make you the wife of another—of one who—in short, of Sir James Dornton? Why should I shrink from naming a man whom, from my inmost soul, I despise beyond all else on earth? Do you remember with what fierce and feverish indignation you repelled the idea? Should you, indeed, have ceased to do so, call back your thoughts—the time is still too recent to require a great effort of memory.

"On my part, your astonished look was not unobserved, when Lady Flora and myself returned the greeting of Sir James on his visit to Rooksley during Lady Madelaine's widowhood, as that of one to whom we were not altogether strangers. The cause was simple: he was grouse-shooting in Scotland, when Lady Madelaine saw fit to summon me at last to what should have been the home of my infancy; and, at her request, he took charge of us to London; but I was at that period so mere a girl, and, moreover, so preoccupied by the approaching change in my position, that I should have forgotten his existence, had not your passionate invectives taught me to believe that you did him less than justice. Yes, Lady Dornton, you it was who first awoke in my heart that feeling of interest in his fate, which those who have themselves suffered from injustice, naturally extend to their fellow-victims.

"I had lived a life of utter isolation. My studies, unlike your own, had been grave and serious. Your experience, real and acquired, startled and enlightened me. I began to understand that I also might, at some future time, find beyond the circle of my own family, that tenderness which had been denied to me within it. I began to listen with more eagerness, and to reflect with more precision; and after a while I combined with my own visions the image of a man who like myself was despised, and probably misjudged. Do not imagine, however, that I even tried to fancy that I loved him: my feelings, unlike your own, were not the sport of impulse and romance: to me he was only a reposing point for my unloved and solitary spirit: an object from which I did not shrink because it had never causelessly and wantonly repelled me. I am not asking for your sympathy: to me even at that moment it would have been valueless: judge, therefore, what it must be now.

"You left Rooksley, and I wept when I lost sight of you—but it was not your departure that I mourned: it was this new wrong done to myself. You had, however, left your influence behind. You had opened up a new world to my solitary musings, and made me feel that solitude tenfold more bitter. I longed to annihilate time, and to attain the age when I also should be introduced into the world: not to pamper myself with its vanities, not to pollute myself with its deceit, not to degrade myself by its falsehood, but simply and solely to commence my search after that one only being who was to be to me—to the poor unloved and deserted Adela—at once a fond protector and a tender friend. Surely I did not ask too much of fate! I was willing to receive this boon as a compensation for all else on earth. Others have so many to love them—I only asked for one, and that one

——but all this is worse than idle: there is another feeling in the human breast fiercer and quite as firm as love. I shall not have died before I learn it.

"You are, perhaps, not aware that ere you had been long in town our mother made a hurried journey to Rooksley: the pretext was some forgotten papers, too precious to be intrusted to indifferent hands. Certain it is that she was accompanied by Sir James Dornton. I was in the park when they arrived, and to my surprise was summoned to receive them. This was an unexpected, and would have been an equally unwelcome attention on the part of Lady Madelaine, who was not apt so promptly to remember my existence, had I not been also informed who was her companion. Curiosity at once overcame every other feeling. I should, at least, have an opportunity of judging by my own observations in how far he merited the disdain and dislike with which you had overwhelmed him, and I hastened to return to the house.

"It is probable that my hurried walk had given a glow to my complexion, for—I remember it well, as it was the first and only time that it occurred—Lady Madelaine herself glanced at me with complacency, and even deigned to utter a few words of approbation at my altered appearance, as Sir James approached to greet me. How different did he appear from the picture that you had sketched! He looked steadily, almost searchingly upon me, with a smile before which my eyes fell, while I felt the rushing blood crimson my cheeks and forehead. His voice was low and soft as he addressed me; and whenever I subsequently glanced toward him, I still met the almost ardent gaze which thrilled to my very heart. I listened eagerly to his conversation with my mother, in which he betrayed a constant anxiety to include me, but I was at that moment less than ever capable of exertion. Nevertheless I felt that, for the first time in my life, I was not altogether overlooked. On one occasion, when Lady Madelaine was engrossed for a few instants by her sister, Sir James addressed himself to me, and exerted all his powers, and they are great—what is there on earth more brilliant than the scaled coat of the serpent whose bite is poison?—all his graceful eloquence, to convince me that, in his eyes at least, I was worthy of regard and courtesy: and I welcomed the soothing effort as the parched wilderness welcomes the refreshing dew of heaven.

"The papers, as Lady Madelaine asserted, were found; and once more Rooksley was restored to its monotony; but its gloom was gone. As I saw them drive from the door, all had become more bright about me: I was a new being. Something whispered me that Sir James was not gone forever: that the papers had been an imaginary want; and that I was the actual object of this visit. But how? the blood leapt to my heart: I remembered with an indescribable thrill of delight that my mother had reminded me that in another week I should be sixteen years of age, and that it was time for me to be more careful of my appearance. I was full of a mysterious joy. I should not, probably, so readily have combined circumstances apparently so trifling: and decidedly I should never have been so powerfully affected by what were, after all, the mere courtesies of a man of fashion and my mother's friend, had not your superior knowledge taught me where and how to form the combinations. As it was, however, the new sentiment by which I was inspired exalted me in my own eyes. I was more than ever convinced of the possibility that I should one day be loved as others were; and to the curiosity which I had felt regarding Sir James, there succeeded the gratitude due to the man who had first afforded me a brighter glimpse of the cheering and sustaining prospect.

A week passed away—a week of bright and happy dreams; when once more Sir James Dornton arrived at Rooksley. I was agitated with joy, but that joy was unmixed with surprise. I had had, from the hour of his departure, an intuitive conviction of his prompt return. He also had his pretext. He came at the request of my mother, but he did not explain the cause of her sudden solicitude, nor did I waste one word on the inquiry. In her absence I was less constrained: for a few hours I was his hostess, and I exerted myself to do the honors worthily. After dinner he proposed a saunter through the grounds.

"Lady Flora, according to her daily habit, was already half asleep in her chair, and declined to accompany us; the eyes of Sir James flashed with delight; and in five minutes we were buried in the shrubberies.

"I do not spare you one detail, Eveleen. You are proud of your destiny. Poor tool of another's will! Married to a man who never loved you, at the bidding of a mother who consulted only her own interest in the disposal of your hand.

"What had I to fear? Lady Flora slept: and for her, during the next few hours, time was consequently annihilated, while I leant upon the arm of the first being who had given me a value in my own eyes. Is it then marvelous that an hour had not elapsed since we left the house, ere I ascertained that Lady Madelaine knew nothing of this visit? or wonderful that when I expressed my fear of her displeasure, he should find it an easy task to allay that fear? Let those who seek to blame me appreciate my position.

"Before we parted I felt that I was loved. What woman can be deceived when the feeling is not feigned? I did not wish to receive an assurance that it was so, but rather thanked in my heart the delicacy which left the decisive words as yet unuttered. Occasionally, as we conversed, my companion looked earnestly at me, and listened with an eagerness to which all flattery would have been inadequate. By a single word, a single look, he encouraged me to continue speaking; and I was proudly conscious that every hour I had risen in his esteem. The brilliant man of the world hung upon the fresh and unfettered fancies, upon the gravest feelings of a mere girl, the pupil of the mountains, and of their sublime and soul-strengthening silence. Yes! he may have sold his soul, bartered his honor, and sullied his self-esteem by becoming the husband of another; but I go to my grave with the consolatory conviction that from that eventful evening he has loved me only!

"Again, and again he came, and ere long

was his betrothed wife. I knew nothing of the after-machinations of Lady Madelaine. He confided to me simply that she had consented to our marriage, but at her own good time; and that, in the interval, we were only to meet in her presence. This declaration alarmed me, for I had everything to dread from the involuntary indiscretion of Lady Flora, who believed his visits to be not only sanctioned, but even suggested by her sister, and who had never entertained the slightest suspicion of our mutual attachment.

"Sir James reluctantly acceded to the justice of my fears; and his declared visits to Rooksley gradually declined, and at length were entirely suspended. I saw him still, however, at frequent intervals; and when he failed to present himself at our appointed rendezvous, he was replaced by his letters. He was to be my husband! I was content with this assurance; the when, never occupied my thoughts. My happiness was so immense that it afforded space neither for fear nor hope. I lived in the present. Satisfied of the truth of his affection, I had acknowledged mine with the usual frankness of my nature. Ignorant of the usages of the world on such occasions, and still more so of the perfidy by which that happy ignorance might be repaid, I laid my whole heart before him, and did not hesitate to let him know that henceforward my existence depended utterly upon himself. Had I acted otherwise, I should have been self-despised for my own vain and empty heartlessness.

"Here, on my death-bed, when my extended hand scarcely suffices to veil the night-lamp from my eyes, but like a transparent film only softens what in the days of health it would have darkened—yes, even here, and now, I can look back upon those hours, and feel that once indeed I lived!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

I LAID the manuscript upon the table: my tears had blinded me. Poor Adela! I forgave all her invectives against myself, bitter as they were—I even forgot for a time the fearful nature of my own position—I only felt that I pitied her, and would have called her for an instant from her grave to tell her that she was revenged—for that in my turn I did not love this man. After a time I resumed my painful task.

"Eveleen! had you really been capable of the attachment for which you proudly claimed belief—before you forfeited it forever—you would understand my feelings when the visits of Sir James suddenly ceased, and his letters became changed. You, however, would not, perhaps, have perceived that change; or had you chanced to do so, might probably have deemed it matter of self-gratulation, for they were, if not as lengthy as ever, tenfold more full of protestations and endearing epithets. But I had studied him closely, and was not to be so deceived.

"The ore of true passion was no longer there, and the base counterfeit of eloquent adulation was substituted in its place. All was constraint and effort. He wrote like a man above whose head was suspended the sword of a modern Damocles—who quailed before some anticipated danger. My pride revolted at the conviction: but alas! that wholesome pride was subdued beneath a more powerful feeling. I have told you—not now, nor here—but long, long ago, when you first taught me to reason on such subjects; I told you then that I could not love as you did, with one hand clasped in that of my husband, and the other extended to beckon to the world to come between us—but wholly and exclusively. Unlike yours, my practice does not gainsay my precepts; and this man was to be my husband—could I then see without agony even one vapor of doubt arise to separate us? No—no—the stake for which I played was not merely my happiness, it was my life, and I could not afford to lose it lightly.

"I answered his letters by one line; 'Come,' I said, 'if you would ever again see me in this world,' and then I drew close the curtains to shut out the sunshine, that, after smiling on my happiness, now, with the same hot glare, seemed to mock my anguish; and in the sudden twilight of my darkened chamber, I sat down to reflect upon the misery which I felt was about to come upon me.

"I once read of a man subjected by an awful tribunal to torture. He was alone, in utter darkness, bound hand and foot upon a couch furnished with warm and soft coverings, and on his unprotected head fell at measured intervals a drop of ice-cold water. It did not vary in its descent a single instant; the failure of one drop, even by a second, would have been a relief which he might have repaid by a sob of prayer but there was no intermission, none! He knew it, for he counted each by the pulsations of his heart—— I might have pitied even him during that fearful night. In my position you would have wept yourself to sleep like a tired child; but I had no tears for the fate that I foresaw. There was a morrow to that night, and then came three more weary days; and my stubborn heart kept its watch steadily, for I had calculated the time which must elapse ere he could obey my summons; but the last few hours were almost too much for my reason. I read and reread the fatal letter, until the lines danced before my eyes, and I looked through a cloud of flickering atoms, as black and dense as my own fears. There was nothing to console me in this renewed perusal; I could find no new interpretation for the honeyed words which had failed to blind me to the truth; and I had no inclination to encourage a deceit of which I must ultimately become the victim.

"At length he came; we met at the same spot, at the same hour, and he strove to greet me with the same smile, but, although it wreathed his lip, it left his eye cold and silent. He took my hand, and would have pressed his lips upon my cheek, but I turned it from him. The letter had sufficed; and I had respect enough for the man to whom I had vowed my life, to spare him an acted as well as a written hypocrisy.

"I saw that he was wounded to the heart by my coldness, and I rejoiced. He was not then all evil. He inquired the cause of my altered manners, and I placed his letter in his hand. A sudden flush mounted to his brow:—

"'Listen, Sir James,' I said, gravely; 'I cannot be deceived; something has occurred since we last met: something which has opened a

gulf between us I am not to be cheated by words. The heart speaks, or is silent; the lips cannot replace it where it is absent. Be frank —what has happened?'

"'Happened!' echoed Dornton, with a look of anguish, which I have never since forgotten. I calmly repeated my question.

"'Adela, you torture me!' he exclaimed vehemently; 'do you, can you doubt my affection?'

"'I will not, I dare not,' was my reply; 'but it must be assured beyond all possibility of suspicion. Another week like the last would destroy me, body and mind. I must hear from the lips, or read in the writing of Lady Madelaine herself that I am to be your wife. I must know that my fate is fixed beyond the power of caprice or tyranny. With less than this I can no longer rest satisfied. Let her name her own time; I shall have the certainty of future happiness to abridge the interval. Let me even be denied all personal communication with you until that time arrives, and I will submit; but I cannot remain a prey to uncertainty and suspense. I cannot any longer subject myself to be the mere tool of another's pleasure.'

"Then it was, that Sir James, overcome by the steady resolution of my words and manner, avowed to me that he had reason to apprehend a change in the projects of Lady Madelaine. The admission only made me the more steadily adhere to my purpose.

"'Until her will is known, should such, indeed, be the case, we must not meet again,' I replied, with an appearance of calm which belied the real agitation that I felt: 'of your own truth I can entertain no doubt. I felt at once from whence the blow must come. See Lady Madelaine, remind her of her voluntary pledge; tell her that you exact its performance, and all will yet be well!'

"'You shall be satisfied,' he said at length, in an accent which betrayed more fear than hope. 'I will do as you require: but should I meet with a refusal, all may be lost through this precipitation.'

"'A refusal!' was my rejoinder, 'does she not call you her friend? Is not your own happiness involved in the question?'

"'Adela!' he exclaimed reproachfully, 'do you doubt it?'

"'Again I say no—but why this fear, for which you have hitherto chidden me? Has my mother displayed any new proofs of her aversion? Does she indeed hate me to an excess which will induce her to sacrifice your happiness in order to destroy mine?'

"'No—I am bound to declare the contrary; and yet—'

"'Enough,' I said hurriedly; 'we can be ultimately separated only by your own agency; for myself I am pledged to you forever—death alone can dissolve the vows that I have uttered. I am aware that Lady Madelaine can not only oppose, but also retard our union: be it so: in five years I shall be my own mistress, and may defy her authority. The time is long, I admit,' I added, as Dornton made an impatient gesture; 'but as you love me—'

"'Better than my life,' he interrupted eagerly; 'but if you loved as I do, you could not talk thus coolly of a delay which appears to me eternal.'

"'You misjudge me: hear me then: make me your wife, and carry me abroad—anywhere; the world is wide enough, and all countries will be to me alike if you are beside me. When I am of age we will return to England; and, in the possession of our proper rank, revenge ourselves upon the past.'

"A gloom like that of midnight spread over the face of Dornton. Fool that I was not to comprehend how terrible a secret lay below that darkness! Secure in his affection, I had yet to learn that the ruined gamester and the debt-covered man of fashion must sell himself for gold when it was tendered to his grasp. What had he to do with affection or with fidelity? He had tasted of the world's stream; and he was eager to bid the waters of Marah flow over the golden sands of Pactolus. I, too, tendered him wealth—but when? I knew nothing of all this when I urged him to a step he had not the means to take; and we parted, after he had pledged himself to an explanation with Lady Madelaine, of which he was himself to bring me the result.

"Four more weary days and nights of impatient anguish intervened, before the hour at which he could again arrive at Rooksley. I was unable to take even physical repose: the fate of my whole existence was about to be decided, and I was powerless to turn the balance. On the morning of the fifth day I was at our trysting-place at an early hour; nor did I long await the information which I went to seek. A stranger met me, and with a respectful salutation, tendered a letter upon whose superscription I instantly recognized the well-known characters of Dornton. I had no sooner taken it from his hand, than with a second silent bow, he turned and walked hastily away.

"I stood motionless for a moment with the letter in my hand.—Did something whisper to you, Lady Dornton, as you looked on this packet, that it would decide your destiny in this life? Did your blood curdle, your hand quiver, and your eye grow dim? It may be so: I had already undergone the same agony which I have bequeathed to you. Suddenly a new impulse urged me to fly the spot, and to learn ALL—and I plunged into the thickest of the wood, and throwing myself down upon the earth, I resolutely tore asunder the folds of the letter which had been so mysteriously transmitted to me: I read it from one end to the other without a pause. Read it in your turn. It is a production of the man to whom you have given your hand, and can scarcely fail to excite your interest—

"'I am about, my beloved Adela, to plunge a dagger into your heart—fearful necessity to a man by whom you are adored! I dare not however, incur the culpability of leaving you, for one moment in ignorance of the fatal truth beneath which my own prospects of domestic happiness are forever crushed. All is over. We must renounce every hope of being united in this world. Neither prayers nor tears will soften the unbending will of your mother; no is there even a chance that time might operate a change. I have thought much of your self abnegating and generous proposal; but alas! you do not guess, novice as you are in the world's ways, beneath how frightful a load of

suspicion and contempt I should bury myself, were I selfish enough to profit by it. I should be accused of taking an unmanly advantage of your youth and inexperience; and the pure effect of a passionate attachment would be attributed to a sordid interest of which you alone would know me to be incapable. I could not live under this stigma, even with you to comfort and console me; and I could never again raise my head proudly among my fellow-men. These are fearful anticipations, Adela: alike for you and for myself: too fearful to be realized. Nor would you, pure and perfect as you are, escape the reverberation of the thunder. Your reputation would be sullied; your position ruined; and this shall never be for *my* sake. Beloved of my heart! your very virtues would thus become a scourge. Weep then for yourself, and weep for me; but bend in pity to us both before the inexorable destiny which parts us.'

"Eveleen—had a traveler passed near the woods of Rooksley at the moment of sunshine and silence in which my burning eyeballs fastened upon the signature of this heartless letter, he would have dreamed that happy and light hearts were wandering beneath their shadows; for I was myself startled by the peal of ringing laughter which escaped from between my parched and quivering lips. Yes, Lady Dornton, yes—the fiends laugh—they have a mad mirth of their own—a frantic merriment that must have voice, or it would choke the reveler. I knew it then! Despair made me resolute; I answered this withering letter; briefly but urgently; I insisted that he should himself come to Rooksley, and give me all the details of his interview with Lady Madelaine. He resisted resolutely; again he wrote: he urged that it would destroy his reason were he to see me again only to lose me a second time. Passion and anguish breathed in every line; I laid the letters side by side before me, and I could not reconcile their tone. It was evident that another revolution had taken place in the feelings, if not in the intentions of Dornton, and I was resolved to solve the mystery.

"Once more I summoned him, upon his honor as a true man, to obey my bidding; and after the delay of another week he reappeared. He told me that he came from Woodville, that you had barely escaped from death, and that Lady Madelaine and her husband had urged him to continue their guest during your convalescence—and still, poor cheated fool! I suspected nothing. I meant to tell you all that passed after his arrival, but I cannot—my strength is weaker than my purpose. Enough that day after day he lingered near me, evidently bowed down by the weight of some mighty sorrow which he would not reveal. As for myself, despair had made me frantic, and this fatal mystery overthrew my poor remains of composure. The excitement of the false position in which I stood, the evident wretchedness of the man I loved, and the tenacity with which he refused all explanation of a secret whose existence he did not attempt to gainsay, fevered my brain, and as we were about to part, I fell lifeless into his arms

"My hour of bitter triumph was come. Regardless of consequences, he bore me to the house, to the consternation of the bewildered Lady Flora, and the marvel of our slender household; and once there, refused to quit me for an instant. When I recovered power to articulate, his name rose instinctively to my lips, and it was his own voice which answered the appeal. A second syncope, succeeded by delirium, soon informed Lady Flora of our secret, and thenceforward she allowed no one to approach me save herself and the physician. At times she summoned Sir James, that he might strive to recall my scattered faculties; and there were moments in which he partially succeeded. My first care on a return of reason was to obtain from him a solemn pledge that he would not abandon me until I was convalescent. He started in alarm as I demanded this, and would have urged a thousand pleas against it; but I denounced him as my murderer, if he left me thus to die of the despair which was his own work, and at length he promised everything.

"Reckless of the future, careless of the past, weak in body, but calm in spirit, I was happy. Happy, amid my physical suffering, for he was constantly beside me; happy in the belief that even yet all was not lost; while Lady Flora looked on, satisfied by my assurance that I must become the wife of Dornton, or perish.

"Little did I guess, Eveleen, that the tender nurse who had so lately left your sick bed to take up his post at mine, had become my brother. But I cannot even now dwell upon that time, for once more I feel my brain burn, and my sinking frame quiver beneath the fierce pulsations of a heart too big for its weak and narrow prison-house. Your letter awoke me from my trance. Your letter, in which you announced your marriage and your isolation; and asked me—ME! to become your companion. I was alone with Lady Flora when I received it; and I read it to the end. I can tell you nothing more than that I was suddenly startled by the vehement grief of my poor aunt; and that when I strove to open my eyes, and to inquire into its cause, I felt as though I were crushed down upon my bed by a hand of iron. Slowly, and by imperceptible degrees, reason came back upon me, and, with it, memory; and then I struggled fiercely with my agony; and for a time I conquered. I demanded the letter, and it was put into my hands. Once more I read it resolutely to the end; and then I bade them summon Sir James. He was gone. I had lain twelve hours in my frightful swoon, and the coward had escaped the curse I prepared for him. They would have disobeyed me when I asked for writing materials; but I was too well aware that my factitious strength was nearly spent, to listen to their expostulations, and I was at length obeyed. I answered your letter; I uttered no reproach; I gave vent to no invective; I felt that I should not long survive the struggle, and I resolved to leave you for a while in ignorance, and to bequeath the truth as my best vengeance, when remorse would be too late.

"I have no more to tell—no comment to make—no word of bitterness to utter. I leave you to your own thoughts—weak, unstable, and irresolute, you had already forfeited all claim to happiness. Should you still cling to one hope, be wise enough to fasten it upon the grave.

"Farewell."

CHAPTER XLVII.

I SUFFERED the papers to fall from my hand. I had read even to the last line, hurriedly, eagerly, gaspingly; and now I knew all. I could not think—I could not weep—I had no pity either for my dead sister, or for myself—no hate for Dornton—no feeling of either the present or the past. All was dead within me. My eyes were open, but I did not distinguish an object; my apartment looked upon a great thoroughfare, but I did not hear a sound. I was, for the moment, annihilated.

Gradually, however, and painfully I awoke from this stupor. My brain whirled; my heart labored with thick sobs; those dry and withering sobs which rend their way, with each its separate pang. I clenched my hands until the blood started beneath my nails; I writhed like one convulsed; and still the frightful truth glared full upon me—I had been the unconscious murderer of my sister!

And for what? And whom? And then uprose within me the boiling hatred which my long lethargy had for a time suppressed. I had to revenge not only Adela, but myself also. How I envied the grave into which she had gone down! How I loathed myself that I was still condemned to live and suffer! All was dark and hopeless about me. What had I now to ask of fate!

Such was my state of mind when the door of my dressing-room suddenly opened, and my husband stood before me. As my eye fell on his advancing figure, I uttered a wild scream, and covered my face with my spread hands.

"What means this, Eveleen?" he asked in a troubled voice, as he stopped before me; "how am I to interpret this reception?"

I strove to speak, but I could not. My emotion rendered me unable to articulate.

"This is worse than childish, Lady Dornton," he continued more firmly; "I have already seen your mother, and I know all. Yet surely, the death of your sister—"

"Name her not!" I exclaimed, as I started vehemently to my feet, animated by a new feeling; "name her not, lest the words wither the lips which utter them. Name her not to me—to me! at once her victim and her executioner."

Dornton was evidently agitated, but he strove to suppress his emotion.

"Has your grief indeed deranged your faculties?" he asked, struggling to smile.

For all answer I pointed to the papers, which still lay where they had fallen. He stooped, and gathered them together; but as he did so, his hand trembled.

"Do you recognize the writing?" I asked bitterly, as I again sank into my seat; "it is the legacy, Sir James Dornton, which the dead Adela has bequeathed to me—and you."

While I was speaking he had run his eye rapidly over the opening lines. "I see it all," he said; "I might have expected this. She knew the weakness of your nature, and she has revenged her wrongs upon you."

"Dare you talk thus to me?" I cried, irritated even amid my anguish; "you, who have destroyed us both?"

"You use strong language, Lady Dornton," he said, striving to assume an accent of indignation, "and such as you are unable to justify. You now know what it had been better for your peace to have concealed from you forever. The evil is, however, beyond remedy: and I owe it to myself to place the matter in its proper light."

His self-possession startled me; but the damning evidence of his dishonor was before my eyes, and I retorted angrily, "The 'matter' will admit no light but one. I do not now speak of myself—I have time for my own wrongs—I address you as the deceiver of my sister."

"And upon what grounds do you accuse me of deception?"

"Did you not use every method to induce her to believe that you loved her?"

"I do not deny it; the fact was so.'

"You did love her! You admit it, and yet you abandoned her!"

"I was the slave of circumstances."

"Did you not persuade her that she was to become your wife?"

"I did, in the firm belief that such would be the case."

I pressed my hand upon my burning forehead. I was bewildered.

"I used, as you have stated, every effort to gain the affections of your sister," he continued, hurriedly: "I had reason to believe that she was to share my fortunes; her peculiarity of character attracted me, and the romance of a young, fresh heart lent itself willingly to the endeavors which I made to owe her hand to her own affections, no less than to the will of those who had power over her actions. Rest assured that the tragical termination of our attachment has proved as bitter to me as to herself, although, where I have only striven, she has sunk."

"And why," I interposed, "why, if you really loved her, did you not withstand all opposition? Why destroy us both only to thwart your inclination?"

"I had no alternative," was his reply.

I shook my head contemptuously.

"You doubt my assertion; and yet I could readily prove its truth; but the explanation would involve details which might not flatter your self-love; and I would rather you should credit my declaration without further proof."

"Fear nothing, sir," I said haughtily; "my self-love is beyond your reach. What can you admit which will touch it more nearly than the words that you have already uttered. Even the vanity, to which you make allusion, has not deprived me of the power to understand that I am indebted for your hand to the fortune with which destiny had cursed me."

"Be it as you will," was his unmoved reply. "It then only remains for me to justify myself." I bowed in silence.

"Reckless as you are," he resumed, after the pause of a moment, "you have nevertheless been long enough my wife, to understand that at the period of our marriage my pecuniary resources were exhausted. I was, therefore, under the necessity of forming an alliance which would enable me to retain my accustomed position in society. I looked round me, and from the moment in which I became intimately acquainted with your family, I cast my

eyes upon yourself. You were very young, but I had gained the confidence and friendship of your mother, and I knew that she was all-powerful. I therefore resolved to retrench sufficiently to enable me to wait for a few years, and I, meanwhile, continued to pay my court assiduously to Lady Madelaine. I see your lip curl; but your contempt is misplaced. Do not men frequently toil during a lifetime, suffer privation and contumely, and even barter their good name for gold, of which they subsequently made a weak and unworthy use, when their necessities are not more imperative than my own! And with what have you to reproach me since our marriage?"

"Proceed, sir," I said, coldly; "for the tale promises to be a long one."

"The death of your father altered all my projects. It is true that if Lady Madelaine had distinguished me by her regard, she had been no less condescending to Lord Otterford; while neither the one nor the other could boast of one unguarded word or action by which to assume a claim upon her preference—you have yet much, Lady Dornton, to study in your mother; and much from which, as a woman of the world, you might derive no small advantage."

"You are completing my education, Sir James," I said bitterly.

He bowed with a sarcastic smile; turned his chair more fully upon me, and proceeded.

"The death of your father left your mother free: she was still in the full lustre of her beauty and of her fashion, and desirable in every point of view. Her fortune, although, indeed, less considerable than your own, was tangible, and within my reach from the moment in which she became my wife; and this circumstance was far from indifferent to me, as every year rendered my position more difficult.

"You have doubtlessly not forgotten my appearance at Rooksley during your mother's widowhood. I went there to offer her my hand, and she was flattered by my declaration. She admitted this fact frankly; but I soon perceived the reason of my failure, for of that she convinced me at once. She strove to keep her secret, but I was playing a desperate game, and I at once declared my conviction of her attachment to Lord Otterford. At that period Otterford had not declared himself, and the pride of Lady Madelaine took alarm.

"'I am neither young enough, nor wealthy enough for you, Sir James,' she said; 'Eveleen is the wife best suited alike to your habits and your tastes. Like you she promises to be a world-worshiper; and her beauty and fortune will enable you to realize all the dreams of your ambition. You know that my authority over her is unlimited—you are no stranger to her absurd and childish fancy for young Devereux: you are, in short, an old and tried friend of the family, and under your protection her fate would be assured. I have long desired an opportunity of suggesting this marriage to you, and I gladly embrace that which your declared preference for myself has afforded to me. Does my proposal meet your views?'

"I was at a loss how to reply. Quite aware that I was as much indebted to the prudent egotism of Lady Madelaine on this occasion, as to her regard, I made difficulties, all of which flattered her vanity, and increased her friendship; but at length I yielded. After a long and animated conversation my destiny was decided: but I was not altogether satisfied. It is true that, as though she could have penetrated into the design which I had formed several years previously, she voluntarily offered me your own hand; still I should have preferred a more certain and a more immediate boon, and I was mortified that she should sacrifice me to a mere animal like Otterford, whose only charm lay in a handsome face, and a certain tact in flattering the weaknesses and follies of her character. I knew that, once her husband, he must necessarily degenerate into a domestic automaton: he was formed for no other purpose, and my prophecy has been realized."

I was lost in astonishment at the audacity with which Dornton thus crowned himself with his vices, and exacted worship for them; but I struggled resolutely against my indignation, and commanded myself sufficiently to listen with at least an appearance of composure.

"She had no sooner herself become a wife," pursued Dornton, undauntedly, "than I reminded her of her promise, and she at once pledged herself to fulfill it, although she would appoint no given period. The motives which she alleged for this delay were specious: I was not, however, at a loss to define her real ones: she was too recently a bride to tolerate so unequal a rivalry; and, as I felt how useless all argument must prove against such a conviction, I submitted in silence. Otterford was less punctilious; from the period of their marriage he never ceased to represent to your mother the incongruity and danger of thus shutting you out from a world so well aware of your existence, and so ready to draw false deductions from your extraordinary seclusion; and she at length yielded reluctantly to his entreaties.

"You were summoned to town, and I now believed that my difficulties were over—it was not so; like Jacob, I had served seven years for Rachel; and was then coolly told to take Leah as my reward. You look amazed; but I am about to explain, and by that explanation to justify myself. You had scarcely appeared in London, when the Duke of Barminster was attracted by your beauty. It is possible that you may scarcely remember a tall, gaunt, large-limbed youth, with pink eyes and yellow hair, who had just escaped from his tutors, after having made a tour in France and Italy; whence he returned with pinker eyes and yellower hair than he set out. Be that as it may, he admired you, and was what in stage-parlance is designated 'enamored' of your fair face and high-bred self-possession; nor did Lady Madelaine, whose ambition was flattered by his preference, hesitate covertly to encourage it. Her position was, however, somewhat embarrassing; I was constantly beside her like an accusing spirit which all her spells were unable to lay; and I believe that I should have triumphed even over the yellow-haired duke, had not a hint of my pecuniary difficulties been dropped into the eager ear of your mother. Had this hint never been given, Eveleen, it might have been happy for us both;

but this one circumstance became the key-stone of all the evil which has since been slowly built up.

"Lady Madelaine at once availed herself of the information thus received. She had her own reasons for not exciting a feud between us; while, at the same time, she was equally resolved upon your alliance with the duke. As yet he had said nothing decisive upon the subject, but that was evidently the effect of shyness, and from the dread of a refusal; for it was a boy's love, fearing everything and risking nothing.

"Secure of my enforced acquiescence in her wishes, from my total inability to gainsay them, your mother, with an *aplomb* which would have done honor to a statesman, took me into her confidence. She admitted that I might have some right to consider myself aggrieved until she explained her purpose—she abhorred the young duke; who, had he been no duke, would not have been presentable in society: but she felt it her duty on such an occasion to sacrifice her own wishes to the interests of her daughter. She reminded me that you were altogether unaware of the promise which she had made to me—that you still resolutely clung to your girlish fancy for Devereux—that, in short, your sentiments toward myself were rather those of avoidance and dislike, than such as promised happiness in married life. In fine—as a matter of duty to you, and of prudence to me, she had evidently resolved that you should become Duchess of Barminster. 'And may I ask,' I inquired, with a cool sarcasm which forewarned her of my probable vengeance, should she endeavor to make me the victim of her sudden ambition; 'may I ask what character I am expected to enact in this strange comedy?' She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then replied—'Sir James, this little incident must not affect our old and honest friendship. Had I not been assured from what occurred at Rooksley that you felt no overweening attachment to Eveleen, I should at once have negatived the duke's pursuit; but under the circumstances, and knowing also the sincerity of your regard for me, I have acted accordingly. You are aware that I have another daughter; less beautiful than Eveleen, I admit, but also without a silly passion in her head.'

"I had already seen your sister, when I traveled with her from Scotland. I remembered only a silent girl, who appeared rather proud than shy; and with whom I did not throughout the journey exchange a dozen sentences. You may imagine my surprise, my indignation; but my embarrassments had enslaved my will, and, as Lady Madelaine was well aware, I could not contend.

"I accompanied her to Rooksley, and I confess that I was startled by the change which a few months had effected in the appearance of your sister; still, the constraint induced by your mother's presence did not enable me to judge correctly of Adela, whose intellectual expression promised both mind and feeling. Stung by your own haughtiness, and revolted by a coquetry which was almost marvelous for your age, Lady Madelaine had by no means advanced in error when she asserted that my heart had remained untouched. I was dazzled by your beauty, and infatuated by your success; but it required more than this to resuscitate the long dormant feelings of a man of the world; and thus you will not be astonished if I submitted with a tolerable grace to a decision against which, under my peculiar circumstances, I dared not appeal, and resolved to ascertain at once what I was likely to gain or lose at the game of matrimonial shuttlecock which Lady Madelaine had instituted in her family."

"And you discovered?——"

"I discovered, Lady Dornton, ere long, that in Adela I had found the very being who had it in her power to renew the youth of my heart. I lost no time in returning to Rooksley, and, pleading the permission of your mother, I succeeded in gaining the affections of your sister, before I avowed to her that my visits were unauthorized. You know the independence of Adela's character; and you will therefore be prepared to understand that this circumstance, although it increased her caution, by no means affected her resolution. We met again and again. The extraordinary resources of her mind, and the noble qualities of her nature, were laid bare before me. She cared nothing for my fashion, nothing for my popularity; she loved me for myself—she loved me as I never hope to be loved again."

He paused. His lips quivered, and his face assumed an ashy paleness; but he soon rallied, and in a less steady voice, resumed: "You will not be surprised that, under these circumstances, I soon blessed the fortunate chance which had thrown the boy-duke in your path I was not, however, long destined to enjoy my dream of coming happiness; for on returning to Woodville, after one of my hurried visits to your sister, feeling myself unable any longer to control my impatience, I urged Lady Madelaine to withdraw Adela from her retreat, and to prepare the minds of her circle for our approaching marriage.

"I had remarked that she was less at her ease than usual, and that something had occurred to ruffle her; but never suspecting that my own happiness could be involved in so trivial a circumstance, I had paid little attention to it. I was soon better informed. 'Trust to me,' she said; 'I feel that I have dealt ungenerously toward you, but it is not yet too late to repair my error. You shall soon be my son-in-law; circumstances have occurred which have changed my views for Eveleen, and I will redeem my word. She shall be your wife!' I will spare you a description of my feelings. What I instantly suspected, proved to be the fact; the change had not originated with your mother, but with the relatives of the duke, to whom the comparatively obscure origin of your father was an objection even more insuperable than the youth and inexperience of the noble blockhead himself.

"Do me the justice to believe that I did not passively submit to this insulting tyranny. I resented it warmly and loudly, but all my violence remained unavailing. I was in the toils, for Lady Madelaine, secured in her position by the pressing nature of my pecuniary necessities, had already turned aside the triumphant consolations of her dear five hundred friends on the secession of the duke, by smiling at the ab-

gurdity of the report, and asserting your long engagement to myself. Thus we had both too much at stake to continue long at feud. We were necessary to each other—and, you know the rest."

I was crushed. I had struggled to be firm; to pay back with cool contempt the perfidy of the man to whom I had been sacrificed; but I had not sufficiently prepared myself for such an avowal as this. The consciousness of his utter indifference; the conviction that all his affectation of affection had been false from the first moment of our marriage; the reflection that I had been a mere tool to conceal the weakness of my mother, and to build up the ruined fortunes of a profligate, cut me to the heart; and every angry feeling faded before the deep humiliation which bowed me to the earth.

"And am I then, indeed, wholly and utterly, the victim of my fortune!" I exclaimed, wringing my hands in despair; "was it not enough to find myself deceived in my every hope, without being forced to feel that I have been a dupe from my very cradle."

"Be rational, Lady Dornton," said Sir James, rousing himself with effort from a painful reverie into which he had fallen as he ceased speaking. "Since you became my wife, of what have you to complain? Have you not profited as fully by the illusion as you could have done by the reality? Have you had one indulgence the less? Has your vanity been the more ruffled, or your self-love the less respected? Look back upon your brief period of married life—what has been wanting which would have grown out of even the idolatry of a husband! Can you complain of the manner in which I have played my part? It is rather I who should complain of the life of struggle and seeming to which the caprice of your mother has condemned me. Let us be honest with each other. You had assuredly no right to calculate upon an undivided affection on my part, when you gave yourself to me with an old love clinging about your heart, which you scarcely cared either to conceal or to combat. I, feeling myself exonerated by the fact, did not persecute you upon the subject, but left time to do its work, assisted by that great ally, the world—and we are, consequently, beyond recrimination upon that point. Why then do you arrogate to yourself the right to accuse me?"

I could not command myself sufficiently to reply: the cold-blooded matter-of-fact reasoning of Sir James at such a moment maddened me.

"I see your agitation," he resumed; "and knowing as I do your utter want of self-command, I am by no means surprised at its violence. Calm yourself, however, if possible, and listen to me for a few moments longer. What I have to say deserves all your attention. This day will probably effect our actual separation; but let us, at least, preserve appearances: it is needless for us to offer ourselves as a spectacle to all London. You have an attachment of which the object is more than disagreeable to me; nevertheless, amuse yourself as you have hitherto done; I understand you too well to dread your injuring your own position for any created being. Nevertheless, be careful; for, if you are Cæsar's wife, remember that I am Cæsar; and I have no inclination to become the laughing-stock of my set."

"How, sir!" I exclaimed, starting to my feet, "do you, guilty as you are of my sister's death—fallen as you are beneath the contempt of all honest men—do *you* dare to threaten!" And exasperated by his calmness, yet still unable to give utterance to my feelings, I rushed out of my dressing-room, anxious only to rid myself of his presence, which had each moment become more insupportable to me.

Fortunately, he retained all his self-possession; and, alarmed at the idea of the scene to which I was about to expose both myself and him, he sprang after me, and caught me as I was about to escape into the gallery.

"Where are you going?" he asked sternly.

"Anywhere, so that I be not subjected to your presence," I said, as I struggled to loose myself from his grasp; but he held me fast.

"Well, then, madam, return to your dressing-room; I am about to leave it. But I beg that you will not expose yourself to the gossip of your servants in your present undignified state of passion, for your own sake. Have you yet to learn that, in such cases, your own hired domestics are more to be dreaded than all other persons? As for myself, I am careless of their comments; nay, they would afford me an admirable opportunity of visiting this scene upon Colonel Devereux—an emergency which, I imagine, you would on your side rather avoid than provoke. Give yourself the trouble to reflect, and remember that it is not always upon the husband that the world is apt to visit results like these."

Again I was compelled to submit. I felt that I was indeed, through my idle folly, at the mercy of a man whom I alike loathed and despised. I had no refuge in my mother, who would necessarily abandon my cause in order to excuse her own conduct; and, thus left to myself, I was altogether powerless. Profiting by my evident indecision, Dornton led me back to the door of my dressing-room, which I had no sooner reached than I closed it violently behind me, as though I sought to evade the pursuit of an assassin.

As I sank panting upon a sofa, I felt as though my reason would have given way beneath the struggle. The horror of my position rose bare and hopeless before me. The ties which attached me to my husband, and the authority which they gave him over my very thoughts, distracted me as I reflected on them. I had determined on a rupture; but I had been prepared to dictate its terms, and not to find myself thus bound hand and foot at his mercy. The species of menace which he had uttered, and which was merely conditional, still rang through my brain; for I remembered that he might, at any moment, and under any pretext, avail himself of it to complete my wretchedness.

Nevertheless, by some strange inconsistency, it was not fear that I felt; blinded by my indignation, I should have considered it a meanness to tremble or to yield, or even to control my actions in any way, at the bidding of a man whom I had saved from ruin, and whom I felt myself authorized to despise. Never had I been in so dangerous a state of mind. Every feeling was

in revolt. I ceased to envy even the quiet grave of my sister. I had vague visions of a vengeance as mighty as the wrongs of which I had been made the victim—wild, untangible, and aimless for the most part; but welcome, inasmuch as they tended to restore me to some degree of composure, and to people the void into which my first emotions had plunged me.

May those whose hair whitens, and whose necks bow beneath the hand of time, without having undergone such mental struggles as these, be merciful as they pronounce a judgment upon me!

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A DEEP sleep succeeded to this terrible agitation. I was wearied, body and spirit; and my waking was only productive of new projects of self-avenging. I found from Joséphine, whose expression of countenance betrayed that she was aware, at least in some degree, of the altercation which had taken place between my husband and myself, that immediately after leaving my chamber, Sir James had departed as usual for his club, although evidently ruffled; and that he had given orders to his valet not to await his return, as he should be absent all night. This decision was a great relief to me, and I immediately retired to bed, in order to have a pretext for dismissing my attendant.

What a night I passed! Visions of Adela, and of her wrongs, came blended with the miserable conviction of my own isolated and unhappy position. In the excited state of my feelings, I never dreamt of tracing the events of my life to any fault or error of my own. I regarded myself simply as a victim to the machinations of others; and as bound to visit upon my persecutors all the sufferings to which I had myself been subjected. I had the means of vengeance in my hands. It was true, that they might recoil upon my own head; but that reflection did not deter me. I was already ruined both in fact and in hope. A life of joyless wretchedness was before me. I could scarcely render my fate more bitter; while, on the other hand, I might enable myself to support it with less suffering. All that the world could offer of adulation, luxury, and indulgence was before me, and within my grasp. The void within my heart might be filled up. I must think no more of home enjoyments, and home ties; they were forever denied to me; but the alternative remained of creating new interests and new bonds without the pale of home.

My decision was irrevocably taken.

When I rose in the morning, my first care was to obliterate the withering effects of the last night's agitation, and to bestow unwonted care upon my appearance. I could not be seen in public so immediately after the death of my sister, but I could at least admit those of my friends who came to offer me their sympathy in my bereavement; and it is probable that Lady Madelaine had decided upon the same prudent and praiseworthy line of conduct, for I heard nothing of her throughout the day. One or two unimportant visits occupied the greater portion of the morning, when at length Colonel Devereux was announced in his turn; and, pleading fatigue, I desired that I might be denied to every one for the remainder of the day.

"I may then, indeed, hope that I still number you among my friends," I said, as I extended my hand, "since you come to me in the hour of grief."

"Did you do me the injustice to admit a doubt upon the subject?"

"I am afraid so. Many circumstances have occurred to shake my faith in your regard—but I will not dwell upon them now. A friend is too precious to me at this moment, for me to encourage such misgivings."

"Is it Lady Dornton who talks of needing friends?"

"It is, indeed, and heaven knows that few need them or would prize them more. You are, of course, aware that I have lost my sister?"

"I am; and I feel for you most deeply."

"You may do so. It has been a bitter blow to me in many ways. Do you also know the cause of her early and most unhappy death?"

"I fear, consumption," he replied anxiously, as he looked attentively at me; "Miss Tilden was naturally of a weak and nervous constitution; and probably sank under her self-constituted isolation from society."

"No, no; do not be disingenuous with me, Colonel Devereux," I interposed; "you have been too intimately connected with our family not to have learnt the truth; or, if you have indeed been blinded to the fact, be so no longer: my sister died of a broken heart."

"A broken heart!"

"Even so; and now do more justice both to me and to yourself. Your look and accent both betray you. You have nothing to hear from me save what you already know; unless, indeed, that I also am no longer ignorant of the great secret which has changed the whole current of my after-life."

"Lady Dornton, you alarm me."

"And yet you see that I am calm. I have a great work before me, Colonel Devereux. I am like a rudderless vessel, which, after having for a long period been borne among sunken rocks and hidden sands without becoming quite a wreck, is suddenly driven far into the open sea, without chart or compass—into a fearful, limitless, and unknown waste of waters,—to plough its way as it best can to some eagerly dreamt of but uncertain port. I can look back upon the perils which I have survived, but I know not how to direct my course through the vague. Nevertheless it must be done; I may perish in the attempt, but it shall be made."

"Your position is indeed a painful one."

"I know it, but I do not shrink. I am only about to exchange one species of suffering for another."

"You may be deceiving yourself as to the extent of the evil."

I smiled bitterly, as I put into his hands the papers which I had brought from Glenfillan. "Read these," I said, with the same unnatural calm; "read, and be convinced in how far I still retain the power to cheat myself."

Devereux shuddered as he ran his eye over the opening sentences.

'Is this, indeed, the writing of Miss Tilden?' he asked.

It is.—That is the legacy of a sister whom I would fain have loved—that is the dying bequest of Adela. Do you ask me now to doubt!"

"This is terrible!"

"Is it not? Is it not frightful to have incurred a hatred which lived even beyond the grave? And that too by an action to which I was compelled? Had it pleased fate to grant her wishes, I should have been spared the misery that has been visited upon me, and we might both have been happy. The tyranny of my mother, and the mean cowardice of Sir James Dornton had, however, decided otherwise; and it is still I who incur the penalty; it has been my destiny through life to be made at once the dupe and the victim of those about me, and I must be content to drain the bitter draught to the very dregs. Do as I will, I can secure neither affection nor friendship. I am alone in my own misery."

My firmness began to forsake me, and, despite all my efforts, I felt the scalding tears fall upon my cheeks. Devereux was leaning upon his arm, with his face concealed in his spread hand; and for a few minutes we both remained silent.

"It was most cruel," he said at length; "thus to destroy the illusions on which you had built up your happiness."

"My happiness!" I exclaimed reproachfully. "The only happiness that I have ever known has been based on hope—and that hope has never once been realized."

"But who could have been so imprudent as to give you this letter?" he asked, without appearing to have heard my last remark.

"A person who was unaware of its contents, and who believed that they were calculated rather to comfort than to agonize me. Listen to me, Devereux," I continued, observing that he had again sunk into silence; "you shall have all the details of this painful tragedy; and then tell me what hope remains for me in this life. I am very young—I have never wilfully caused pain or suffering to any being within the sphere of my influence. Where I have erred it has been through the prompting of others. Listen to me, for I have much to tell."

I then briefly recapitulated all the circumstances which had taken place from the moment of our summons to Glenfillan, to the outbreak of my husband on the preceding evening; only concealing the fact that his own name had been introduced into the reproaches of Sir James. As I told my tale, the words had frequently been smothered by my sobs, and I saw the tears of Devereux stream through his fingers. Amid all my misery I felt a thrill of joy as I detected this proof of sympathy. It was so long since any one had felt for me! He still remained in the same attitude with his head bowed down over the writing, but he had ceased to turn the leaves.

"Poor Adela!" I murmured, after awhile; "even she was not so wretched as I am, for she had, at least, some one to pity and to advise her."

"Your positions in life were different," he replied sadly; "many felt that they were free to pity the desolate and heart-stricken Miss Tilden, who could not presume to affect compassion for the gay, admired, and envied Lady Dornton."

"Does the world indeed envy such as I am?" I exclaimed impatiently. "Do you also consider me beyond the pale of sympathy and help?"

"I did so very lately; but now all is changed; and from my very heart I pity you."

As he ceased speaking he rose, and paced the room with hurried and agitated steps.

"You may, indeed," I said, wringing my hands; "I am beset on every side. There is no escape for me—none. Every illusion is dissipated; the truth is before me in all its hideous reality—I am unloved—abandoned by all who should have clung to me—by all that could have attached me to life—nor have I even the consolation of feeling that Dornton was the first to blight my happiness."

As these imprudent words escaped my lips, Devereux suddenly paused, and riveted his eyes upon me with an expression which went to my very heart. There was reproach in them, but it was a reproach so blent with happiness, that my own fell before them. I felt my indiscretion when it was too late.

"Lady Dornton—Eveleen," he murmured, as he approached me, and laid his hand upon my arm; "I beseech you to consider all the import of your words. Can it be me whom you would reproach? How, in what manner have I deserved this?"

"Leave me—leave me!" I gasped out; "I am distracted by my grief, and can no longer distinguish friends from foes."

"Not when I am beside you?" he asked deprecatingly; "and yet I too have struggled, I too have suffered; and do you believe, Eveleen, that you had no part in those struggles and in that suffering?"

I had sunk upon the sofa, and buried my face in my handkerchief, which he sought gently to remove.

"Only look at me," he continued tenderly; "only whisper to me that you do not think so harshly as you have led me to believe."

I was bewildered by agitation. The tones of his voice brought back upon me the early and happy period of our attachment. It was long since I had heard these tones; and now I trembled beneath them as though they had been fraught with bitterness.

"Leave me—leave me—" I again exclaimed; "I said I know not what—leave me, and forget it."

"Do not drive me away," he persisted in the same low gentle accents; "we have too long misunderstood each other, and I have also my tale of care to tell. Nay, do not withdraw your hand; are you not conversing with a friend—a brother—to whom you have just poured out the sorrows of your heart? Listen to me in your turn. What has passed within the last few moments has determined me to speak. It will be a trial to me to be frank, for I fear that I may chance to wound you by my sincerity, but you will at least learn to know me as I am; and you can then decide in how far I am worthy of your confidence.

"I imagine," he resumed with evident effort, after a pause which I had made no effort to break; "that you cannot have forgotten our

last interview at Rooksley, when I failed to induce you to pledge yourself to me definitely. Your terror and indecision betrayed only too plainly how little I could rely upon your firmness; and I left you with despair in my heart, for I felt that all hope was lost."

"Yet you might have made one more effort," I murmured involuntarily. Devereux shook his head sadly.

"Wherefore should I have done so? It would have served only to torture both yourself and me. Nor would letters have availed me, even had I ventured to risk them; for where my presence and my entreaties had alike failed, a colder medium of intercourse could have effected no favorable result. I learnt your departure from Rooksley and the sensation which you produced in town. Ere long rumors reached me of the assiduities of Sir James Dornton, of whose pecuniary involvements I was aware, as well as of his tact in influencing the mind of Lady Madelaine by his flatteries. Next came the news of your marriage, which had taken place before either your mother or your husband deemed it expedient to make it public; and I shall not attempt to tell you the feeling with which I learnt it. I believed at that moment that I might defy the future to inflict another pang as poignant; but I did not know the future. The human heart has a frightful elasticity in suffering—it expands to receive it, whatever may be the shape in which it present itself: and new faculties appear to be created for endurance. I learned this truth when I heard that you were on a bed of sickness, and probably of death.

"I believed, and I had a right to believe, that the compulsion under which you had acted, was the sole cause of the danger to which your life was exposed; nor can you picture to yourself how dear you were to me while that belief existed. How often did I not pray that you might submit more calmly to a fatal necessity, and so preserve an existence which was to me more precious than it had ever been, although I could no longer hope to ensure its happiness. And here, at least, Eveleen, my prayers were both heard and answered. I have never regretted that I uttered them; but I have since learnt to feel that the falsehood of those whom we have loved, is worse, far worse than death."

"Devereux!"

"You were forewarned of my intended frankness," he pursued; "nor do I fear but you will pardon it. I was, then, in this wretched frame of mind when I received a letter from Otterford, who, with the consent of your mother, invited me to Rooksley. Fearing, and yet anxious to see you, and thus judge by my own observation of the actual state of your feelings, I decided upon obeying the summons, although I was more than once on the point of declining the trial, for which I felt each hour less competent. I went, however,—I found you more beautiful than ever; and for awhile I pleased myself with the belief that you had not met me without emotion; but before the close of the evening I despised myself for my fatuity. Never had I seen you in such brilliant, such overpowering spirits. Never had I seen you so boldly challenge the admiration which no one appeared anxious to withhold. Your coldness to Dornton was so extreme that it wore the appearance of a mere heartless coquetry, unworthy of the woman whom I had so long worshiped in my inmost heart; and I resolved not to spend a second night under the roof that sheltered you. The morning still found me firm in that determination; for I had not slept throughout the night, Eveleen, I had not even striven to sleep. The altar upon which I had enshrined my idol was overthrown, and I mourned over the scattered remnants of my last illusion If I returned on the morrow it was only because your husband, who had decided upon not leaving me for an instant, alarmed me by his jests, and piqued my self-love by some of those trivial but comprehensive witticisms before which the firmest quail at times.

"I was not long in making the discovery that the passion of Dornton was merely acted; that you felt its hollowness; and that wounded pride would soon restore your heart to me; but the same self-esteem which had prevented my utterizg one reproach upon your infidelity, also taught me to reject so questionable a benefit. A woman for whom I had felt a mere passing passion would not, perhaps, have found me proof against such a temptation, but with you I scorned so poor a triumph. The renewal of your passion for me must be the mere result of the neglect of Dornton, or of your love for change: and these were not motives which could satisfy an affection like that which I had vowed to you.

"I have now confessed to you the true reasons of my estrangement; I will neither seek to excuse, nor to justify them; for however extraordinary or unnatural they may appear, they have sprung entirely from the one ruling principle of my life."

Never had I felt so utterly humbled as I was during the time that Devereux had been speaking. How contemptible a picture had he, as it involuntarily, drawn of myself! How had he turned back my thoughts upon all the inconsistencies and errors of the past! And, above all, how had he abstained from the bitterness and reproach which I had only too well merited. Nevertheless, I endeavored to justify myself; and forgetting my agitation in my anxiety to redeem myself in his good opinion, I undertook my exculpation with all the warmth which usually accompanies a bad cause; and attempted to found it upon all that I had suffered to redeem my promise to himself.

"Lady Dornton," he said gravely, as if pained by the weakness of my arguments; "I never believed that you had consented to make me miserable, without an effort to prevent it; but the more energy you had displayed to remain true to your first affection, the more inexplicable was the prompt adhesion of your heart to your new engagements. The little study which I had made of your sex, the reproaches which I had heard lavished upon it, and my own experience, would, at that moment, have led me to believe that women were incapable of firmness or fidelity, had not the unhappy fate of Miss Tilden convinced me that they can exert both where they really love."

Despite my freshly-awakened affection for Devereux, I resented the contras which he had drawn; and somewhat haughtily expatiated

upon the enforced duties which rendered all indulgence of my past attachment a crime, while I claimed for myself a virtue of which I knew little more than the name.

"You are not frank, Lady Dornton," said Devereux; "fine phrases may pass with the world, which contents itself with seeming, and rarely looks beneath the surface; but remember that I have loved you—have read your very heart—and understand all the intricacies of your character. Let us be sincere, at least to each other. Had duty prompted your actions, painful as might have been the experience, I should have respected the severity of your principles, and submitted without a murmur to the coldness which they induced: but I felt too much interest in their analysis to deceive myself. You loved Dornton for a time without caring to inquire too curiously the cause of your sudden passion. You ceased to love him, when he had piqued your pride by his neglect and egotism, with the same uncalculating facility; and once more your feelings welled back again toward your first affection by the mere strength of habit—"

"I will hear no more!" I exclaimed indignantly; "again I say, leave me, Colonel Devereux; I wasal ready sufficiently miserable; do not continue to add insult to my other wrongs.'

"Lady Dornton, you do me injustice—"

"Be it so; suffer me then to remain in my error. It was left for you to convince me that I had no longer a friend on earth. Be satisfied; you have performed your mission fully and unsparingly. And now, let us meet no more."

"Let us meet no more!" echoed Devereux in an accent of anguish; "Eveleen—in what a tone, with what a look do you pronounce the sentence."

"With a look and tone which best express my feeling, Colonel Devereux; with the decision that is induced by the indignities with which you have just overwhelmed me."

"And it is those very indignities which should have proved to you the extent, the exacting claims, the jealous scrutiny of my passion," he replied scornfully; "I have uttered harsh words, I know it; but there are still harsher thoughts within my breast—for my heart was full. It was impossible for me to give vent to my pent-up feelings without permitting their bitterness to overflow my lips; outraged affection is never gentle in its language—smooth phrases were made for hypocrites—truth cares not to round its periods—Eveleen! I have wounded you—you whom I would die to shield from even temporary suffering."

"Colonel Devereux, this inconsistency—"

"Is weak and contemptible—I know it; but am I to blame if my passion is stronger than my reason? Is it nothing, Eveleen, to inspire a love in which all other feelings and interests are either absorbed or stifled? Is it nothing to see a man who had vowed to forget—to detest—and to despise you—at your feet and at your mercy? Oh, Eveleen, if indeed you ever loved me, let me once more hear you make me the acknowledgment, and I shall almost cease to remember my past wretchedness."

"You forget that such words from my lips would now be sinful."

"And have I not sinned for you? Have I not cursed during the night-watches the authors of our disunion? Have I not encouraged a thousand impious hopes, a thousand evil wishes? And am I, even in this, to be the only victim?"

Devereux had flung himself at my feet, he grasped my hands: his very existence seemed to hang upon my reply. And he was the only man whom I had ever really loved. Upon his brow, and in his eyes, I read all the memory of the happy past, when hope was bright before me. I had believed him to be estranged; and there I saw him, more tender, more devoted, more enslaved than ever. I thought only of him. My mother, my husband, the whole world were forgotten.

"Herbert!" I murmured, as my tears fell upon the hands which grasped my own.

"Eveleen!" he whispered, as he bent his head yet lower, until his forehead rested upon them. "My own Eveleen, once lost, but found again!"

And then there was a deep unbroken silence; yet strange to say, as I sat there with my hands clasped in his, and his head bowed down upon my knees, I felt no sense of error; all was peace and calm; I was like a child which has wept the absence of a mother, and then sinks to rest upon her protecting bosom. I was, however, awakened to reflection by the first movement of my lover; as he at length raised his head, our eyes met, and I felt the scorching blush of shame spread over my brow and bosom.

"Rise!" I exclaimed hurriedly, in an accent of dismay; "rise, Devereux, if you really still respect me. This is no posture to assume before the wife of Sir James Dornton."

"It is precisely because I do respect you, Eveleen, that I do not obey," he replied resolutely; "not as the wife of Sir James Dornton, that invocation is idle—you are but his victim—but for your own sake. You have borne much from me to-day; be forbearing still. What can you fear from me? Have I not loved you from your very girlhood? Was I not the first to read in your young heart, and to awaken it to life? Were you not morally mine, before you were sacrificed to expediency and convenience? All that has since occurred has been the effect of chance; and we are no longer children to believe that the heart can be trammeled like the hand, and be bestowed at the bidding of another. Eveleen! only whisper once that I am still dear to you."

I could not; but I was equally unable to withstand the appealing eyes which were earnestly riveted upon me; and gently withdrawing my hands from the clasp in which they were still held, I parted the hair upon his brow, and bending down, I pressed my lips upon it for an instant. The effect of that unguarded action convinced me of the gravity of the fault which I had committed. Devereux sprang from the floor as if electrified. "I have not then lived in vain!" he exclaimed ardently; "Eveleen, you are still mine; and no power on earth shall again part us."

Terror and remorse restored me at once to composure and to prudence. "Devereux," I said beseechingly, "have pity upon me—upon

yourself—you have tried me beyond my strength, and you had not to learn to-day the weakness of my nature. I have no friend, no adviser on earth, if you forsake me—if you put me beyond the pale of your own sympathy. Consider my position—remember my youth—do not teach me to hate myself, and to fear even you." My head sank upon my bosom; and when he seated himself beside me, and clasped me to his breast in silence, I only wept, for I had lost the power to resist.

"Is this generous?" I at length sobbed out.

"Forgive me, Eveleen;" he said sadly: "forgive me. I should, indeed, have remembered all this. Forget the madness of a moment, and restore me to your confidence—to your friendship—to your heart. I am alone to blame—and yet—Eveleen—Eveleen—why have we thus been fated to one common misery?"

The hand upon which his head had drooped trembled beneath its burthen; his quivering lips were white, and his whole frame shook with emotion.

"I too am culpable," I murmured gaspingly: "I should not have forgotten what was due to myself, and to the name I bear."

As I spoke a fresh cause for anxiety awoke within me. Upon the arrival of Devereux I had pleaded fatigue as a pretext for shutting out all other visitors, and I saw with dismay, on chancing to cast my eyes upon the time-piece, that several hours had elapsed since his entrance. A dread of the effects of this imprudence turned me sick at heart: I directed his attention to the fact, but he treated my fears as chimerical, and strove to persuade me that it would pass unremarked. I was, however, so conscious that this hope was vain, and my agitation became in consequence so violent, that he was soon convinced of the inutility of his efforts: and at length he reluctantly consented to depart, in pity to my terror.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Devereux had scarcely left the house when Joséphine entered my room unbidden. It was the first time that she had ventured upon such an intrusion, and even agitated as I was, I should have rebuked her for the liberty which she was then taking, had she not at once addressed me in a tone of half-confidence, to communicate the fact that Sir James had returned home two hours previously, and had been about to proceed to my dressing-room, when, on seeing her in the antechamber, he had inquired if I were alone, to which she had replied by informing him that I was in my morning-room with Colonel Devereux.

"And what prevented Sir James from seeking me there?" I asked, as calmly as I was able.

"I cannot inform miladi; Sir James looked surprised, perhaps a little angry; then he walked towards miladi's room; and then he turned back to his own, telling me to let him know when Colonel Devereux left."

"And have you done so?"

Joséphine shook her head significantly: "I take no orders but from miladi, who might be fatigued and wish to rest a little after her long visit."

Alarmed alike by what I heard, and by what I saw, I desired that Sir James might be immediately informed that I was at my toilet, and would join him at the second dinner-bell; and then abandoning myself to the hands of Joséphine, I fell into a painful train of thought. Ah, my courage had departed with Devereux, and I trembled as I sat; the very looks and motions of my attendant inspired me with terror; she evidently suspected a mystery; and what could she suspect that was not calculated to degrade me in my own eyes?

Had I been actually, as well as morally guilty, it is probable that the very extremity of my situation would have inspired me with factitious courage, or have rendered me sufficiently callous to brave its results; but as it was, I shrank before every breath. I dreaded to meet the looks of the footmen during dinner, for how knew I of what comments I had been made the subject? I shuddered as I thought of my mother—of my coming *tête-à-tête* with my husband—but beyond all other suffering was the dread that I had forfeited all claim to the respect of Devereux.

There, indeed, the iron had entered into my heart! In the enthusiasm and emotion of the moment, alive only to his passion, he had been all tenderness—all adoration—but when the effervescence of feeling had once subsided, how would he look back upon that morning's interview? When my beauty was no longer present to delude him—my tears to unman him—would he not forget all, save my weak and culpable neglect of my duties as a woman and a wife! Had I not been sufficiently forewarned by the scorn with which I had heard him speak of those who had forfeited their position in society? and, although in the eyes of the world I had lost nothing of my purity, I was but too well aware how conscious he himself must be that I had sinned in heart. It is true that he had been alike to blame; but I had not now to learn the impunity of his sex in all that relates to passion. While he could crush me to the earth with his disdain, he could stand proudly erect, and defy my utmost efforts to bow his head even for an instant. How bitterly I felt at this moment, when the reflection came too late, the utter madness of the woman who thus volunteers her own tortures. How my spirit yearned to recall the past—and alas! how vainly. I fancied that when I had once more met him, I should be more calm; yet the thought of that meeting came over me like a death-pang. What had to him, perhaps, been the mere passing adventure of an hour, might be to me a lifelong memory of bitterness. He knew my weakness, and henceforward I was at his mercy.

After a time I began to search at least a partial remedy for the fatal imprudence of which I had been guilty. My heart still yearned toward him with irrepressible affection, but I resolved to stifle its every throb, in order to reinstate myself in his opinion. I determined to be prudent, jealous of every word and action, to avoid every occasion of being alone with him, to gird myself about with caution and reserve; in short, to prove to him that the error of an instant would exert no baneful influence over the future.

Full of this resolve, I descended to dinner

with more composure than I had hoped to exhibit. The second bell had rung, and there was barely time for me to receive and return the greeting of my husband before we seated ourselves at table.

Although the presence of the servants prevented all conversation, save those commonplace remarks and courtesies incident to the meal, I was at no loss to discover the preoccupation of Sir James. There was a mocking smile upon his lips which made me quiver; and his comments upon my loss of appetite added to the agitation which I struggled painfully to suppress. I had lost my vantage ground even with him.

At length the dinner ended; and contrary to his usual custom, Dornton left the table at the same time as myself. I was not prepared for this. The quiet hour upon which I had calculated to restore me to at least a semblance of composure, was thus denied to me, and I felt that I must at once bow my head beneath the coming avalanche.

"Are you aware, Lady Dornton," he abruptly asked, as the servants withdrew and closed the door behind them; "that I have been at home for several hours?"

"Joséphine informed me that such was the case," I replied in tones which I strove to render indifferent.

"And did she also tell you, may I inquire, that I was about to visit you on my return to the house?"

"I think that she did mention something of the kind, but said that you subsequently changed your mind."

"She doubtlessly added to her other information that I inquired whether you were alone?"

"She did, and I presumed that this novel observance was consequent upon our last conversation."

"By no means. I have sufficient knowledge of the world to be aware that the sudden apparition of a husband may be at times importunate."

"I am obliged to you for your consideration."

"I accept your thanks willingly, for upon this occasion I can have no doubt of their sincerity."

I made no reply.

"To-day, for instance," he pursued in the same accent of assumed deference; "I should have been extremely ill-advised to intrude upon a *tête-à-tête*. which, judging from its duration, must have been eminently interesting."

"You were perfectly free to act as you saw fit. The subject discussed by Colonel Devereux and myself was one to which you are no stranger."

"I understand, Lady Dornton; you were confiding to your early friend all the events which have occurred in the family. The arrangement does infinite credit to the respect which you evince toward those to whom you are bound by the ties of relationship and—duty."

"Your susceptibility is misplaced," I answered calmly; "Colonel Devereux was acquainted with the melancholy affair in all its details."

"Ha, indeed! his connection with the family is more intimate than I had hitherto believed. The subject must, in that case, have been skilfully anatomized during a discussion of upwards of three hours, but I readily enter into its several ramifications. The supposed wrongs of your sister naturally led, by an easy transition, to your own; and I had to be tried, condemned, and executed before you parted. Fortunately, Lady Dornton, I hold such a tribunal lightly; while I am rather inclined to fear that it may be attended with more serious results to yourself. Do you consider the proceeding of this morning calculated to insure you an increased degree of respect? Be assured that not even a French waiting-woman, mounting guard in your antechamber, can shut out curious eyes, or quiet slanderous tongues. There is not a lackey in the servants' hall who could not tell you to a second at what time Colonel Devereux was admitted, and at what time he left the house; and who will not consider himself at perfect liberty to draw his own inferences from such a visit."

"Inferences!" I exclaimed angrily; "and pray, Sir James, of what inferences will it admit?"

"The question is ingenuous! Do you imagine that I am myself the dupe of your having passed nearly four hours alone with Colonel Devereux in sighing over the moral suicide of a wrong-headed girl? And I believe that you have advanced no other pretext for this extraordinary privy council."

After my indignant exasperation of the previous evening, nothing could be more ill-judged than a tame concession at the present moment. The terms on which I had parted from my husband gave him, moreover, no right to expect consideration at my hands; but I was no longer conscience-clear; I was accused by my own heart, and my own reason; and, as a natural consequence, I gave way to a cowardice which prompted me to temporize. I therefore affected to be convinced by the reasoning of Dornton, and declared myself awakened to a conviction of my imprudence. I admitted my error without bitterness; but excused it upon the plea that Devereux was acquainted with the whole of my sister's unhappy story, and that I consequently felt I might, without indiscretion, talk of her to him without reserve.

"Perhaps," I said in conclusion, "I should have acted more prudently had I deferred this conversation for a time; but in the freshness of my grief, and confident in the innocence of my own motives, I have blindly subjected myself to miscon-truction."

"Blindly!" repeated Dornton, as he elevated his eyebrows ironically; "that is the version of the affair which you are pleased to offer to my acceptance; but you wrong yourself, nothing could be more clear-sighted. There are so few tears, be the sorrow what it may, which a lover's hand cannot wipe away."

"A lover, Sir James?"

"Yes, Lady Dornton; why should you startle at the truth? Do you, by this show of virtuous indignation, wish me to understand that Devereux listened to all your lamentations, without exacting any recompense for his patience? That would indeed be a new *rôle* for a young guardsman in the first harvest of his triumphs.

In short, I do not attempt to demand an explanation of your proceedings, but I beg you to be assured that I am, in no respect, your dupe."

The words of Dornton were like barbed arrows, which, without being mortal, nevertheless wounded me on every side; I could bear no more; I burst into an agony of tears.

"Are you not yet weary of overwhelming me with insult!" I asked bitterly, "have you nothing more to add which may prove equally offensive to my pride, and painful to my feelings!"

"I have this to add, Lady Dornton, that I request you to call to remembrance the wholesome advice which gave I you only yesterday; advice which you received in no very tranquil spirit, but which you have already shown to be by no means unnecessary. You have made so rapid a commencement in your career, that you would evidently go further than even I suspected, were you to remain unchecked; but, as I have no inclination to hear you quoted as one of those witless women who seem created only to afford a subject for the idle and the vicious, I forewarn you that I still retain the authority of a husband, and that I shall be by no means slow to use it."

As he ceased speaking he rang, and ordered his carriage; and then once more turning toward me, he said coldly:—

"I will now rid you of my presence, Lady Dornton. Two interviews of unmeasured duration in one day might prove too trying for your nerves. I was merely anxious that you should comprehend your true position; and we will waste no more words upon so ungracious a subject."

Then bowing sarcastically, he rose and left the room.

CHAPTER L.

I was no sooner alone, than my thoughts reverted to Devereux, and as I recalled my own words and actions of the morning, all my terror returned upon me. I was already suffering the bitter and humiliating penalty of my imprudence. The impertinence of Joséphine, which I dared not resent, and the taunts of my husband, which I could not refute, were the first fruits of my fault. As regarded Devereux himself, I felt the absolute necessity of immediately ascertaining my exact position. The few hours which had already elapsed since our meeting must have afforded time for reflection even to him; and I panted to be informed of its effect. The difficulty was how to accomplish this.

Even had I possessed a friend upon whose caution I could rely, it would have been impossible to admit a third person into such a confidence. Nothing, therefore, remained save another interview, or a written correspondence. The former alternative was too hazardous under present circumstances; and I consequently decided upon a letter. Having come to a determination on this point, I lost no time in putting it into execution; but, seating myself at once at my writing-table, prepared to pen the letter which was to decide my future conduct. The task was by no means either an easy or a pleasant one; for here again my conscience rose up in judgment against me, and held my ideas in check. The natural result ensued; my style and manner were alike constrained, and the very effort which I made to disguise the fact, gave an artificial and studied appearance to the communication. I had alike to excuse myself, and to conciliate Devereux—to admit my imprudence, and to make it appear a virtue in his eyes;—above all, it was necessary to convince him that my first error was to be my last; and to appeal to his honor and generosity to assist me in my resolve. I implored him henceforward to consider himself only as a friend—an esteemed and dear friend—who could never be more to me in this life; and I concluded by reminding him that I should estimate his respect and regard for me, in proportion to his obedience upon this point.

I was not altogether satisfied with myself as I closed the letter, but still it was sufficiently dignified to carry with it the aspect of sincerity which I was anxious it should bear. Devereux, I moreover reflected, must be aware of the agitated feelings under which it was written; and would therefore be more inclined to approve than to criticise my tardy endeavor to act prudently.

This done, I became more calm. His reply would necessary reveal to me the estimation in which he held alike my request and my reputation; and I endeavored to banish the subject from my mind until it arrived.

Another day had gone by without a word from my mother; but a hurried note from Lord Otterford had informed me that, his mournful duty performed, he had left Lady O'Halloran in safety under the roof of her son, and had himself returned to town. Adela, he said, had requested that an ample provision might be secured to Lady Flora for her life, an arrangement to which he felt convinced I should at once cheerfully accede; and the rather as from the fact of my sister having died in her minority, I had become sole heiress to my father's wealth, as well as the remainder of Lady Madelaine's jointure. He alluded also to the lease of Glenfillan, which was at my disposal; and where, he added, Lady Flora wished to reside, until I should see fit to give it another tenant.

All these details interested me but little. I replied briefly that I left everything in his hands and should be ready to subscribe to any arrangements which he might deem advisable. I had already suffered so bitterly from the possession of wealth, that its increase rather alarmed than gratified me. There was, moreover, something saddening in the conviction that all was, indeed now over with the unhappy Adela; she was no longer upon earth; they had laid her at the feet of her maternal grandfather, who little dreamed when he bartered his favorite child for gold how soon one of his victims would moulder within a foot of his own bier!

On the following day my mother made her appearance, clad in deep sables, but with little of the mourner in her look and manner. Her husband, on the contrary, was visibly depressed; the broken heart which he had just followed to the grave had probably reminded him of another, in which he had more share.

Her first inquiry was for Sir James, of whose movements I could give her no information. Her next related to the contents of the packet

of which Lady O'Halloran had informed Lord Otterford. "If it contained a will," she said coldly; "you are of course aware that it is a mere mockery, as your sister died a minor, and had consequently no control over her property; while any request which she may have made is in no way binding, as her whole career has proved her perfect inability to judge rightly upon any subject."

"Her letter made no mention whatever of money matters," I answered; "had it done so, I should at least have had the gratification of fulfilling her last wishes."

Lady Madelaine shrugged her shoulders, but could not entirely conceal her uneasiness. "It is at least satisfactory," she resumed, "that she did not leave the earth as thoroughly estranged from all her family as she had lived, since she favored you with so voluminous a confidence in dying."

"In one respect," I answered, as I struggled to suppress the agitation which was gaining upon me; "it is, indeed, satisfactory, for I at length know my actual position, to which I was before worse than blind. I am forewarned for the future."

"That Adela had bequeathed to you some sentimental folly which had not tended to render you more docile or more rational, has already been binted to me by your husband," said Lady Madelaine unguardedly.

"If you allude to a communication made by Sir James Dornton, madam," I interposed resolutely; "it is needless for me to enter into any further explanation, except that I no longer recognize that individual as my husband."

Lady Madelaine bounded upon her seat.

"My dear Eveleen," said Lord Otterford, affectionately taking my hand, "do nothing rashly. You know not—you cannot guess the trials and dangers to which so young a person as yourself must be exposed, should you be so unguarded as to make the misjudged confidence of your sister the subject of a rupture with Dornton. Should your after-life be as pure as heaven, it would, nevertheless, be embittered by a thousand pangs."

"I am so conscious of it, my lord, that I have already tacitly consented to the proposition of Sir James that we should mutually avoid all public scandal; more than that he did not see fit to exact; and he was wise, or I should probably have conceded nothing."

"You have acted prudently, Lady Dornton," observed my mother, with an expression which I could not mistake.

"Yet still it would be advisable," persisted Lord Otterford, "if this unfortunate affair could be forgiven and forgotten. You are very young, Eveleen, and should you maintain your present resolution, a long life of disquiet and disgust is before you. You can never feel the happiness of home, the delight of a full and free companionship with the man to whom you have given yourself."

"Say, rather, my lord, to whom I have been given."

"Remember, too," he pursued, affecting not to have heard my interpolation, "that Sir James is a man of fashion, courted and caressed wherever he appears. Are you wise thus to risk still greater trials?"

"Your meaning is a kind one, I am convinced," I said, composedly; "but Sir James Dornton is in every respect his own master, and need apprehend no interference from me. Whatever may tend to promote his absence from a home for which he is indebted to my fortune, and for which he has made so manly and honorable a return, I shall always hail with delight. Your fears are, however, I suspect, groundless; my most dangerous rival will be the dice-box; and, moreover, I love to believe that no man can at once forget the victim whom his own perfidy has destroyed."

The words had scarcely passed my lips ere I upbraided myself for their utterance. Their effect was painful; and the stab must have been the keener from the consciousness of the sufferer that the hand which dealt it knew where the wound would be vital. Lord Otterford was silenced. I had rewarded him cruelly for his well-meant interference; but, embittered as I was by my recent trials, I regarded him only as the tool of his wife, and was anxious to rid myself at once of a new opponent. I was confirmed in this belief by the silence in which Lady Madelaine had listened to our dialogue. She was evidently aware that her own power over me was shaken, and wished to try the effect of her husband's more conciliating arguments.

"You are, then, resolved to assume the heroine, Lady Dornton," she said, as she remarked that Lord Otterford had, incomprehensibly to her, withdrawn from the combat; "in another week you will be the laughing-stock of all London."

I smiled sarcastically.

"And if this prospect do not deter you," she pursued, with rising anger, "understand at once that I will never consent to a course of such egregious folly."

"The same bequest which exonerated me from all supposed duty to my husband freed me equally from all enforced obedience to your ladyship. The hand of Miss Tilden was bartered at your pleasure—bandied from duke to commoner—resumed, and again bestowed as it suited your convenience; but the dignity of Lady Dornton is beyond your reach—exempt from your control. I acknowledge no right of interference between myself and the man to whom you married me."

Lady Madelaine rose. A red spot had mounted to her cheek, and seemed to burn there. Her eyes flashed with anger. "Beware, Lady Dornton!" she exclaimed, as she turned to leave the room: "you are not sufficiently immaculate to take so high a stand without risking a fall."

As Lord Otterford prepared to follow her, I extended my hand, but he shrank back. "Forgive me!" I murmured pleadingly.

He glanced toward the door through which my mother had just disappeared, and then seizing my hand, he wrung it earnestly as he whispered, "I do—I do forgive you, though it was cruel, Eveleen, very cruel. Heaven help you, my poor girl; your lot is a bitter one." And in another moment he, too, was gone.

I was buried in a maze of gloomy thought when Joséphine once more suddenly stood before me, and extended towards me a salver

upon which lay a letter. My heart beat violently, and for an instant I felt unable to take it.

"I thought miladi would never be alone," said the soubrette, as I at length put forth my trembling hand. "More than an hour I have waited with this *maudite lettre*; and my lady is so *abattue* and *triste* in her mourning dress!"

"Joséphine," I asked, "from whom did you receive this letter?"

"Miladi must not be angry," said the Frenchwoman, with affected humility; "but I watched for the valet of *Monsieur le Colonel*, to bring it myself to miladi."

"And how knew you," I again inquired with difficulty, for my heart throbbed with such violence that it almost choked my words—"how could you know that Colonel Devereux was about to write?"

"Miladi forgets that she did not leave her letter upon the table *à son ordinaire*, but commanded me to see that it was delivered safe. I did as miladi bid me. I took it where it was sent, and then I waited for the answer, that it might come safely too."

I could find no fitting reply to so circumstantial a rejoinder, and therefore made a gesture that my too intelligent attendant should leave the room, which she did with the same affected caution as she had entered.

The letter was, indeed, from Devereux, and I trembled with impatience as I tore it open. It afforded the most perfect contrast to my own: brief, simple, sincere, and manly. He acquiesced alike in the prudence and the propriety of my decision, without excusing his own imprudence; he reminded me of our long friendship and mutual regard, which he declared, on his side, to be immutable; pitied us both for the sacrifices to which we were condemned, but of which he nevertheless admitted the necessity; and, finally, applauded and approved my courageous resolutions, pledging himself religiously to respect them.

This was truly what I had asked of him; but I am bound to confess that at that moment I felt that I had not expected so much. I was dissatisfied with his reply throughout. My pride was hurt that he should pity me as much as himself; my vanity was wounded that the extreme of prudence could tread so closely upon the extreme of passion; I was mortified, above all, that my heroism had not excited alike his wonder and his despair, and that I had no longer the triumph of combating his passion.

I was not worthy of the love of such a heart. He believed that he had wronged me, and he was now anxious to repair his fault, and to do justice to my virtues, while I was only lamenting over an obedience which should have made me appear more estimable in my own eyes, and asking myself whether, abandoned as I was by those who should have cherished me, so vast a sacrifice as I had thus volunteered could indeed be requisite.

Suddenly a new inspiration dawned upon me. The ready compliance of Devereux removed, at least for the present, all danger of interference from either my mother or Sir James. I would await only the close of my mourning to plunge freely into the world. I must inevitably meet him everywhere, but it would be in a crowd; he would understand and appreciate a thousand trifles which would pass unheeded by those around us; I should no longer feel desolate and unloved, for he would be near me—and that too without peril and without blame.

Meanwhile I rarely saw Sir James; and when we met it was with a cold and ceremonious politeness, which scarcely amounted to courtesy. I knew that he played high, and that his losses were occasionally serious; but for this I cared nothing; nor should I have bestowed the slightest attention on his altered habits, had he not, on the first occasion of my receiving company after my sister's death, absented himself from home, and thus given reason for those suspicions against which he had so strenuously urged me to guard myself. This circumstance induced me to watch him more narrowly; and I was not long in discovering that his character had totally changed. His gaiety was gone; his sparkling conversation had become abrupt, pointless, and constrained; he no longer even affected any deference for my tastes or wishes, and his whole manner was absent and preoccupied.

That some mystery was concealed beneath this change was evident; and, for the first time since I had been his wife, he succeeded in piquing my curiosity. I was not fated to endure it long.

The reappearance of a popular singer, after a long and dangerous indisposition, had attracted all the fashion of London to Drury Lane on a particular night; and, in accordance with the resolution that I had formed, I exerted myself to obtain a box, in which with considerable difficulty I succeeded. To my great delight, Lady Devereux visited me early in the day, in order that I might condole with her upon the increased gout of Sir Herbert, and her inability to witness the welcome prepared for Mrs. Billington, every box in the house having been taken for the last eight-and-forty hours. I instantly volunteered my own; and, affecting to have forgotten the indisposition of the baronet, I promised to reserve two seats for her use.

The delighted pleasure-hunter left me, perfectly relieved in mind; and I remarked with considerable satisfaction that she also, in the triumph of the moment, had overlooked the ailments of her lord, and must, consequently, confide herself to the protection of her son. Secure in his mother's presence, I was safe from all remark or animadversion, and I looked forward to the pageant of the evening with an anxiety which might have forewarned me that I was preparing for no common spectacle.

CHAPTER LI.

Lady Devereux was punctual, and I was received by herself and her son upon arriving at the theatre. Of course I was surprised and grieved to find that Sir Herbert was unable to venture upon this slight dissipation; but I nevertheless submitted to the substitution which had been made with very amiable philosophy. I was in brilliant spirits; my temporary retirement from the world had given pleasure a new zest, while it rendered me an object of interest to those who now for the first time hailed my reappearance. I felt that my box was an a

traction to the whole house; nor was Lady Devereux blind to the fact, but put forth all her waning fascinations to effect her own share in the triumph; while her son, half-hidden in shadow behind my chair, was almost invisible to the audience.

I had returned the greeting gestures of my dear five hundred friends, and was quietly making a circuit of the house with my *lorgnette*, when the door of the private box which immediately faced my own was flung back, and a handsome woman, about ten years my senior, showily and not altogether correctly dressed, entered, and leaned for a moment into the broad light of the chandelier, while a pair of bold but magnificent black eyes wandered over the audience. She wore no powder; neither had she polluted her cheeks by the coat of rouge which was at that period considered almost indispensable to female beauty; but masses of raven curls fell upon the ample shoulders which would otherwise have been bare, and the glow of conscious triumph lent a bloom to her cheek and a fire to her glance. A mantle of black velvet edged with ermine had fallen from her neck as she entered, and was only upheld by the whitest and most finely-modeled arms that I ever remembered to have seen. There was, in short, an originality in her beauty which enforced admiration, even while its audacity blended the homage with a feeling for which it was difficult to account.

I was gazing, with this vague sensation, upon the proud woman before me, and was inquiring her identity of Colonel Devereux, when a movement took place in her box; and, as she stepped a pace back, a second female appeared for an instant, and then dropped quietly into a chair, with her back to the stage; and while she was in the act of doing this, a hand withdrew the mantle from the grasp of her companion, and, raising my glass once more to my eye, I discovered in the attentive cavalier Sir James Dornton.

"That," said Devereux, replying to the question which I had already put, "is the celebrated Mrs. Delamaine, who, after her divorce, went over to Italy, whence she only returned a month or two ago, having become as noted at Florence and Milan as she had previously been in London."

"And where is her husband?" I asked, still gazing attentively upon her box.

"Not where yours is, my dear Eveleen," laughed Lady Devereux; "for as I live, *il fait les yeux doux* to this fallen goddess."

"So I perceive, and compliment him alike upon his taste and his propriety; but where is her own?"

"In his grave," whispered Devereux; "he could not brook the disgrace which she incessantly brought upon him, and found his refuge in a pistol."

"The woman is, then, a fiend!" I exclaimed indignantly.

Devereux sighed audibly.

Thenceforth the stage and the audience lost all their interest for me. I felt that the enigma which had lately bewildered me was solved: Dornton was in the snare of the syren. For the abstract fact I cared nothing; but no married woman can coolly look upon so public a demonstration of neglect without mortification. That he had not anticipated my presence in the house was probable; but it was still more certain that he had taken no pains to avoid so disagreeable and disgraceful an encounter.

"Am I not justified?" I asked, in a low voice, as I turned towards Devereux.

He frowned, turned pale, and made no reply.

Suddenly the eyes of Mrs. Delamaine rested upon me; and, with a smile, she addressed some remark to the pale and spirit-broken-looking woman who sat beside her. There was a condescending expression of admiration in her gaze which brought the proud blood to my cheek; never had I felt so indignant. As my heart throbbed beneath her glance, she turned her head and addressed Dornton, who had hitherto remained in the back of the box, but who bent forward evidently at her bidding, and started as he encountered my glance. For a moment he appeared irresolute, but only for a moment; and then I saw the obedient confidant rise from her seat and resign it to Sir James, who had, apparently, resolved to brave the difficulty in which he found himself. Not one of his movements escaped me. I could explain them all. From the expression of Mrs. Delamaine, I felt assured that he had announced me as his wife—*his* wife! And then there were more questions and more rejoinders. There was a mocking smile upon the lip of Dornton, and a glow of gratified vanity upon the cheek of his companion, who occasionally glanced curiously toward me, as if to reconcile what she heard with what she saw. My position was a trying one: totally indifferent as I was to Sir James, and careless of the depreciating comparisons which he might see fit to make between an outraged wife and a new mistress, still I had heard enough to feel that he had placed himself in the power of a very dangerous woman. They were evidently upon terms of the closest intimacy, and I began to ask myself how long that intimacy had existed. Devereux was, or affected to be, as ignorant upon the subject as myself; and I was still endeavoring to calculate its duration by circumstances, when my attention was attracted by voices in the next box to my own, which had remained empty until a few minutes previously, and from which a fashionably-dressed man was now sweeping the boxes with his *lorgnette*.

"I see the handsome Delamaine is in full force," he observed, as he seated himself upon a chair which was only divided from my own by the thin partition, and the folds of the curtain, which he had carelessly pressed back with his elbow.

"Yes, and I see also that she has brought down her bird," answered a second voice, equally careless of being overheard; "I thought that Dornton was likely to be the next on the list, when I met them at Ranelagh; but although he has almost lived in her house for the last three weeks, I did not quite expect to find the affair advertised so soon in public."

Devereux was about to speak, but I motioned him to silence; and, like myself, he became all ear.

"It was a mystery known to half London which was not worth any farther affectation," retorted the first speaker; "moreover, no one

now asks of the Delamaine, how is it? but simply, who is it?"

A faint sickness crept over me. It was, then, for such a fallen woman as this that insult had been heaped upon me. I know not to what lengths my indignation would have carried me, had I not at that very moment felt the hand of Devereux stealing gently to my waist. My head drooped, and a painful feeling of humiliation rendered me once more passive.

"Dornton is a blockhead," resumed the second stranger: "he no sooner cajoles an old flirt into giving him her daughter and some ninety thousand pounds, than he begins to play the Lothario. They say that the girl never loved him, and that, handsome as she was, he returned the compliment; still, there was some consideration due to the woman who paid his debts and patched up his lost credit; but it is always the case with fellows on the wane: they can never amuse themselves quietly, but must always have a crowd to look on."

The attention of the strangers was now attracted to some other group, and I heard no more of the subject in which I was interested; but I had heard enough; and, coldly withdrawing myself from the clasp of Devereux, I requested him to ascertain if my carriage were in waiting, as I was anxious to return home. Lady Devereux, who had also seen, and been seen, as much as she considered necessary, declared her intention of following my example, to the evident discomfiture of her son, who accordingly quitted the box in quest of our servants.

"Do you know, Eveleen," said my companion, as he left us together, "that the conduct of Sir James to-night is quite too bad. If Sir Herbert had ever *affiché* himself in such a way when we were young people, I should have been furious; and there you sit as calmly as though he had never entered the house."

"You probably loved Sir Herbert, my good friend, and I am totally indifferent to Sir James," I said, forcing a smile, "and there you at once discover the secret of my composure."

"But consider the imprudence into which such a *liaison* may betray him. Women of that stamp are expensive toys."

"Not more so than the gaming table."

"Oh, you are, then, aware of Dornton's failure in that respect. I am sure I warned your mother a hundred times of the risk she ran in making you the wife of such a man."

"He was her alternative for Mr. Curties."

"Mr. Curties!" echoed Lady Devereux; "she had no opportunity of choosing between them. Had you been the Medicean Venus in petticoats, you would have made no impression upon that block of living marble."

"Yet I was led to believe—"

"My dear Lady Dornton," said my companion, in the same tone in which she would have lamented the naughtiness of a spoiled child, "all your life you have been so easily led to believe anything."

Any reply was rendered impossible by the reappearance of our cavalier, who announced that the carriages were drawn up. With a prudence, partly suggested by the presence of Sir James, and no doubt increased by my own coldness, Devereux carefully enveloped his mother in her wraps, leaving me to adjust my own shawl; after which he tendered an arm to each, and we left the house. As I resolutely declined his escort, he put me into my carriage, and then handing his mother into hers, he made a low and somewhat constrained bow, and returned to the theatre.

I arrived at home perfectly satisfied with myself, but still marveling what would be the effect of my repelling manner upon Devereux. The sight of the bold beauty of Mrs. Delamaine, and the light tone in which she had been spoken of, had struck to my heart like a solemn warning; and had the impression lasted, it is probable that I should have been a wiser and a better woman; as it was, this impression was weakened by the feeling of self-justification induced by the public off-falling of my husband.

I was still in my dressing-room on the following morning, when, to my astonishment, Dornton made his appearance. He had assumed an expression of unusual amiability, through which I could, nevertheless, detect a tinge of embarrassment that he struggled vainly to conceal.

"You took me by surprise last evening, Lady Dornton," he said, as he threw himself into a chair; "I did not know that you had determined altogether to emerge from your seclusion; and, when I discovered you—acting upon the principle which I announced some time ago—I forebore all intrusion. What did you think of the beautiful woman whom I had the honor to escort?"

"That you were quite worthy of the honor which had devolved upon you."

Sir James bit his lip, and was visibly disconcerted.

"She is, indeed, a charming person," he said after a moment, "and would make a delightful addition to your circle."

"To *my* circle, Sir James! If you are in facetious mood, I entreat that you will select more seemly subject for your wit."

"I am perfectly serious; I see no jest in the suggestion I have made."

"It is, then, intended as an insult?"

"Really, Lady Dornton, you are inexplicable. Can it be, that, in your character of a pretty woman, you are jealous of her attractions? Such a suspicion would be degrading to you, and utterly contemptible."

"Your affected ignorance does not impose upon me for an instant, sir," I said, haughtily; "you must be perfectly aware of the cause which prevents any recognition of the person to whom you allude from me; or, should you indeed, be unconscious of the character of your new friend, permit me to enlighten you."

"I have no taste for women's gossipry, and defy you to prove anything against Mrs. Delamaine."

"The defiance is amusing," I retorted contemptuously; "a divorced wife, the widow of a suicide, and the mistress of—"

"Proceed, Lady Dornton."

"Of a gambler."

The blood flashed in a crimson tide over the forehead of Sir James. I was evidently better informed than he anticipated.

"You are, as usual, the dupe of some one who profits by your weakness," he said, striving to rally; "Mrs. Delamaine is amiable,

timable, and accomplished. She would grace any circle which could secure her."

"You allude, doubtless, to the circles of the lobbies and the gaming-houses."

This was the spark which ignited the fire that was raging in the bosom of Dornton. He, hitherto the most immovable, the most self-possessed of men, became the most violent under the influence of the new and overwhelming passion of which he was the victim. His utterance was passionate and bitter. Not a trait of my past life escaped him which could be tortured into invective. I was not slow in paying back the injury. I reproached him with his meanness, his falsehood, his ignoble submission to the will of an imperious woman; the ruinous effects of his vices; the waste which he had made in a fortune which he could not call his own. He staggered under my vehemence, and uttered, in a tone of bitterness, the name of Devereux. I defied him to prove his accusation. He forbade me to see him again; I defied him in the same tone; and, overcome at length by the storm which he had himself provoked, he sprang from his seat and left the room.

I felt that once more I had conquered; but it was a painful triumph, for I had achieved it at the expense of that dignity which I had hitherto maintained. My whole spirit was up in arms: I felt degraded, but not disheartened. A resolute defiance blinded me to my own defects, and kept those of Sir James constantly before me; and in this frame of mind I descended to the drawing-room.

My first visitor was Devereux. He came, as he alleged, at the desire of his mother, who was anxious to ascertain that I had reached home in safety; and then he apologized for an intrusion which, he asserted, from my manner on the preceding evening, he felt to be almost inexcusable.

"Had you not forgotten our compact?" I asked reproachfully, as a deep blush mounted to my brow.

"I throw myself on your mercy. I was not aware that your exaction was so extreme."

"We will talk no more of it," I said, hurriedly. "I hastened home as an escape from a new and serious annoyance; but it was not so easily to be evaded. Sir James has declared himself the friend and champion, if not something more than this, of Mrs. Delamaine—of the Cleopatra of last night. I have already experienced the bitter fruits of this new indignity. He has been with me this morning to suggest that I should receive her as a friend. What is your opinion of this proposal?"

"That it was disgraceful on the part of Lady Dornton's husband. And what did you reply?"

"All that was befitting, without attempting to disguise the contempt which I felt alike for him and for his *protégée*."

"Your refusal was correct and necessary; your contempt would have been better suppressed. It is dangerous to provoke the hatred of the vicious. I do not believe that Dornton himself is radically wicked; but he is very weak, which frequently produces the same results."

I had expected that Devereux would have shared my exasperation, and exhausted himself in invective against my tormentors; and I was, consequently, quite unprepared for this rebuke. So much composure, contrasted with my own violence, appeared to me to be misplaced, and in every point of view a proof of his indifference. I was not without a consciousness that no married woman can, with safety to her own peace and honor, make a confident of any young male friend, let the extent of their intimacy be what it may; and I was, accordingly, the more moved by this apparent want of interest in my anxieties, that I had wilfully rushed into a peril which had produced such inadequate results.

I reproached Devereux for his want of sympathy.

"You do not act fairly with me, Lady Dornton," he said, in a subdued tone; "last night you crushed me with your displeasure for a simple change of position, and to-day you accuse me of coldness because I restrain my feelings, and compel myself to assume a composure which would but too readily give way before very different emotions."

"Perhaps I am wrong," I replied, as I turned toward him with a smile which expressed the conviction of my own error more fully than my words; "I will even try to believe so; but you must at least admit, on your side, that you are strangely inconsistent in your friendship. You bring the stoical philosophy of Cato to the hearth-rug of the drawing-room, and exhibit it at all times and seasons. Nothing destroys your equanimity—at least, nothing that one would voluntarily provoke—and you give advice where you are only asked for sympathy."

"You know how deeply, how earnestly I feel for you."

"I would not willingly doubt it; but still, in your present mood, I have a suspicion that you would subscribe, without opposition, to the command which I have received to close my doors against you."

"Decidedly, if by so doing I could secure your happiness. But who has suggested such a proceeding?"

"That, I should imagine, is a riddle by no means difficult to read; but I indignantly repulsed a mandate which I should have felt degraded by admitting."

"The arrangement would have been as absurd as it was ill-judged," replied Devereux, still in the same quiet accent; "as, in order to prevent our meeting, you must have discontinued to visit your own mother and to appear in the world. Nevertheless, as I would not willingly compromise you even for an instant, I shall, thus warned, confine my appearance in your own house to those distant and necessary courtesies which are incumbent on me as a family connection."

"I was prepared for this decision," I exclaimed bitterly; "nothing costs you any effort, and you do not give yourself the trouble to reflect upon the probable consequences of a sudden neglect, which cannot fail to be remarked by those about me. But it will, perhaps, be better so: totally abandoned to the violence and ill-will of Dornton, he will have less trouble in ultimately ridding himself of his victim; for I feel that, alone and unsupported, I shall not

ong have strength to contend against the trials to which I am exposed."

"Lady Dornton, do you accuse *me* of want of reflection? Were my feeling toward you other than it is, I should not venture to remind you of the danger of wilfully exciting the animosity of those by whom you may be seriously injured. Let the thunder-cloud which you have invoked pass by."

"You use strong expressions on a very inconsequent occasion," I retorted, peevishly, "and appear to look upon everything through a gloomy medium. I was, perhaps, myself startled by the outbreak of Dornton at the moment; but the reflection of an instant, for which I am indebted to your want of sympathy in my trials, has sufficed to reassure me. Sir James is weak—you have yourself admitted this fact; he dreads a public rupture, and he is ruled by my mother. His lofty words can produce no fruit. He is too exquisite an egotist to drive to extremity the woman to whom he owes his ease."

"But suppose, fair casuist, that Lady Madelaine should not support you in your opposition, how could you assist yourself without her aid?"

"Oh, pray do not let us amuse ourselves by supposing improbabilities. Act as you see fitting. I can make no claim upon either your sympathy or your assistance; and you shall yet learn that I am possessed of sufficient firmness to resent the insult which I have received from the man whose name I bear."

I was disposed to quarrel even with Devereux, because he had exhibited more respect for me than I was prepared to exact. It had been my misfortune through life to preärrange all the actions of others in connection with myself, and the consequent result was perpetual disappointment. I was even yet too ignorant of human nature—thanks to my self-confidence, which admitted no lessons save those which struck right to the heart, and left their scars behind them—too unsuspicious of its subtlety, to suspect that the coldness of which I had condescended to complain was the result of a delicate tact on the part of my companion, who, believing himself sure of his victory, preferred the smooth diplomacy of a Talleyrand to the less temporizing prowess of an Alexander. Devereux was a man of feeling and refinement, who sought rather to win me from myself than to surprise me into a weakness; and he, unfortunately, knew enough of my natural temper and disposition to consider time and caution as his best allies.

It need scarcely be stated that, when he left the house, I felt thoroughly dissatisfied both with him and myself. I had conceded too much, and he too little. I had wounded my own pride, and he had trampled upon it as it lay prostrate before him. I had now only one resource. My home had become a desert, my mother a stranger, my husband an enemy, Devereux a censor, and I stood alone. There was, however, stretching along between the dark and yawning gulfs which had swallowed up my past and my future hopes, one narrow pathway strewn with flowers and radiant with sunshine. The world was still before me! I could revenge myself on destiny.

CHAPTER LII.

My toilet on the evening of that day was more *recherchée* than ever; my rouge more glowing, and my eyes more bright. I went alone to the Opera-house; and my box was filled in succession by all the gay and idle men of fashion who had the *entrée*. Never had I been so gracious to the one sex, or so sarcastic on the subject of the other; and before the conclusion of the ballet, I found that to the reputation of a beauty, I had added that of a wit. My success was complete. I had divided the attention of the house with Grassini and Tramezzani. I was intoxicated alike by the praises of the men, and the affected disdain of the women; and in this mood of mind, I drove from the Haymarket to the ombre and basso party of a young and lively foreign ambassadress; where, without having suffered myself to waste one moment on reflection, I discovered as I reached home that I had emulated Sir James himself at the gaming-table; made myself a subject of general remark; and created more than one enemy. But as this did not, in my present mood of mind, affect me for a moment, I entered the house humming an aria of Grassini, to which I ought to have given my attention while she was singing it; and on reaching my dressing-room perceived for the first time the absence of Joséphine, for whom I rang somewhat impatiently. My summons was answered by an attendant who had been accustomed to assist her in her duties, and who presented herself upon the threshold somewhat timidly.

"What means this?" I asked imperiously; "where is Joséphine?"

"Mademoiselle Joséphine was dismissed by Sir James, my lady, soon after your ladyship left the house; and I was ordered to await your ladyship's return, and to perform her duties."

"In that case," I said coldly; "you may at once retire to rest, as I am not accustomed to accept the services of strangers about my person."

The woman withdrew; and, taking one of the lights from my toilet-table, I walked at once to the dressing-room of Sir James; resolved to demand an explanation of the extraordinary step which he had taken. So gratuitous an interference with my personal establishment was an impertinence on his part which to me appeared the heaping of "Pelion on Ossa"—the culminating point of injury. I could not disguise from myself that it was intended as a trial of strength; and this conviction determined me to resent the insult.

The surprise of Dornton, on entering his apartment at daybreak, may be imagined, to see me, still covered with jewels and draped in satin, occupying a fauteuil beside the hearth; especially when he remembered our present estrangement. I however left him no time to comment upon the singularity of the circumstance.

"I am here, Sir James," I said haughtily, "to inquire by what right you have dismissed my waiting-woman?"

"You are easily answered, Lady Dornton; by the right of a husband who will not suffer under his roof the agent of his wife's intrigues—the confidant of his wife's disgrace."

"Explain yourself, sir."

"Joséphine was your letter-carrier. Do you require any further detail?"

"Sir James Dornton, I will no longer submit to this tyranny,—to this dictation. I am at length determined to assert myself."

"We have, in that case, formed a mutual resolution; for, conscious that my supineness and indulgence have already produced an ill effect both upon your feeling and your conduct, I will henceforward compel you to respect both yourself and me; and to yield implicit obedience to my will, be it what it may."

The harshness and assumption of this reply produced a very different effect upon me from what he had evidently anticipated. I answered in as high a key, and our dissension became even more violent than that of the previous evening. We had no longer any terms to keep with each other. To the name of Devereux I responded by that of Mrs. Delamaine; to his taunts of my general levity, I opposed his own extraordinary influence with my mother; and was even so far misled by my passion as to hint that, in all probability, it was a mystery which would not safely admit of solution.

"You are a disgrace to your sex," thundered out Sir James, as he retreated a few paces; "leave the room, madam; and deliver me from the presence of a woman for whom nothing is sacred."

"I go, because I am anxious to retire to rest," I said with a contemptuous smile; "and I leave you to your dreams of the past; for in your projects for the future you have sadly deceived yourself."

"Time will show," was his reply, as he abruptly turned his back on me, and rang for his valet.

I was now in open rebellion; and, strange to say, I felt happier than I had done for months. I no longer hesitated to display my preference for Devereux wherever we met in society; while at the same time I indulged in a general system of coquetry, which at length compelled my mother to interfere. It will easily be understood, however, in what spirit I received her reprimand. I talked of the past; and inquired if I had ever committed myself with Colonel Devereux, as she had, during my father's lifetime, compromised her own dignity with the man to whom she had subsequently married her daughter, and afterward with her present husband.

"Believe me, madam," I concluded sarcastically: "the reproof falls pointless from your lips; for our fate has been more similar in life, as well as our actions, than you appear willing to comprehend. Your noble father married you to a commoner in order to secure his wealth: my noble mother married me to a *roué*, in order to secure his—friendship: my husband rendered himself conspicuous by breaking the heart of my own sister—while yours—"

"Speak, Lady Dornton," almost shrieked my mother, wounded in her tenderest point—her vanity; "speak! what is it that you dare to insinuate?"

"I insinuate nothing," I replied, triumphant at the effect which I had produced, and forgetful of all, save the gratification of the moment; and, most and worst, of the kindly feeling which Lord Otterford had invariably exhibited toward me; "I insinuate nothing; but merely advise you to inquire of *your* husband, the exact nature of the consumption which laid poor Emily Vernon in a foreign grave."

"Eveleen, you are a fiend!" gasped out Lady Madelaine, with clasped hands, and quivering lips.

"I am what you have made me. One of your victims has already paid the penalty of her parentage; but the other is before you, prepared to contend rather than to suffer."

"Only tell me that you have spoken at random, and that there was no covert meaning your words!"

"I have no more to say upon the subject."

"But, Lady Dornton, I insist—"

"Uselessly, madam; and as it is now time that I should dress for court, you must pardon me for leaving you, should you desire to prolong your visit," and courtesying ceremoniously I left the room.

Strangely, pitiably, had my feelings become perverted. The knowledge that I had revenged my wrongs upon my mother gave me an energy, which made me dazzling. I felt no weariness during the period of my toilet, tedious as it was, for my thoughts were fully occupied; and when I fell into the rank to proceed to St. James's, I had never been more satisfied with myself, for I had found in my dressing-room a magnificent bouquet of exotics, about which my new attendant affected to know nothing, while she was aware that her silence told me all.

As the carriages moved slowly onward, I pressed the gorgeous flowers to my lips more than once; and when I at length arrived at the Palace, I found myself surrounded by adulation and flattery; my spirits rose still higher, and I scarcely heeded the shrugs and sneers which I occasionally detected in the courtly crowd. I had accepted the arm of Colonel Devereux upon the staircase, and my first care was to thank him for his elegant and well-timed present. He merely smiled his reply, and pressed my arm more closely against his side. But in the throne-room my triumphs ceased. The queen looked coldly upon me; and the princesses affected to be discoursing, and not to be conscious of my approach. From the princes I received my usual greeting, but I felt that my popularity at the palace was at an end.

"*Tu es échouée, ma chère!*" said my friend the ambassadress, when we again met in the crowd. She might have spared me the assurance, for I knew it.

I murmured my indignation to Devereux, but he only chid me for my weakness, in regarding as an affront the caprice of a straight-laced old lady, while he reminded me of the admiration which I had elicited from the Prince of Wales; and I was obliged to accept this as compensation, and affect to laugh at my own sensitive folly. The blow had been struck, however; but instead of inducing me to redeem the past, it only fortified me in the belief that I must make myself independent of the world, as I had already done of all home ties; that I must, in short, rely upon my own strength, and demonstrate to the utmost how entirely I had been misjudged. Colonel Devereux did not put me into my carriage until he had arranged to join me at the Opera: and I arrived at home at an unusually late hour, the drawing-room having been a full one.

When I drove to the door, I was surprised to

see the carriage of Dornton, with four post-horses, move a few paces forward to allow of my approach; but as I cared little for his personal arrangements, I made no inquiry as to the cause of its appearance there, and at once proceeded to my room. No doubt, he was, like myself, wearied of the constant conflicts which now characterized our domestic *têtes-à-têtes*, and was about to vary the scene by a visit to some distant friend, perhaps to escort Mrs. Delamaine to the coast. Be it as it might, I only congratulated myself on his approaching absence; and heartily wished him a long and prosperous journey.

Nothing could be either more specious or more probable than these conjectures; and assuredly, nothing was ever more opposite to the truth.

At the door of my anteroom I found the valet of Sir James, who requested me to pass in the first place into the library, where his master was awaiting my return. I was annoyed at this, for I was in no humor to encounter him at that moment; and as I slowly advanced in the direction indicated, I sought for an instant some sufficient pretext for refusing the interview.

"Tell Sir James," I said, just as I reached the door, "that I am overcome with fatigue, and will receive him to-morrow morning in my dressing-room."

As I ceased speaking, I turned upon my heel, and was just congratulating myself upon my escape, when the door opened, and Sir James appeared upon the threshold.

"You have returned late," he said, as he held it open for me to pass: "the horses have been put-to more than an hour."

"And what can there be in common," I asked, as I advanced rapidly into the room, in order that his servant might not be a party in the discussion; "between your post-horses and my return?"

"Do you not guess, madam? You are now sufficiently compromised to leave town, I should imagine, without regret; but, be it as it may, you must leave it, and that instantly. Common propriety exacts it, your mother insists upon it, and I will have it done."

"Do you mean to assert that my mother is cognisant of this tyranny, and that she ventures to authorize it? I will not be so imposed upon. My sister is as yet scarcely cold in her grave, and she cannot so soon have forgotten that deathbed."

"You do both your mother and myself less than justice, Lady Dornton; while your exaggerations are absurd and ill-placed. Your life is in perfect safety—would that your reputation were equally secure. But, madam, you are incapable of self-government; and must not be abandoned to your own imprudent, not to say vicious, tendencies. Far from seeking to revenge upon you the insults to which we have both been subjected by your intemperate inferences, we are anxious to secure to you an opportunity of redeeming the past. I shall accompany you to the country, where you will have leisure to reflect, to become rational, and to acquire certain qualities and virtues in which you are at present most unhappily deficient."

"I will appeal to Lord Otterford," I exclaimed with vehemence; "he will never sanction such unheard-of violence."

"Lord Otterford!" echoed Dornton in a tone of pained reproach; "have you indeed the pretension to seek a champion in the man whom you have so deeply injured? In your victim of this morning?"

The blood curdled at my heart. Bitterly did I at that moment repent my treachery, but it was too late. I felt that I had indeed no longer a right to claim his support or kindness.

"Make no resistance," pursued Sir James coldly; "for it will be useless. Even the world will no longer uphold you, for that world has seen you slighted where all seek to please; and I will have no more public jests at my expense."

My mental reaction was frightful. I could scarcely comprehend my own identity. Ten hours before I had been occupied only by dreams of triumph and of pleasure; idolized by the world, by the man I loved, by the gay flutterers about me; rich in the world's gifts of wealth, and youth, and fashion, I could have defied fate to overthrow the trophies of my vanity; but in an instant all these gorgeous visions had disappeared, and I saw before me only a compelled and comfortless exile: cheerless isolation, and endless humiliations. I shrank from the hateful prospect: but all my firmness was gone. I uttered one long piercing scream, and fainted.

Dornton rang for my attendants, even assisted in removing my jewels and head-dress, and then, when I had partially recovered from the swoon, offered me his arm to reach my own room. My first impulse was to refuse his support, but as I found myself too weak to dispense with assistance, I was compelled to accept the courtesy. No word was exchanged between us until we reached the door, when he said as calmly as though we had been about to spend the evening in the adjoining street:

"In an hour precisely, Lady Dornton, I will again be here to conduct you to the carriage. Your woman has, I believe, made all the necessary arrangements; and you have only to rest yourself, and endeavor to regain your strength."

I made no reply, for I was stricken to the very earth. I found, as he had stated, my drawers and wardrobes empty; and was informed by my attendant that their contents were already on the way to Rooksley. A close traveling dress with a bonnet and mantle were spread upon the bed; in short, "my home was made unto me desolate."

My first care was to tear off the finery in which I was tricked out, and which seemed to mock my wretchedness. The composure of despair took possession of me, and I put on, one after the other, all the elaborate wraps that had been provided for me by the zealous care of my woman; I remember that I even drew on my gloves, although I was parched with fever, and gasped for air; and then I cast myself into a chair, and remained silent and passive. I neither wept nor thought. My brain burned and throbbed; and I was sick and faint for want of sustenance; but no wish for food grew upon me. I had a mere vague perception of my existence, and nothing more.

At the appointed time Dornton reappeared,

and I instinctively rose as he approached me. Once more my hand rested upon his arm, but this partial support no longer sufficed, and I staggered, and should have fallen, had he not thrown his other arm about my waist, and borne me up.

My dejection became complete when I saw Dornton and the new attendant whom he had placed about me, follow me into the carriage, and that no friendly face had appeared to shed one ray of comfort over my departure. I had from the first disliked this woman, whom I considered as the agent of his tyranny, and at such a moment the loathing naturally increased. Why had he forced her upon me, in the very carriage? Beyond all doubt in order to avoid finding himself again alone in my society. We soon left the metropolis behind us, and as we not long afterward stopped to change horses, I imagine that the light of the lanterns which flashed into the carriage, had afforded a melancholy view of my pale and wretched face, for I saw Dornton suddenly start, and he inquired anxiously of the attendant if I had taken any refreshment since my return from court. She had no sooner replied in the negative than he drew from a traveling case a bottle of Malaga and some biscuits, of which coldly but resolutely he compelled me to partake; and this done he drew himself closely into his corner, and either slept, or affected to do so, until the morning.

What a strange combination of inconsistencies does human nature present! I remained widely awake throughout the whole of that long night; but I neither mourned over the past, nor speculated upon the future; I was buried in marvel as to the real feelings of the weary woman who sat before me.

In prosperity we little heed those who minister to our comforts in a subordinate capacity. All that we care to know of individuals who are so widely separated from ourselves in interest, in habit, in feeling, and in sympathy, is their adroitness in performing their allotted duties; and we feed our own vanity with the belief that all their faculties are limited to the proper performance of those duties. In misfortune we begin to understand our error, and to comprehend our mutual dependence; where we find a sympathizing auditor, we please ourselves by believing that we have found a friend; and although I had not yet brought myself to confide in Joséphine, still I was conscious that she was in my secret; and this very consciousness had already rendered her necessary to me. Nevertheless, while absorbed in pleasure, and meeting Devereux daily, I had been less susceptible of her loss; but now I felt as if I were at the mercy of a hired spy; and, inconsistent as it may appear at such a crisis, this fact weighed more heavily upon me than all the rest.

We arrived at last, to my surprise, at Rooksley; and I became more calm. I even persuaded myself that Sir James had only endeavored to alarm me, by showing the extent of his power as a husband; and, rocked by this pleasant delusion, I retired to bed, and fell into a deep and refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER LIII.

Evening had flung its drapery over my chamber ere I awoke and even then it was by the cautious opening of a door which led to my servants' apartments. I raised myself upon my elbow, and to my extreme astonishment, I saw Susan, my new attendant, stealthily approaching the bed.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" I asked angrily, jealous lest the system which I had apprehended should already have commenced.

"I have awoke your ladyship," she said, humbly; "but I beg you to believe, my lady, that I would not have taken such a liberty, if I had not felt that time might be everything in such a case; and I was afraid that I should not find another opportunity so safe. Sir James is writing in the library, and every one is busy making the house fit for your ladyship; so I thought, my lady, that if I could speak to you at once, you would have more leisure to consider what you wished to do, when you knew all."

There was an accent of sincerity in the woman, but this, nevertheless, did not suffice to convince me, although it served to excite my curiosity. I felt at once astonished and anxious; but I could not make up my mind to ask a single question, for I had no confidence in my mysterious visitor. She saw my mistrust, and was evidently wounded.

"What I am about to tell you, madam," she said steadily, but with constraint; "I heard in London, from the very person to whom Sir James himself told it after seeing your ladyship's mother, about two hours before you returned from court. Perhaps I ought not to repeat it; perhaps even you, my lady, may blame me; but I cannot see you so unhappy, whatever you may have done, without feeling that it is my duty to do what I can to help you."

She paused for a reply, but I continued resolutely silent.

"You are not to remain long here, my lady," she resumed, after having vainly awaited an answer; "only till the furniture of some of the family rooms in Portland Place has had time to reach Glenfillan Castle, where Sir James is to take you, and where he is afterward to leave you in the care of a sister of Lady Madelaine Otterford. I have also, my lady—" and here she burst into tears; "I have also been instructed to watch you, and to give an account of all your doings to Sir James; none of us are to be allowed to leave the grounds; we are all to be prisoners together; and I know beforehand that your ladyship dislikes me, and has no confidence in the duty which I wish to show you."

As I could discover no competent reason why this woman, who had but recently entered my service, and to whom my bearing had been the very reverse of conciliatory throughout, should bury herself alive in order to assist my husband in his extraordinary proceedings, or betray her trust in order to gain my favor, I resolved to be prudent, and not to fall into a snare, which I considered clumsy enough when I remembered that so able an artist in dissimulation as Sir James had been its originator. The instinct of self-preservation for once taught me prudence, and my suspicions continued in full force.

"Your ladyship still doubts me," said Susan, after a second pause which remained equally unbroken by any response on my part; "and may,

perhaps, neglect a useful warning because it reaches you through my means. There is only one way of removing your suspicions of my honest meaning, my lady; and with your ladyship's permission, I will own to you my reasons for serving you in this difficulty with more zeal than I might, perhaps, otherwise have done."

"Speak, Susan," I said, "tell me the truth frankly; I shall be at no loss to discover in how far I may trust to the sincerity of your words."

"I have a lover, madam; a worthy young man; but we are too poor to marry; and I have no hope save in the generosity of your ladyship, that I shall ever be able to save enough honestly to bring us together. I accepted the offer of Sir James without reflecting that his gold had been paid for deceit and treachery; but when I came to think of this, I knew that money so dishonestly gained would never prosper, and might be the ruin of us both. That is the real truth, my lady; and your ladyship sees that I do not pretend to feel an attachment to your person which cannot be expected to have grown up in the few weeks that I have been about you."

"I believe you, Susan, I believe you; for you have, indeed, made a great moral effort to be honest," I exclaimed, as I extended my hand to the now weeping woman. Yes, I, the haughty daughter of Lady Madekaine Otterford, actually, for the first time in my life, extended my hand to a menial.

Oh! adversity is a shrewd task-mistress: a mighty moral leveler—how it teaches us to appreciate kindness and to discover friends where we had previously only discerned inferiors! It is, indeed, as the great poet of the world has said, the jewel struck out of the ugliness and venom of the heart. Fine friends fall away—the dust of the butterfly's wings is swept off by the cold touch of this same adversity—and it is then, and only then, that we turn to simple, pure, and honest human hearts for comfort. Happy they, who even thus tardily find what they seek.

"What is to be done, Susan?"

"Alas! madam, I can but obey your wishes. Whatever you order shall be done. Only, I entreat your ladyship not to mention that I have betrayed the secret; or to let any one know that I am in your interests."

I could no longer entertain a doubt of the honesty of my new confidant; and the comparative composure with which I had contemplated a temporary retirement at Rooksley, gave way at once before the frightful anticipation of Glenfillan Castle, and the companionship of Lady Flora. I knew that the spot was bleak, barren, and desolate; and that the house itself was no better than an ornamented prison; while I remembered with no less repugnance that my mother's sister was tyrannical and overbearing by nature, and that she had a score of real and imaginary grievances to revenge upon myself. The situation was an incongruous one for both parties; for I should be at once her host and her prisoner, while she would be at the same time my guest, my jailer, and the head spy of Sir James. The contemplation of my coming fate maddened me: I passed from sobs and tears to recrimination and invective—I cursed the hour and the means which had made me the wife of Dornton, and thus blighted my whole life; and then I fell back upon my pillow in a paroxysm of mute despair.

I was aroused from this dark lethargy by the low voice of Susan, beseeching me to exert myself, and to consider what steps it would be necessary to take in order to avert the evil which was impending over me. Once more awakened to a full sense of my situation, I embraced the anxious girl, besought her to be true to me, and made the most magnificent promises in the event of her good faith. She listened in respectful silence, and then again besought me to remember how rapidly the time was passing, and how soon I might be compelled to resume my hateful journey.

Still I was powerless. I could not come to any rational decision.

"Consider too, my lady," she pursued, pointing out in the strength of her plain good sense the duty which I owed to my own reputation, "how necessary it is that your ladyship should not lose a post in writing to some of your friends, to explain your sudden departure from town. So many wicked reports may go abroad, and no one can contradict them without your authority."

"But to whom can I write?" I asked gloomily: "who now cares to interfere in my fate?"

"Will not your ladyship at least undeceive my Lord Otterford? He has always appeared so partial to my lady."

"That is over for ever," I answered, with a pang so bitter that he was almost revenged; "I have nothing to hope from that quarter."

"Some of your ladyship's relations——"

"I have none. I am now alone in the world."

"But my lady has so many friends."

I laughed in the irony of my heart.

"Poor Susan!" I said; "you little understand the friendship of the world—the give and take system, which always insists upon receiving its equivalent—or you would not talk to me of my friends. No, my good girl, those who prosper in life: who raise themselves by wealthy marriages, or fortunate chances, have alone the right to boast of their friends; and they are the very first, even while doing so, to forget all the fond and holy memories of the past; and to spurn from their homes and hearts the loved ones of less prosperous times who have been less lucky than themselves, although they may previously have vowed to them an undying affection. Last week I was hemmed in with devoted friends; to-day you stand alone to pay me back duty for avoidance."

"Yet surely, my lady, among so many—"

"You are right, Susan," I exclaimed suddenly; "I am not utterly desolate. Bring me my desk and a taper."

I was promptly obeyed, and, seizing a pen, I wrote a long and hurried letter to Devereux. Imprudent as the step actually was, I was nevertheless less blamable in this instance than in many others, for I literally knew not in what direction to turn for help. I detailed to him my forcible removal from town, the threats held out by Dornton, and the intelligence which I had obtained of his subsequent designs; and I implored him to take steps to rescue me from both the public and private injustice with which I was threatened.

When I had sealed and directed my letter, I placed it in the hand of Susan, who had already undertaken to secure its safe transmission to the post; but when her eye fell upon the superscription, I saw her redden and appear irresolute.

"Has your courage failed you so soon?" I demanded abruptly.

"Your ladyship mistakes me. It is only that I am fearful lest, in forwarding this letter, I may do mischief instead of good. Oh, my lady, I would humbly beg of you to write to any one rather than to Colonel Devereux."

"You forget yourself," I said haughtily; "I am the best judge of the eligibility of my correspondents."

"But should Sir James ever discover——"

"I do not acknowledge the authority of Sir James Dornton. The advantage which he has now obtained over me has been the mere triumph of brute force."

"But I was so particularly warned, my lady, against——"

"I do not doubt it. Your employer was unable to appreciate the noble qualities of Colonel Devereux, and therefore feared him; but I, who know him better, do him more justice."

"I will yet be bold enough to venture one word, my lady," persisted the anxious woman; "let me entreat your ladyship not to encourage the colonel to come to Rooksley; for, I am sure, that in my master's present humor, there would be bloodshed."

A cold thrill passed through my veins, and made the blood quiver in its passage to my heart; but I forced a smile, as I declared that I had expressed no such wish to Colonel Devereux; when Susan, reassured, concealed the letter in her bosom, again declaring that I need apprehend no inconvenience in its transmission.

Somewhat comforted by the certainty that Devereux, at least, would soon be informed of my misfortunes; and full of conjectures as to the course which he would pursue, I refused to leave my room that evening. Sir James submitted heroically to my resolution, nor did he strive to alter it; and thus I was left free to profit by my own reflections.

It was evident that if I were inclined to be chary of my society, he, on his side, desired it quite as little; for each morning, long before I awoke, he was away with his gun and his dogs, and only returned at a late hour to dinner.

Few words were exchanged between us during the repast, and we parted when I rose from table. Not a question had I asked; not a reproach had I uttered; and at times I fancied that I discovered a restlessness in the manner of Dornton, as though, touched by my submission, he upbraided himself for the treachery which he was still meditating against me; but I never ascertained the correctness of my conjectures, for his self-possession soon returned, and with it all his accustomed coldness.

In as short a period as it was possible for me to receive an acknowledgment of my letter to Devereux, and before my anxiety had yet attained to its height, Susan one day put into my hands a small piece of folded paper, evidently torn from some pocket tablets, and upon which were written three words "I am here," without date or signature, but the characters were too familiar to me to need interpretation. It was the reply of Devereux.

"From whom got you this?" I asked eagerly.

"From the colonel himself, my lady."

"Where is he?"

"At the Wood Lodge, my lady."

"When did he arrive?"

"Last night, my lady."

My bonnet and shawl were on in a moment. It was the first time that I had left the house since my arrival at Rooksley; and memories of the past came thronging before me as I advanced along the well-remembered path, under a clear spring sun, and with a sharp air playing upon my face. What had I not seen and suffered since I last met Devereux beside the same spot. Had I been true to myself and to him that day, what trials might have been spared to us both!

When I reached the lodge, I hesitated for a moment to raise the latch, for I had encountered no one on my way; and while I yet paused the door softly opened, and Devereux stood before me.

"Fear nothing, Lady Dornton," he said as he took my hand, and led me across the threshold, carefully closing the door behind us. "The lodge is still uninhabited during the day, and the gamekeeper, who occupies it at night, has ceded his right to me for a season. And now tell me what your melancholy position exacts of the most devoted of your friends."

"Alas, Devereux," I sighed, as I sank upon a low bench beside the rude oaken table, "I know not. Will you not think for me, and counsel me?"

"I am so interested a party—" he murmured, as he folded my hand between his own.

"I have been outraged and insulted," I said with bitterness; "the very sight of Sir James is odious to me; had he conveyed me here, and then returned to town without any further intrusion on my privacy, I should perhaps have remained passive, at all events for a time; but such is not his pleasure; he is still an inmate of Rooksley, and will remain here, until he departs for Glenfillan, once more in the character of my jailer. Then, indeed, I find that he is to leave me to the enjoyment of my prison, and the guardianship of my mother's sister. My only hope now is, that my despair may soon lay me beside Adela."

"This journey must not take place," said Devereux, as he carried my fingers to his lips. "We can hope nothing from Lady Madelaine; nothing from my uncle. They are both exasperated against you; and equally violent against each other. Your mother has left town, and retired to her Putney villa, whence she emerges, however, almost nightly, to join the gay societies of the season; while Otterford remains *perdu* in the square, refusing to receive even his most intimate friends. Something terrible has occurred between them."

"I can understand the cause of their coldness," I said sadly; "and now, when it is too late, I regret that it has been in a great degree, if not entirely, my own work. Devereux, when we first loved each other, your uncle bitterly offended me, and I then, girl as I was, vowed that I would one day be revenged. Subsequently however, I forgave, even if I did not quite for

get the injury; nor should I have again sought its requital, had not the insolent assumption of my mother instigated me to destroy her happiness, as she had previously destroyed mine. In my passion I did not pause to remember that I made a second victim, and one who deserved more consideration at my hands. I am, therefore, the culprit."

"It has chanced at an unlucky moment," answered Devereux, in an accent considerably less desponding than his words; "for nothing can now be expected from either party save an increase of hostility. Your situation is indeed desperate, Eveleen; and we must be satisfied not to look beyond ourselves for your deliverance. How much longer do you calculate on remaining at Rooksley?"

"I am as ignorant upon the subject as yourself I believe," I added, with a scornful smile, "that my movements are now dependent upon those of some furniture, which even Sir James Dornton has considered it necessary to dispatch to Scotland, in order to make my prison habitable."

"But you will not, of course, submit to this abuse of authority?"

"What can I do? He is my husband; and I am too weak to resist."

"And yet, Eveleen, you affect to love me, and to hate this man; while his word is still your law, and my affection is met only by coldness and reproof. Is this consistent? Is this reasonable? Above all, is this generous? Nay, listen to me," he added, as I strove faintly to disengage my hand; "the moment is at length come in which it behoves me to be frank. Your name is blighted and your fair fame sullied; you are abandoned by your mother; insulted by your husband; and denied by your acquaintance. You alone know your own heart, unless indeed you will admit me into a participation of that knowledge. You alone know that you are guiltless of those errors of which you are accused, and of which many of your accusers are themselves far from free—and what avails that knowledge, when you cannot obtain credence of the fact? The woman who is merely suspected is always lost; and it is only she who has moral courage to brave the world, and to do justice to herself, who escapes scathless."

"Spare me—spare me," I faltered amid my sobs.

"Eveleen, dear Eveleen, hear me out," whispered my companion, as he seated himself beside me, and encircled my sinking figure with his arm; "I must show you precisely the nature of your position, in order that you may summon resolution to resist your fate. You have now seen what you have to expect from that world of which you were so lately the brightest ornament, and the most worshiped idol. Now turn your eyes upon your home. What aspect, what prospect does it present! An unloving and unrelenting husband consigns you to a living grave, and to the guardianship of a woman to whom you are repugnant; there to moulder away your youth, your beauty, and your hopes, while he riots in your wealth—and all this, not, believe me, to resent a momentary fit of levity, or an instant of imprudent caprice, but because you were unguarded enough to betray to him that you knew too much of himself—of his past career—of his mercenary motives—and of his late delinquency. Is this not so, sweet Eveleen?"

The solution thus offered of my present sorrows was too soothing to be rejected. My tears flowed less bitterly; I was less dissatisfied with myself. It was clear that Sir James acted from a principle of self-preservation totally distinct from my personal conduct. I was already justified in my own eyes.

"It is certain that you cannot remain here, alone and unprotected," pursued Devereux, evidently encouraged by the effect of his last argument; "for even should Dornton affect to yield his consent to such a measure, you would be at every moment subject to the consequences of his breach of faith; while it is still more impossible that you should be carried to Scotland, almost beyond the reach of efficient help."

"Alas! alas! what then is left to me?" I exclaimed, wringing my hands in agony and indecision.

"The whole world," murmured Devereux, in my ear; "the whole world, fairest and most beloved of women! The sunny skies, and smiling groves of Italy—the glorious mountain-paths of Switzerland—the classic shores of Greece—and everywhere, one loyal and loving heart, on which to pillow all your past trials and present happiness."

I was stunned. I might have expected this, I fear that I *had* expected it; but vaguely, and as a far-off vision seen dimly in perspective. I was too feeble to contend with the emotion of such a moment; and suffering my head to fall upon the shoulder of Devereux, I closed my eyes and fainted.

CHAPTER LIV.

When I recovered consciousness I found myself still in the arms of Devereux, and I felt his warm lips upon my brow. I dare not look back to the intoxication of that moment. All my sufferings and all my fears were forgotten as I lay passively upon his bosom, and listened to his low-breathed words of tenderness; but ere long I felt the necessity of arousing myself from this dangerous lethargy, and sweeping my disheveled hair from my forehead, I endeavored to withdraw myself from his clasp.

"Not yet, Eveleen," he murmured tenderly; "not yet. You are still indisposed and weak, my own love; may I not say *my own*, as I once did some few short years ago, when you promised to love me only? And you will redeem that pledge even yet—you will not be foresworn—you have so far sinned against me only by compulsion, and your heart has been no party to the treachery of your acts. We shall be happy, Eveleen; most happy. We will blot England from the map of our world of love; and we shall still have space enough in which to breathe out our vows of never-changing tenderness and fidelity. I will be to you a friend, a brother, a lover, everything—"

"Save a husband—" I interposed, with an involuntary shudder.

Devereux started, but he almost instantly recovered his composure. "And even that will come, fair trembler," he said, as for the first time he dared to press his lips to mine and to

le so unchidden; for his words had awakened all the warmth and confidence of my nature. "Do you imagine that Dornton will suffer so plausible an opportunity to escape of enriching himself at your expense, and of freeing you from the odious ties which now subject you to his control!"

"Oh, speak not of it," I exclaimed piteously: "think only of the humiliation — of the disgrace."

"Eveleen, remember the commencement of our conversation; and do not distress yourself unnecessarily."

"True," I muttered through my clenched teeth; "I am already humbled—already disgraced."

"If you see fit to accept such a destiny," said Devereux soothingly; "but if you determine otherwise, your fate is in your own hands. Few will now be induced to believe you innocent, even should you consent to pay the penalty of error; and believe me, sweet one, it is at worst an error to which nine-tenths of the world are in their hearts, for reasons of their own, disposed to be more lenient than they deem it expedient to acknowledge. You have consequently only your own heart to consult; for the malice of others has spared you the sole really tangible objections which you might have opposed to my entreaties. And will you entirely overlook the happiness which you would thus confer upon one who has loved you through treachery and neglect, through good report and evil report, as I have done; I of whom you are alike the first love and the last!"

There was a bitter warring at my heart, but I dared not yield. I have already frankly stated more than once, that I had no fixed principle of religion, and consequently no solid foundation of conduct; but, nevertheless, I shrank from the world's sneer; and despite all the well-turned sophistries of Devereux, I could not bring myself to believe that I was indeed so utterly fallen in its opinion, as though I had in truth merited its scorn.

Be the result of my imprudence what it might, I felt that it was incumbent upon me at once to terminate the present interview; and I was surprised and I fear somewhat piqued, at the ready acquiescence of Devereux.

"It behoves us to be prudent, dearest," he said, as he also rose; "and the rather as I shall constantly be near you, to guard you from the harshness of Sir James. From sunrise to sunset you will find me here, until it is your pleasure that I should depart—the happiest of men, or the most miserable. Glance into the next apartment, and you will see that my establishment is complete."

I followed him to a small door which opened in the opposite wall, and, to my astonishment, discovered in the room to which he alluded, a stout horse ready saddled and bridled, and whose rein was made fast to a ring beside a second door which opened into the high road.

"You see I have been wary," he remarked with a smile; "and have secured a means of instant escape should I run any risk of detetion by Dornton or his spies. I need not expatiate, I trust, upon the still more happy use to which this fortunate outlet may be put. I leave it to your own old memories and present attachments. And now, farewell, dear Eveleen. I shall only weary in my solitude for your return, for the interval will be shortened by the visions of the last hour, and the hopes of still brighter and more blessed ones to come."

And so we parted, after Devereux had looked cautiously from the narrow casement to ascertain that we were unobserved, but as I slowly traversed the shrubbery on my return, I involuntarily asked myself whether I had not already more than half-justified that world by which I had been so recklessly condemned; and I dared not trust my own heart with the reply.

On arriving at home I ascertained from Susan that Sir James had not yet returned from shooting, and that none of the servants had left the house during my absence, save the lad who carried the letters to the post town. So far, therefore, all had gone well, at least as regarded the publicity of my imprudent proceeding: but my timid attendant was still pale with terror, and eagerly besought me not to repeat so dangerous an exploit. I was, however, in no mood to listen to her remonstrances; the crisis of my fate was at hand, and I felt the necessity of utter solitude. I dismissed her, therefore, with an apparent composure, which evidently had only the effect of increasing her uneasiness: and she left the room, after a promise to apprise me instantly of any intelligence which she might obtain of the movements of Sir James.

It would be idle to attempt an analysis of my feelings when I once more found myself alone. My head and heart were alike in a whirl. I could come to no resolution either for good or evil. At one moment I remembered my blighted reputation, so lightly whispered away in the very circles where I had lately reigned supreme; and I consequently considered myself exonerated from all social obligations, and free to secure my own happiness as I saw fit; in the next I felt almost proud of the martyrdom to which I had been subjected, and resolved not to forego my innate sense of the injustice of which I had been made the victim. But my recent interview with Devereux rose up before me and tore away the laurels which I had placed so proudly on my brow. I was no longer innocent in heart, and I could not conceal the fact from myself, disguise it as I might. Nor did that evil end here; the tones of tenderness which had fallen upon my spirit like a dew after a long day of drought—the flattering sophistries which had invested vice with a romance at once novel and attractive—the self-appreciation—I dared not call it self-respect — which the devotion of Devereux had reawakened within me—had all done their dangerous work; and left me powerless to contend against their influence.

I saw nothing but wretchedness on every side. That of duty, while it promised a comparatively approving conscience, demanded as the price of that boon a period of living death, of mortification, and abandonment; while that of error threatened me with a life-long remorse, but veiled its sufferings with the roses of passion, and the delusion of egotistical gratification. The alternative was a desperate one; and I felt more inclined to mourn over my buried youth and blighted prospects, than over the self-blame which I might incur by an unworthy

act. The world had ever been my idol; and it seemed to me more desirable to accept its suffrages upon its own terms, now that I could no longer command them upon mine, than to forego them altogether. The first phase of my difficulty left me utterly without support; in the second I should be upheld and guarded by the proved affection of the man I loved: and I accordingly found a thousand sophistries in its favor, which influenced even if they did not convince me.

Had I consulted my own real interest, I should at that moment have hurried to the presence of Lady O'Halloran; have confided to her all the details of my position, have confessed to her, even upon my knees, my moral guilt, and have besought her to protect me against myself; but at the instant when my thoughts turned to her firm and healthful friendship, at that same moment my memory also placed before me the pure and holy image of her son's wife; and, although alone and unseen, I bowed my head upon my bosom with a burning blush! No, no—I could not bend my haughty spirit to such a degradation—I could not myself offer to her the weapon which was to drain my life-blood. Better the long disgrace, far away from all who had watched over my youth and foretold for me a brighter and a more fitting fate, than such an hour of wringing penance as that interview must bring with it.

I was too much enervated by vanity and frivolity, to be capable of such a triumph over my own pride; and thus I voluntarily thrust from me the last fragment of the floating raft which might have saved my honor from shipwreck. In my agony of heart, as I did this, I flung myself wildly upon my knees, and tried to pray. Vain and idle mockery! What right had I to hope for help and strength when I, at the same moment, voluntarily rejected the one chance still offered to my own exertions? And what knew I of praying as hearts must pray which, amid the fervor of their silence, would be heard? What knew I of the spontaneous and relying faith of the bruised spirit, which turns to heaven, as the night-mariner to the beacon light which is his only hope of safety? Nothing—less than nothing—and thus, in this bitter hour, when my vices wrestled with all of pure and precious that yet remained in my fallen nature, I could not frame one petition in which I was not conscious of my own hypocrisy.

I started up self-condemned; the words which had sprung to my lips appeared to echo in my ears like sounds of mockery; my supplications were not pure enough to ascend to Heaven, but were beaten back in rebuke upon me; and I felt that they were rejected. The fire upon the altar of my heart was an unholy fire, and could not ascend; the sacrifice of my burnt-offering had no sweet savor, and the tears which fell upon it turned its juices to bitterness.

I passed a fearful night; it appeared interminable; and yet I dreaded the dawn, for I knew that with the sunrise Devereux would once more be near me, and my moral struggle be renewed. As I at length saw the cold, blank light, stealing along the sky, a new vision, one which had never before risen clearly on my mind, presented itself with terrible distinctness: it was that of a cessation of the love for which I might have bartered my best hopes on earth.

It was a frightful fancy! and coming as it did at that peculiarly depressing moment when the earth has not yet succeeded in freeing her bosom from the winding-sheet of night, I was keenly susceptible of its influence. All around me looked dreary, desolate, and cheerless, as my own fate must be at such a crisis—and I remembered that although the first sun-burst would renovate and revivify the objects upon which I looked, there could be no after spirit-dawn for me. In the impulse of the moment I drew my night-lamp from the vase which veiled its light; and seizing a pen, I poured forth the anguish of my heart to Devereux.

"We must meet no more. You should not wish it—and I dare not. We are both wretched: let us accept our fate. We need not therefore be guilty also. I have tried to think, but my brain burns and my eyeballs throb, and I have no power over my intellect—I have tried to pray, but I am ignorant how those pray who are heard. I could bear the world's rebuke for your sake—I *have* borne it—I could sin to secure your love—I have even meditated to do so. But how? Would my sin indeed secure your lasting and unchanging love? A few brief months of passion you would, no doubt, offer me in requital—probably you would also suppose that nothing could ever weaken or alienate it. Yes you would believe this, for your nature is loyal and honorable, and you are incapable of injuring me for the poor triumph of exhibiting my error to the world. But, Devereux, would this same loyalty and honor enable you to retain your passion for me after I had sinned? Oh! no no; the day would come, tardily perhaps,—but come at last it would, when you would estimate the extent of my fall, and abandon me to its fearful consequences. You must one day see, if not more beautiful, at least more worthy objects than myself, who may pay back your affections with an unblushing brow—and when that day came, what must be my fate?

"I know all that you would urge in reply to this; and therefore—Devereux, for the first time in my life, perhaps, I declare my purpose without one reservation of vanity—one stain of false faith—therefore, I must not meet you again, until I have schooled myself into a better and a more fitting frame of mind. I will submit myself as meekly as my imperious nature will allow, to the destiny which awaits me. May the bitter punishment of my past follies make me a wiser and a better woman.

"I would pray for you if I could—I will forget you if I can—go, and be happy——"

Thus far had I written without one pause; without one instant of hesitation; but here I laid down my pen, and burying my face upon my folded arms, I again abandoned myself to a train of struggling and miserable thoughts. Gradually, as I remained in this position, my ideas became more vague, my reflections more disjointed; weariness alike of body and of spirit did its tardy work, and I slept.

My dreams were such as might have visited the pillow of an opium-eater: I saw skulls with bridal wreaths upon their heads; and skele-

hands stretching toward me a bony finger encircled by a marriage-ring. I wandered in a vast forest of leafless trees, where the distorted branches seemed to writhe in mockery as I passed along. I stood near a bier; my sister lay there in her shroud, and when I stopped beside her, she stretched out her bony arm, and as it moved along, it traced upon the wall of the charnel-house the name of Dornton, in characters of blood. I saw the grave of Emily; her long fair hair had burst through the humid soil, and was scattered over the turf, and playing in the night-wind; and suddenly Mrs. Delamaine was there also, trampling in the pride of her haughty beauty upon those long fair tresses, while her eyes darted flashes which withered the grass and leaves upon which they fell. More, much more, and all horrible, filled up the measure of that fearful sleep; but at last, all passed away, and I fell into a state of deep and unbroken forgetfulness. I was aroused by a light touch upon my shoulder, and raising my heavy eyes, I saw Susan standing beside me, and wiping away her tears.

"Why did you awaken me?" I asked sadly; "I was happy; I was unconscious that I lived."

"My poor dear lady! And you have never been to bed. Now, too, when you require all your strength."

"I have still strength enough to suffer, my good girl."

"But I bring your ladyship unwelcome tidings."

"When do we leave Rooksley?" I asked hoarsely.

"The day after to-morrow, my lady: Anderson has received his orders to go this morning to the post-town to bespeak the horses; and I have been warned to pack your ladyship's wardrobe."

I passed my fingers through my tangled hair, and looked helplessly about me. Thick sobs rose in my throat, and threatened me with suffocation; at length, with some difficulty, I swallowed a draught of water at the entreaty of my alarmed attendant, and gradually became more calm. Suddenly my eye fell upon the letter which still lay before me, and once more catching up the pen I wrote.

"The bolt has fallen. The day after to-morrow I depart for my exile; and now, Devereux, now that our hours are numbered, I feel that I *must* see you once more. Not to-day—for to-day I should betray both you and myself—but to-morrow—to-morrow—Devereux, and for the last time."

Having added these hurried lines, I sealed the letter, and entrusted it to Susan, with express injunctions to convey it secretly to the Wood Lodge before sunset; I had for a moment the intention of writing to my mother, to expostulate with her on the violence to which I was subjected, and her own utter abandonment, but I soon rejected the idea. I had brought grief and dissension to her hearth, and I knew her too well to anticipate that she would ever forgive so deep an injury. Thus then, save as regarded Devereux, I was already totally separated from the world; I was about to follow my sister to the retreat which she had only exchanged for a grave. How knew I but such might be my own case? At that moment I hoped that we might ere long lie side by side; and mingle our dust in death, as in life we had never blent our hearts.

CHAPTER LV.

At an early hour in the morning, trembling with agitation, I threw on a shawl and bonnet, and turned my steps toward the Wood Lodge. I had been careful to ascertain that Sir James had left the house some time previously, as he was in the constant habit of doing, with his gun and his dogs; and as I proceeded along my solitary path, I read myself a serious lesson of prudence and self-government, which I believed that I should not fail to require. A bright spring sun shimmered on the leaves of the trees, and formed checkered mosaics of light and shadow upon the earth. The sky-lark was making the blue heavens ring with its matin song, as it quivered above my head; all about me was calm and beautiful; all within me was dark and troubled. I felt as though I were rushing upon my fate, even while I murmured that I would be true to myself, and conquer the weakness to which it would be sin to yield. As I left the house further behind me, I quickened my pace; and, at length, with a beating heart and a pale cheek, I stood before the little building, but no ready hand raised the latch to give me entrance; no anxious eye had watched for my approach, that my greeting might be hastened. All was still.

After a painful pause, unbroken by any sign or sound of human neighborhood, I summoned courage to throw back the door, but the cottage-rooms were empty.

"He has been detained," I murmured to myself, as I took my place upon the narrow bench, and prepared to await him: "he has been detained, but he will be here ere long." And I felt a strange pleasure as I sat in the narrow and unfurnished chamber where Devereux had, for my sake, passed so many solitary hours; and sighed that the whitewashed walls could not betray to me the secret of his thoughts during his weary watch. Memories of what had already passed in that hovel rose up before me; memories which, at such a moment, I should have stifled, and which only served to increase my passion, and to deepen my regrets; gradually I felt my better resolutions giving way, and my anxiety for the arrival of Devereux becoming greater and more difficult to suppress. If he came not on this occasion, I should see him no more; and I had so much to say, so much to ask. But I heard the clock of the little village school-house, which my mother had built in the first year of her marriage with my poor father, strike nine; and still I sat there alone. The sound had conjured up, however, more healthy recollections; and I recalled the image of that father too little loved, and too early lost, until I asked myself, what—should his shade be hovering near me at that moment, disturbed in its repose by the imprudence of his child—what must be its agony and its despair! I could not bear the harrowing reflection, and starting from my seat, I rushed from the lodge and hurriedly returned home, pursued by the piteous howling of a dog, which smote at my heart with its dismal and ill-timed discord.

An was then over; I should see him no more,

probably for long years, possibly for life. My fate was sealed; and he—even he—had also deserted me. I paced my chamber in despair; I wrung my hands in agony; I vowed myself to an early death, and loathed the very light that glared upon my wretchedness. Another hour pealed from the low belfry: I counted every stroke tenaciously, as though my destiny hung upon its clear and ringing voice; and then I listened anxiously for other sounds, for I was oppressed by the deep stillness which succeeded. It was soon broken once more. From afar-off, yet, as it seemed, slowly approaching nearer to the house, I heard again the long howling wails of the dog which had disturbed me as I left the cottage. The melancholy cadence of those howls made me shudder. I was then to be surrounded to the last with gloom and misery! A cold damp started to my brow, and I sank into a seat, for my limbs trembled. Suddenly the wail ceased, and I heard a strange movement in the house; cries of alarm and horror, confused voices, and steps hastily approaching my chamber. I grasped the arms of the chair in which I sat, and half raised myself, as if to meet with less delay the new trial which was awaiting me, be it what it might.

A heavy hand beat rudely upon my door. I answered hoarsely to the summons; and immediately the valet of my husband stood before me, with a blanched brow, and trembling lips. For an instant he was speechless, but at length he gasped out: "All is over, my lady; there is no longer a hope—they have brought him home, but he is dead. My poor, poor, murdered master!"

"Dead!" I repeated, like one who dreams. "Who is dead! Who has been murdered!"

"My master—my poor master!" again exclaimed the man.

I heard no more. A heavy blow appeared to have descended on my head, and I fell senseless to the earth.

Susan was standing beside my bed when I again opened my eyes; for a time I could not sufficiently recover my scattered senses to comprehend what had occurred; but gradually a confused memory grew upon me, although still so vaguely, that I clung to the hope that I had been visited by a sleeping vision which had bewildered my imagination.

"I have had a frightful dream," I whispered shudderingly.

"My lady has not slept," sobbed out the weeping woman.

"Not slept!" I exclaimed, lifting my heavy head from the pillow; "can it indeed be really so? Sir James——"

"Is no more, madam."

"Dead!" I almost shrieked; "and where is Colonel Devereux!"

"I can understand my lady's suspicion, but—"

"The word *murder* seems to ring in my ears, as though some demon had uttered it. Tell me how my husband met his death; and tell me the truth," I added; "frightful as it may be, I must know the truth: this is no moment for false refinements, or mysteries which have in them more of anguish than of mercy—tell me who murdered him."

"Indeed, my lady—"

"Peace, girl!" I said wildly: "I know it a He was not there when I went to seek him. waited there alone—alone, till the spirit of my father drove me forth; and I was pursued even to my chamber by the voice of the wailing brute who was howling out his requiem over the dead. Susan," and I clutched her arm with my convulsed fingers; "I am innocent—you know that I am innocent!"

"My poor dear lady, you will break my heart."

"You warned me that there would be blood shed, Susan; but I did not heed you. Mad with terror and despair, I thought only of myself,—and yet I had been warned—I had been warned—"

"I do beseech you to listen to me, my lady; indeed, and indeed—"

"Where did they meet? Did *the murderer* escape? Did your master curse me before he died!"

"Unless your ladyship will calm yourself, and let me speak," said Susan firmly; "it is in vain for me to hope to comfort you. There is a great deal to be done, and it must be done by you, my lady—"

"Alas! alas! what will become of us?" I exclaimed, writhing like one in the agonies of death.

"Rely upon it that your ladyship does Colonel Devereux injustice," persisted Susan; "from all that I can learn, the death of Sir James was caused by an accident for which no one is responsible."

"An accident? can it really be? Who told you that it was an accident? Who saw it? How did it occur?"

"I do not yet know the exact particulars, my lady. Hearing a great noise in the park, and the howling of a dog that I knew at once by his voice must be one of my master's pointers, I ran to a short distance from the house, fearing I did not well know what, when I saw, my lady ——I saw the bleeding body of Sir James, which two peasants were carrying in their arms. I had my own fears, I will not deny it; and in my terror I began to question these men; but, full of anxiety about Sir James, they answered me shortly: 'He did it himself—he did it himself —he was killed by his own gun.' I came back with them to the house, and walked close beside my master's head, in the hope that I might see some sign of life, but I watched in vain; the blood had stopped—and—and—in short, my lady, I was assisting to remove Sir James to his own room, when his valet came running to tell me that your ladyship had fainted; and I know no more."

I listened with panting eagerness; but the hope which had for an instant pierced through my agony, once more abandoned me as Susan proceeded with her narrative. I know too well the position in which I stood both to my husband and Colonel Devereux, and the feelings which they mutually entertained toward each other, to venture to lean upon so slight a reed as the one now tendered to me; and this knowledge, combined with the imperfect information of my attendant, rather served to deepen than to decrease the awful suspicion which was gnawing at my heart. Moreover, Devereux had

not appeared at the lodge, although I had apprised him that I would be there to see him for the last time. Could I now doubt what it was that led him to neglect that meeting? At what a moment, too, had the catastrophe occurred? Just as I was about to be subjected to the last indignity with which the authority of a husband enabled Sir James to visit me. Was not all then fearfully and fatally clear?

In this emergency I felt all the ardor of my love for Devereux; for I forgot the dead man who lay stark in his stiffening blood within a few chambers of my own; I forgot the horror, and perhaps it might be also, the peril, of my own situation, to shudder at the danger which impended over him. He, the guilty one! against whom a cry had gone up to heaven. Would he escape out of the country? And, if so, whither would he turn his wandering steps? Friendless, homeless, and an exile, with the stain of blood upon his heart, and the brand of Cain upon his brow—he, who had been a spoiled child of the same world, which had also abandoned me. And he had become its outcast for my sake—he had paid this bitter price for my love—and that love must now be denied to him for ever. The serpents of the Laocoon were not more crushing or more deadly, than the insidious and snake-like sophistries which rose tumultuously within me, and writhed and grappled at my heart; but I shuddered as I spurned them back, and resolutely bent my thoughts upon my own probable destiny.

Susan had left me at my desire to obtain more full and feasible information of the tragedy which had been enacted almost under my very eyes; and I was still lost in a sea of wild conjecture, when she returned, with an expression of countenance that almost reassured me.

"I have not misled your ladyship," she said, so soon as she had closed the door behind her; "every one tells the same story. The peasants who brought my master home were working in a field about half a mile from here, and saw him leave the open park, and beat the small wood near the road-side; after which he jumped out upon the pathway, and walked slowly along, with his gun upon his shoulder, and his head bent down, as if he was full of thought. A groom had been sent some days ago to London by Sir James, and just as he nearly reached the lodge (which your ladyship knows stands at a turn of the little wood), he rode up, and gave Sir James a letter. The underwood and weeds are thick there; and my master, having rested the but-end of his gun on the ground, leant upon the barrel while he read his letter; and he was still doing this when another horseman approached him, riding very rapidly. At the sound of his horse's feet, Sir James looked up, and as though he knew him, made him a sign to stop; folded his letter and hastily lifted his gun, without remarking that it was entangled among the long weeds and brambles; the jerk which he gave to draw it out, brought the trigger in contact with some weed or twig; it went off; and you know the rest, my lady—my poor master was killed on the spot."

"Is this true, Susan?"

"They all swear to it, groom, and peasants, and all, my lady."

"And the horseman?"

"Fortunately, your ladyship, it was Jacob, the new stableman, that Sir James sent to London, and he had never seen the colonel. All that he could say, therefore, was that the strange gentleman was muffled up about the chin, wore a large cloak, and rode a gray horse."

"Are you sure that he said a gray horse?"

"Positive, my lady; and besides, the farming men remembered seeing both the horse and the man pass by toward Rooksley for the last two mornings; only they said that to-day he was later than usual."

"And what did he when he saw Sir James fall?"

"He jumped off his horse, my lady, and lifted up my poor master, and felt his heart; and then he shook his head, and desired the men to carry Sir James carefully up to the house, telling them who he was; and then, when he saw them about to obey him, he mounted again, and galloped off toward London."

This intelligence calmed me at once. He was not then a murderer—he was guiltless of my husband's blood—the very consciousness of this fact removed its heaviest weight from my heart. But why had he not ridden on to Rooksley, now that there was no impediment to his appearance, and prepared me for the horrible tragedy of the morning?

I subsequently learnt the cause. The letter which Susan had delivered, and which informed him of my immediate departure for Scotland, coupled with the assurance of my intention to see him on the morrow for the last time, had convinced him that he had not a moment to lose if he would secure a different result. He had, therefore, ridden to the post-town to provide a carriage, which was to take its station a hundred paces from the Wood Lodge at midnight; never doubting that the woman who could risk such an interview at such a moment, would offer but a faint resistance to his passionate entreaties. Yes, that very night, on which the pale and disfigured corpse of my husband lay buried in its everlasting sleep, he had calculated that I should become at once a fugitive and an outcast from my home and from my country! Even now, I shudder as I remember the precipice upon whose brink I stood; and the awfulness of the means which saved me.

Other arrangements, connected with our anticipated flight, had detained him until so late an hour that he was compelled to remain at the post-town all night; and he was on the way to our appointed interview, when he came upon Sir James; whom, from the fact that his face was concealed by the letter upon which he was intent, he had not recognized until he passed close beside him.

Struck by the fatal inferences which might be drawn, should it be discovered that he was an eye-witness to the horrible death of the man he hated, he had no sooner ascertained that all was indeed over, than he galloped back to ——, declared that he found it necessary to hasten his journey, and throwing himself into the carriage which he had already secured, he hurried to town with all the speed which four stout horses could insure.

Earnest to prevent the possibility of my being

implicated in the melancholy affair, as he was conscious that I must be if he remained absent from London, he lost not a moment on his arrival in throwing off his traveling dress, and calling upon my mother; after which he made a circuit of the clubs, and then returned to his father's house; where, pleading fatigue, he shut himself into his own apartments, in order that he might be alone, when the fatal news, which he was aware must follow him in a few hours, should be promulgated.

This proceeding was too well-judged and too generous to be either guessed at or appreciated by me at such a moment; and my indignation and wretchedness at his neglect and apparent indifference to my misery, helped me to overcome the horror of my position, where sympathy and kindness, however active and insidious, would probably have failed.

Amid all this conflict of distempered feeling, I suddenly remembered the necessity of dispatching a messenger in all haste to Lady Madelaine, to inform her of the tragic event which had just occurred; and I had actually seated myself at my writing-table before I became conscious of the extreme difficulty of the task. In what spirit could I address her? If I assumed a tone of grief, she would be well aware of the hypocrisy to which I had condescended; and if I wrote coldly, she would at once accuse me of even more unholy vices. Moreover, I knew not what had become of Devereux. Should he be still in the neighborhood, and that the fact became known, every sentence that I wrote might, perhaps, be tortured into an accusation which I did not possess the means of rebutting. What was to be done?

Once more Susan came zealously to my aid. "Indeed, my lady," she said, beseechingly; "you are not yet able to undertake such a melancholy letter. Only give me your orders, and I will do my best to inform my Lady Madelaine of the sad event."

I gladly acquiesced in this proposal; and desiring her to say what she considered necessary, and to excuse me on the plea of my agitated condition, I abandoned the project of being myself the herald of my widowhood, to my prudent and sympathizing attendant. Nothing could have been better judged than the plain, true, and simple manner in which she told her tale; one only portion of her letter displeased me, but to that, I could not, without extreme imprudence, make an exception. It concluded with an entreaty on my part that my mother would come to me, and support me in my trial by her presence and advice.

Conscious as I was that I required both counsel and assistance, I loathed the idea of owing either to my mother; that mother who had never been to me other than an object of jealousy and fear; and I shuddered as I thought of a meeting which was, however, inevitable, for I knew that, sooner or later, I must claim her protection. My youth, and the death of my husband; a death sufficiently equivocal in appearance to excite the comments of those who had watched the recklessness of my conduct during the last few months of my residence in town, would alike oblige me to submit in a certain degree to her authority. I could therefore only sigh over the necessity, and submit.

This letter was at once confided to the groom who had witnessed the catastrophe of the morning, with strict injunctions to travel with all speed to town: and to answer the questions which might be put to him without either reserve or exaggeration; and I made this selection, because I believed that the account given by a person who was on the spot, would suffer less from the cross-questionings of suspicion or ill-will, than that of one who merely repeated what he had heard from others.

This arrangement was scarcely completed when to my surprise I heard the wheels of a carriage pass over the gravel under my window at a rapid pace; and in five minutes afterward I was clasped in the arms of Lady O'Halloran.

No, never, never, shall I forget the almost painful happiness of that moment. I had still a friend! There was no room for doubt, for I felt the warm tears falling upon my neck.

"Eveleen," she at length said in an accent of real feeling; "how, in such an awful trial as this, could you forget that I was near you? Were you not sure of my sympathy and assistance under any circumstances?"

I could only strain her closer to my heart.

"I would not idly inflict another pang upon you, my poor child," she pursued while she returned the pressure; "but I have a stern duty to perform," and as she spoke, she drew me toward a sofa, and seated herself beside me. "One question you must answer, and with truth, as you hope for consolation in this world. Eveleen; strange, terrible rumors have reached me; but I will trust to your word—are you innocent?"

"I am—I am"—I exclaimed eagerly, as I cast myself on my knees before her, with clasped hands and streaming eyes: "innocent most innocent in act; but guilty, I fear, in heart."

"After this admission I cannot doubt you; guilty or not, my age left me free to offer consolation to your father's child; but hoping that you had been misjudged, I have brought you also another comforter, for you have need of all our tenderness." And replacing me gently upon the sofa, she rang and desired that her daughter-in-law, who still remained in the carriage, might be requested to join her in my dressing-room.

"And now, calm yourself, Eveleen," she said, "and find consolation in learning the happiness which your assurance has given me. You know not how my heart has bled for you, since those horrid doubts were awakened in my mind. Imprudent though you may have been, let your past errors be subject indeed of deep regret, but not of despair. You are still very young; but you have already had opportunity to appreciate the hollowness and falsehood of that world which you loved too well for your own peace; let your past experience be to you as the fire to the gold in the crucible, and you may yet have occasion to be grateful for the trials which awakened you to higher and better hopes."

She had hardly ceased speaking when the door again opened, and the pure and heavenly eyes of the younger Lady O'Halloran met my own.

"The world has done her injustice, Margaret," said my kind comforter; "take her to your heart, for the bruised reed must be bound up."

Long and earnest was the embrace which we exchanged; but even amid all my emotion I felt humbled by the striking contrast which we presented. Calm and serene in her almost saint-like beauty, no cloud had gathered upon the radiant brow of that young girl; no trace of passion had marred the purity of her beauty; while I was crushed and withered by the spirit-war which had so long been scorching up my youth.

I was not, however, suffered to dwell long upon so bitter a contemplation, for the watchful old lady, as if conscious that a new source of suffering had been opened within me, suddenly exclaimed: "You must allow me, my dear Lady Dornton, to assume at once the authority of an old and sincere friend. You cannot remain under this roof at present; nor are you competent to control the mournful arrangements which must necessarily be made, before either your mother or Lord Otterford can arrive from town; go then at once to the Hall with Margaret; my son is from home, and no one can intrude upon your privacy; I will remain here for a short time, during which your woman can obey any orders which you may wish to give, and then follow you. Meanwhile, Margaret will herself bear you company, and, I trust, afford you comfort."

I could only bless her for the suggestion; and ere long I left the house of death calmer, and more full of hope than I had expected again to be in this world.

A faint sickness crept over me as I passed the chamber of my husband; but I nevertheless approached the door, and would have entered to look upon him for the last time, as though this tardy duty could compensate for my past errors. My intention was, however, instantly negatived by Lady O'Halloran, who was already aware of the frightful spectacle which would have awaited me; nor did I attempt to dispute her will.

And thus I once more quitted the home of my childhood, amid silence, and gloom, and terror; leaving behind no one to regret me, or to sympathize in my early sorrows. All was darkness here; but still before me rose one distant ray of light. The torch had been ignited by the fair young creature who bore me company, and who had already whispered, amid her tears, words of divine consolation which I now heard for the first time, and which seemed to bring peace upon their breath.

CHAPTER LVI.

I was transported to a new world. I was like the tempest-tossed and shipwrecked mariner, who is suddenly cast ashore upon one of those pleasure-teeming islands, where all is fresh, and green, and young, as though it had just sprung into existence; one of those dreamy and delicious latitudes of which distant voyagers bring back tales which are so glowing as to seem almost fabulous. No ill-judged and officious sympathy was forced upon me at moments when I was unable to bear the words of consolation; no retrospect was intruded upon me which could jar one chord of my weary spirits; but in those hours the beautiful young wife, her eyes teeming with a quiet joy which to me was as novel as it was soothing, would come and seat herself beside me, with her infant in her arms, and gradually win me back to composure.

It was a holy picture; and it awoke my heart to thoughts and feelings hitherto unknown to me. Even such as she was might I have been, had I known how to regulate my passions, and to control my vanity. How fatal had been my mistake!

Day succeeded day in the same unbroken and spirit-healing calm. I knew that Lord Otterford had arrived at Rooksley, and that an official investigation had taken place which had ratified the fact of Sir James's involuntary self-destruction. In announcing to me the refusal of my mother to comply with my request that she should come to me in my grief, the kind-hearted Lady O'Halloran was careful to mitigate the pang which she imagined that her information must necessarily inflict, by also acquainting me with the satisfaction expressed by Lord Otterford at my removal from the house to her generous guardianship, and the request he had ventured that she would continue to afford me her protection until some definite arrangement could be made.

"When all is over," she concluded, "he will visit you here, before he again departs for town, and I would counsel you, my dear Eveleen, to entreat his influence with your mother to receive you under her own roof, at least until the expiration of your mourning. I am aware that you will have much to suffer, much to endure without resentment, should she accede to this arrangement; but remember, my dear child, that if you are called on greatly to forbear, so you have also greatly erred, and must pay the penalty of those errors, in patience and expiation."

"I feel—I know it all, my dear Lady O'Halloran; and I will strive, indeed I will, to become less unworthy of the affection which you have lavished upon me; but, oh! you cannot guess what it will cost me to lose your fostering care, and to be cast once more, solitary and unloved, upon the world. I have told you all my wretched story; you are aware that there is still a far-off hope to which I cling; and how earnestly I desire, before that hope is realized, to have rendered myself more deserving of the happiness which it will insure. You know, too, that I cannot look back upon my married life, short as it has been, with one feeling of comfort or consolation; and that its fearful termination is a source of terror rather than regret. Judge, then, of what I have still to undergo, when I shall no longer have either precept or example to guide me—nothing but bitterness, and taunt, and scorn!"

"Have I not taught you where to look for support?"

"You have, indeed; and in that support alone can I trust during the many weary months which await me."

And she had done so; gently, but in surprise at my insensibility, she had led me on to entertain a less exalted idea of mere human and human perfectibility; she had

taught me to look into my own heart, and to discover its hollowness; she had, in short, wakened a new nature within me, unstable and weak as yet, it is true, but which might perchance prove to be the germ of better things; and this, too, in the space of one short week, without dogmatism, without dictation, without rebuke; but simply, earnestly, and fondly; as a mother might have recalled her wandering child to the yearning heart which panted to receive her back.

No wonder, then, that I deprecated any change in my position; that I shrank at the idea of the visit which awaited me; the meeting which, in every point of view, presented a bitter trial. My own mother had spurned my prayer for help; and it was he whom I had still more deeply injured, who was about to stand before me; perhaps to rebuke me with my treachery; perhaps to reproach me with my past errors; perhaps, too—and this was the most horrible thought of all—perhaps, too, to hurl at me suspicions too frightful to be reduced to words!

Nor will any who have followed me through this confession of a wasted life, be surprised to learn that even with the images of this anticipated trial, now at the very threshold, mingled the dread of leaving the roof of Lady O'Halloran, from a nearer and dearer consideration than even those which I had educed to herself. I felt that this sojourn in a home where all breathed of purity and peace, must tend to exalt me in the eyes of Devereux. He would see that I was not in truth the outcast he had believed; that the good and the virtuous had not abandoned me utterly—and this consideration was my best consoler.

I dared not repine that I had heard nothing of him since that fateful morning. Ten days had barely elapsed, and the body of Sir James was not yet committed to the grave. How then could he have ventured to intrude upon my solitude, without a breach of that respect which I was now more than ever anxious to exact from him? It was true, that, as well aware as myself of the actual state of my feeling toward my husband, he knew that my grief demanded no such concession on his part; but still the exigences of society must be observed; and in my case, more stringently than ever, compromised as I was by the past.

For the first time I began—ay, even now, when I had not as yet disguised myself in the mourning garments which were prepared for me—to dwell upon that future from which I had hitherto shrunk. What did I not promise myself? For the first time I had begun also to attach a value to the wealth which would enable Devereux to abandon his profession, and to give himself up entirely to the life of happiness and peace which he had so often painted to me in glowing colors, too brilliant, alas! for the pencil of reality.

From these sweet dreams I was startled on the following morning by the aspect of the funereal dress which was spread out in my dressing-room. I had been prepared to expect it on the day upon which the obsequies of Sir James were to be performed: but when I was actually in presence of this dismal mockery of woe, and looked into my own heart, it seemed to afford the most bitter epigram, alike upon the present and the past; and my blood curdled as I submitted to its adjustment. My long and luxuriant hair was strained back, and concealed beneath the close borders of a muslin cap, which formed a dense and jealous frame-work to my pale features; the long, hanging sleeves, the clinging crape, and the inconvenient texture of my mourning dress, were all novel, and all repelling; but I made no comment upon either; and shortly afterward, plunged once more into a train of thought which diverted me from the present.

I was recalled, however, to the fact of the change which had been effected in my whole appearance, by the involuntary start of both my hostesses when I descended to the breakfast-room.

"How beautiful!" murmured the young mother, while she strained her baby to her heart, as though she sought to avert from its innocent head so bitter a fate as that on which she looked.

"How melancholy!" sighed the more chastened old lady, as she pressed her lips to my forehead. "Eveleen, my dear Eveleen, let me hope, let me trust that you are now clad in the weeds of your past follies; and that when you throw off these mourning garments, you will also cast away with them all the evil influences of your former life. You will then, indeed have reason to bless the day when you were stricken; and to rejoice in the chastisement by which you are now visited."

Little more passed during the meal. I was asking myself, if I should, indeed, fulfil the hop which had just been uttered for me; and m companions were too considerate to intrud upon a silence and a preoccupation, whic they felt to be only too consistent with my po sition. Indifferent, and worse than indifferen as I had been to Sir James as a wife, I coul not, nevertheless, contemplate his untimely fa without a pang, the more bitter because I wa conscious that I had probably been its involu tary cause. Had not Devereux appeared befo him at that eventful moment, he would, witho doubt, have been more guarded in his mov ments; and was not Devereux even then i his way to the meeting which I had myself a pointed?

These were bitter convictions; and as t unconscious tears streamed over my w cheeks, I ceased to believe myself so guilt as I had hitherto striven to appear; but th once more uprose the memory of the cruel ch which was practiced upon me—the falseh and tyranny of which I had been made the v tim—and I passed from the contemplation my wrongs, to the prospect of brighter days come. These were again banished in t turn, by gloomy visions of the house of de the shrouded corse, and the funereal train, wh had replaced the dazzling crowds collec there during my earlier years. Adela had q ted that roof only to die; Sir James had sou its shelter only to follow her to the grave. hideous phantasmagoria flitted before me! tred, and falsehood, and treachery, and blo and I stood alone amid all these, powerless o avert their consequences, even as I had t incapable of anticipating their advent.

Never had I felt less sure of myself. Under the guardianship of Lady O'Halloran, and strengthened by her affectionate and judicious counsels, I found it easy to form the most praiseworthy resolutions; but I had learnt enough of human nature to be painfully conscious that resolutions, however exemplary, are by no means infallible; and that neither my tendencies, nor my education, had given me a right to expect that I should ever acquire that perfect self-government, or be enabled to exert that utter self-abnegation, which were necessary to render me morally the equal of those whom I aspired to emulate.

Meanwhile, the spirit-struggle had, at least, taught me to look upon my own advantages with a less partial eye, and to feel how truly dependent I in truth was upon the generosity of others. What now availed my wealth, my pride, or my beauty? That world which I had resolved to subdue to my will, or to despise, had, like a trodden serpent, turned upon me, and stung me in the heel. I had not even a home, no shelter to which calumny could not pursue me: and my one vision of future happiness was still, certain as it seemed, faint, and afar off; and to be realized only after an interval on which I dared not dwell.

Such were the meditations of my first morning of visible widowhood; and when, on the conclusion of the repast of which I had been merely a spectator, I again retired to the solitude of my own apartment, the same reflections followed me.

The windows were flung open, and I leant eagerly out to catch the cool wind upon my throbbing brow, as it swept over the leafy stretch of forest-timber before me Its influence was wholesome. As I gazed out, I clasped my hands in prayer; when, as if in answer to the appeal, I heard booming upon the wind, slow, measured, and rendered even more solemn by distance, the deep pealing of a death-bell. It needed no interpreter; it was the toll of the village church bell of Rooksley, inviting to the shelter of its vaults the dead for whom I wore those clinging weeds.

Instinctively I fell upon my knees, and still I heard the solemn cadence rolling over hill and valley, and proclaiming to never-dying nature the departure of another of her children.

At length it ceased, and I knew that the mourning train had entered the sacred house. All would soon be over; and I shuddered as I remembered with how little waste of time and ceremony that body was in death committed to the earth, which in life had been tended with so much care and gentleness. This must be one day my fate also. The ghastly shroud, the choking coffin, the writhing worm—oh, it was, indeed, most horrible, for I had not yet learnt to look beyond these antecedents of another and a more glorious life.

It will easily be foreseen that emotions of this description had humbled my pride, and chastened my spirit, sufficiently to enable me to regard even the tardy and brief visit of Lord Otterford with gratitude, if not with hope.

He was to visit me shortly after his return from the funeral, and to set off the same night for town. There was, indeed, little to detain him within the gloomy and abandoned walls of Rooksley; and in the near neighborhood of what had once been the happy home of Emily Vernon.

CHAPTER LVII.

I was yet upon my knees, with my face leaning on my folded arms, when the door of my dressing-room was so softly opened that I was not aware of being seen; until I heard the low voice of my hostess whisper gently:

"Here is the mourner. Judge if she has need of your pity and protection."

I raised my weary head, and with an emotion more acute than I had ever before experienced, I saw Lord Otterford with a pale cheek, but a stern eye, standing before me. Lady O'Halloran had already retired, and was closing the door behind her. As I slowly rose from my knees, I detected that the expression of Lord Otterford's countenance softened, as if involuntarily. The deep and evidently sincere dejection in which he found me had touched him, despite his sense of wrong; and as he threw himself into a seat, he covered his face with his spread hand.

I could neither speak, nor approach him.

"Lady Dornton—" he at length commenced. "Oh, call me Eveleen!"—I exclaimed imploringly; "if you would not crush me to the very earth. Tell me that you forgive me, or I shall sink under my shame and my remorse."

"Of what avail would now be my forgiveness?" he asked with sad seriousness; "you have yourself forever destroyed my power to serve you. You best know how I had earned so deep and cruel a hatred; but the evil is now as total as it is irrevocable. Your mother and myself have met but once since the fatal day on which you betrayed my bitter secret—a secret which I had expiated in remorse and tears—and then it was only that we might consult upon the duties necessary to be performed alike toward the living and the dead. The latter I have accomplished, with the privacy and absence of ostentation suited to the melancholy circumstances; the former, which I am now to fulfill, is, however, the most painful. Had I found you reckless, and unimpressed by the late catastrophe, as I own that I feared I should do, one portion of my task might have been remitted, while the other would have affected me far less, for I could then have told my tidings without emotion. As it is, Eveleen,—as it is, I feel compelled both to pardon and to pity you."

I rushed forward, and cast myself at his feet.

"Yes—you do well," he pursued; "that is the most fitting posture you can assume while listening to what I have to tell. The pride of self-dependence and self-appreciation have nothing in common with such an hour as this, when the scent of the death-soil is still clinging to my own garments, and the solemn words of the burial-service sounding in my ears; and when the weeds in which you are yourself clad are new and strange to you. I will spare you any unnecessary details for both our sakes; but with certain circumstances it is alike expedient and proper that you should be made acquainted. I need scarcely inform you that Sir James has left no testamentary document of any description, either here or in own. No foreshadowing of

his approaching and fearful end had warned him to accomplish this duty; and I was, consequently, from your own silence upon the subject, left free to comply with the injunctions of your mother as to the mode of his interment. And here, Eveleen, I should have bounded my relation with regard to your unfortunate husband, had I found you in a less becoming frame of mind; but, under existing circumstances, I feel compelled to confide to you one fact, which, after you have recovered the first shock of the intelligence, may tend to lessen the compunction which you must naturally experience when you look back upon your conduct as a wife."

I pressed my lips upon his hand, and listened eagerly.

"You may have heard that Sir James had rested the fatal fowling-piece upon the ground in order to read a letter, which he had just received from town by his own messenger; and that he was still engaged in its perusal when the sudden appearance of an individual—Eveleen, I detect your shudder, but I will not, I *dare* not ask you if you can determine the identity of that individual; for despite all the facts which would seem to negative my suspicion, I am but too painfully convinced of a frightful truth—that letter is now in my possession." He paused. He evidently dreaded the effect of his next words; while I gazed at him with dry and dilated eyes, and parched and parted lips.

"That letter," he resumed, after an instant, "was in reply to one which he had himself written; and it came from—Mrs. Delamaine."

I made no gesture of indignation; I felt none. I only bowed my head once more upon his knees overwhelmed by a feeling which was half horror and half relief. Lord Otterford bent over me in wonder, as he whispered, "Do you understand me, Eveleen?"

I made a gesture of assent.

"Do you desire to see that letter?"

"Never!"

"And you are right, poor child! Suffice it then that, although its contents by no means justify your past errors, they nevertheless afford painful evidence that the indignities to which you have been lately subjected, arose less from a desire on the part of your husband to punish your levity and to reform your conduct, than to disembarrass himself of your presence; and this fact, mortifying as it must appear to you, I have considered it my duty not to withhold in justice to both parties. I must also state, although I am aware that upon this point you are careless, that the affairs of Sir James are not considerably involved, despite his apparently profuse expenditure; but as nearly all his engagements appear to have been debts contracted at the gaming-table, which may be legally evaded, it is necessary that I should understand if you intend to recognize them."

"To the last penny, my lord."

"I anticipated no less from your sense of right. And now, Eveleen," he added sadly; "we have at length only to speak of yourself. What are your own views and wishes?"

"You are aware, my lord," I said with a shrinking heart, but struggling to obey the advice of Lady O'Halloran, "that I have already entreated the countenance and protection of my mother."

"I was, indeed, so informed. But surely, Eveleen, you must have understood too well the nature of your mother to anticipate her concurrence in such an arrangement, and I consequently regarded the proposal as merely the effect of sudden isolation; or, perhaps, of a desire to exculpate yourself from any future reproach of reckless emancipation from her authority and guidance. You could not have forgotten that you had so recently inflicted upon her an injury which her haughty nature never can forgive. I have myself found it difficult, most difficult to do so, for it will embitter all my future life—judge, therefore, of the effect which it was calculated to produce on her."

"Oh, had you known, could you guess the insulting taunts, the bitter insults which wrung from me that unrighteous retaliation," I exclaimed with clasped hands, "you would be merciful."

"Yet you should have remembered," he said hoarsely, and evidently struggling against some powerful emotion, "that your mother was not the only victim of your treachery—that your words carried with them a venom which distilled a double poison."

Self-convicted and repentant, I dared not seek to justify myself.

"The effect of this fatal error has extended still further," pursued Lord Otterford, who was at no loss to interpret the humiliation of my silence; "for it has tended to close your mother's heart against you, I fear forever. My entreaties—for, wounded as I was, Eveleen, I could still feel for you—produced no change in her determination; she has refused not only to receive, but even to see you. Her utmost condescension was the expression of her desire that you should, at least during the year of your widowhood, fulfill the intention of Sir James, and reside at Glenfillan, under the protection of her sister."

I gasped for breath. The vision of Adela's death-bed rose before me, with all its appalling accessories; and it was with difficulty that I could support myself.

"Everything has been already prepared at the castle for your reception," he continued; "you will be, in every respect, your own mistress, and secure from all the comments of a censorious world, which must have time to forget the past."

"And do you also advise this, my lord?" I asked faintly.

"I can suggest no other measure of equal prudence. I am aware that the trial will be heavy; but you will have it in your power, Eveleen, to render it profitable."

"My mother shall be obeyed," I said in a whisper.

Lord Otterford laid his hand upon my head with parental tenderness; and then, clasping one of mine within it, he said firmly:

"One thing more, my poor child, and then our conference is ended. You have wounded me deeply; and I claim, in extenuation of the injury, your solemn promise that, during your retirement at Glenfillan, you will hold no correspondence, either personally or by letter, with Colonel Devereux, without my express permission. Give me this pledge for your own sake, and I will not only endeavor to forget the

past, but I will watch over you as a fond father watches over a cherished child."

For such a condition as this I had been wholly unprepared. I was then to be utterly alone; unsolaced by the aspect of one friendly face; unsupported by the sound of one familiar voice; left in ignorance of the feelings and the sympathy of him whose affection had now become the only hope of my existence! Yet the accent of Lord Otterford was so full of conviction, so earnest, and so persuasive, that I could not resist its influence. I promised what he exacted.

"Be true to your pledge, Eveleen," he said as he bent down, and kissed my forehead; "and, should you wish it, I will frequently be your guest. I must at once return to town: your own affairs exact it; and it will be with a heart relieved from a weight of anxiety on your account, that I shall report your obedience to your mother. I would entreat you, meanwhile, to regulate with Lady O'Halloran (to whom you owe a heavy debt of gratitude), the period of your own departure; that done, acquaint me with your determination, and I will hasten to protect you to your new home. And now, farewell; give me your hand once more; let not the promise of this hour, in which I feel a faith which it would indeed pain me to find misplaced, prove fallacious; and I trust that brighter prospects may open upon us all."

Need I say with what emotion I responded to this unhoped-for kindness? I forgot for the moment all save my happiness in being thus restored to the good opinion of my mother's husband. I scarcely cared to remember that that mother herself had not vouchsafed to me one word of sympathy or pity; I forgot the exile to which I had pledged myself; my enforced separation from Devereux: the yet unclosed tomb of my husband; I felt only that I might yet regain the esteem of the world, and become an object of affection to those from whom my former faults had, as I once believed, separated me forever.

CHAPTER LVIII.

My leave-taking with Lady O'Halloran and her daughter was a most trying one; when, at the close of a month, I summoned Lord Otterford to perform his promise. I had lately lived in such an atmosphere of affection and peace that I had almost ceased to regret the world and its gaieties; but my old yearning grew upon me when I contemplated the change to which I was about to be subjected. I repressed the feeling, however; and strengthened by the approbation of my estimable hostess, I uttered no repining; and the rather as she pledged herself that she would spend some months with me at Glenfillan, accompanied by the gentle Margaret and her infant daughter.

The gratification of Lord Otterford was lively and sincere when he was apprised of this arrangement. He at once felt, as a man of the world, the importance of such a concession to my present reputation, and future respectability. He wrung the hand of the old lady with a fervor, and offered his thanks with an energy, which convinced me of his own interest in my fate, and helped to sustain my sinking courage; and thus, amid tears, and blessings, and regrets, I left the house which to me had been indeed "a refuge in the time of trouble."

We traveled slowly, for my considerate companion appeared as little anxious as myself to hasten my arrival at my desolate home; nor did he spare a care or an exertion to lessen the fatigue and tedium of the journey. With a delicacy which I deeply felt, he cautiously avoided all reference to such portions of the past as must tend to humble me in my own eyes; while he explained the new duties which had devolved upon me, and the necessity of my applying my mind and my energies to the proper application of the wealth which was now at my exclusive disposition.

"Hitherto, Evelcen," he said, "that wealth has merely been the source of misery and folly; redeem it from this reproach, and you will then learn its real value."

I readily pledged myself to the task, though I had only a vague idea of the means by which so desirable an end was to be accomplished: and having given Lord Otterford full powers to act for me upon every point according to his own discretion, I at length reached the gloomy termination of my journey. As we drove into the vast and desolate court, I flung myself upon the breast of my companion; and for the first time since our departure from England, gave free loose to my long pent-up emotions; but I soon rallied when he represented to me the inevitable effects of so ill-timed a weakness; and before my meeting with Lady Flora, I had succeeded in suppressing all external demonstrations of the misery that lay heavy at my heart.

I shall not weary the reader by a detail of the loneliness and monotony of my existence at Glenfillan, after the departure of my affectionate and anxious traveling companion. Suffice it that at the close of a month or two of utter despondency, I began to accuse myself of cowardice and egotism in thus wasting life in weak and useless indolence. The thought of Devereux returned upon me, too, brighter and dearer than ever. I must not fail now, for his sake! I looked around me, and each succeeding day discovered new much I was indebted to the consideration of Lord Otterford. My personal servants had been bribed by an increase of salary to bury themselves, at least for a few months, in the country, in order to afford me their services; the appliances of convenience and even luxury which had been dedicated to my especial use in town, had preceded me to Scotland: and Lady Flora, the tyrannical jailer who had lent herself unhesitatingly to the projects of Sir James, forewarned in time, was all humility and obsequiousness. The one great ambition of her life was realized; she was again an indweller of her father's castle; and as she had been made aware that her continuance under that coveted roof depended solely on my pleasure, she bent herself, with admirable ductility, to the new exigences of her position.

My faithful Susan was a treasure to me amid this natural and moral wilderness. I had requested Lord Otterford, while arranging my pecuniary affairs, to insure such a provision for life to the faithful girl as might enable her to realize the fond visions of her heart; but she refused to abandon me during my sojourn a-

Glenfillan: and to her I turned for comfort and encouragement in every moment of despondency. She it was who drew my attention to the school founded by my sister, and to the poor whom she had fed; and I eagerly embraced the prospect of occupation and interest afforded by an emulation of her exertions.

I soon became popular in the neighborhood, for I was rich in means, and subdued in spirit; and where the evil was beyond the reach of gold, I was blessed for my words of sympathy and comfort. My home-hours were the most difficult to support with resignation; for when I found myself alone in the keen mountain air, or seated in the humble dwellings of my pensioners, my thoughts were not wholly absorbed by self, and for a time I forgot to dwell upon my trials, and learned to trust in a future which was to compensate for all. It was during my periods of enforced companionship with Lady Flora that I felt the whole weight and tedium of my position. No longer able, from weakened sight, to weave the knights and shepherdesses in which she formerly delighted, she had taken refuge in the knitting-needles bequeathed to her by her maternal aunt; and wholly absorbed in her monotonous and interminable occupation, passed hours beside me without the utterance of a syllable.

Such was the broad outline of my existence, until the arrival of my promised guests; only relieved at long intervals by the brief visits of Lord Otterford, who encouraged me in my faint efforts in well-doing, and chid me gently for the neglect which I had evidently shown toward my own health. I was in truth sadly changed. The interest which I took in all that passed around me was forced and wearisome; and even while I conscientiously adhered to the promise which I had myself given, I bitterly felt the utter silence and estrangement of Devereux. For a time I consoled myself with the belief that the same pledge had been extorted from him; but gradually this idea ceased to satisfy me. It was easy to wring such a promise from me, for I had no power to withhold it under my peculiar circumstances; but who could compel him to so extreme a measure? Was he not the master of his own actions, and accountable to no one for his movements? And yet he came not; although long months had elapsed since our separation, and that my year of widowhood was drawing to a close.

A strange, vague fear grew upon me. I strove resolutely to shake it off, but I could only partially succeed; and throughout the long, long, weary winter, during the dreary hours of my inhabitation with Lady Flora, this undefined terror, to which I did not dare to give a name, grew and strengthened upon me. Not once had Lord Otterford alluded to the existence of his nephew, during his short and hurried visits; nor had I ventured to utter one inquiry. Of my mother he said little, and that little was discouraging. Satisfied that I had obeyed her will, she had ceased even to mention me; and when the subject was forced upon her, the coldness and indifference of her replies forbade all hope of any concession on her part.

At length came the spring; and with the spring, the beloved guests whom I had so long awaited. Lady O'Halloran, with her usual far-sighted consideration, had deferred her visit until near the close of my year of mourning. She wished to judge of the effect which this long seclusion had produced upon my character, and she had also another reason, which she did not state, but which I was subsequently enabled to appreciate.

Our meeting was even more sad than we anticipated. Shocked and alarmed at the change which was visible in my whole appearance; at my attenuated form, the red spot in my cheek, and the bright light in my eye, the warm-hearted old lady could not conceal her uneasiness; and our first greetings were scarcely over when she drew me apart, and pillowing my pale brow on her shoulder, began to question me as to the cause of my evidently altered health.

"Be frank with me, Eveleen," she said; "you have some new and pungent sorrow gnawing at your heart, which is independent of the past. What is it, my poor child?"

The flood-gates of my grief opened at once. I had hitherto borne my burden in silence; not even to Susan had I confided the apprehension which was sapping my existence; but now I poured forth on the bosom of this inestimable friend all the anguish and humiliation of my spirit.

Lady O'Halloran listened dejectedly, and in silence. "I might have foreseen," she said bitterly, "that you still loved this man; but, Eveleen, you must no longer yield to a weakness which has become unworthy. I have deferred my arrival here until this late period, in order to await with you the close of your period of exile, and to reclaim you as a guest. You have yet much to endure, but you will not disappoint my hopes; you will struggle to be just to yourself; and to avenge your blighted name. I will not abandon you to yourself until you have convinced me that you are worthy of the trust."

I looked up at her in silence; but with beseeching in my eyes.

"Yes—perhaps it will be better so—" she murmured as if unconsciously; "sooner or later the blow must fall, and why not now, when her own fears have partially prepared her for the truth? You must forget this man, poor sufferer," she continued, as she folded me in her arms; "there is a gulf between you which can never be overpassed. This is your last trial, and you must receive it in patience and humility."

"He will not obey their bidding," I gasped out; "be the difficulties what they may, his affection will overcome them."

"Eveleen, remember how long he has abandoned you to sorrow and to doubt."

"He was forbidden, like myself, to seek a meeting—he hoped for brighter days—he trusted in patience, as I have done, to the future."

"Deceive yourself no longer, my poor child. In the cruel pride of his heart he has forsaken you—to preserve what he sees fit to call his honor, he has left you to the desolation of your own spirit. The passion of which he boasted could not resist the influence of envenomed tongues; he had not the moral courage requisite to enforce either your justification, or his own—and, in short, Eveleen, you must think of him no more."

I made no effort to interrupt these crushing

words. I listened eagerly, breathlessly, as though my life hung upon their import; and yet I did not clearly comprehend their force; and Lady O'Halloran had long ceased to speak, while I still listened as though I had more to learn, and that all I had already heard were subject of comparative insignificance.

"Speak, Eveleen," at length exclaimed my companion, terrified at the silence by which her communication had been succeeded; "tell me that you will forget this weak and worthless man."

"We forget all in the grave," I said, as I rose calmly from beside her. "*All!* even the one hope of a whole existence. And now let me leave you for a time; I must be alone—to think."

"I will accompany you to your room, Eveleen; do not restrain your tears, they will relieve you."

"I have no tears to shed," I whispered hoarsely, as I tottered from the apartment upon her supporting arm; "I have no time for tears; I must be alone—to think."

I was conveyed to my chamber, and laid in my bed. A brain-fever supervened. The same physician who witnessed the agonies of Adela now watched over mine; the same dreary stillness reigned throughout the house. Lord O'Halloran hastened to remove his wife and child to their more happy home; but his mother lingered beside what she believed to be my death-couch, in order to fulfill her last pledge to her old friend.

I was not, however, destined to sink under my trial. Life was yet too strong within me; and after many weeks of danger and delirium, my faculties recovered their balance. To what a dreary waking was I condemned! Even the wild and fitful visions of my fever had been less bitter and exhausting than the crushing memories which hovered, like foul spectres of the past, about my restless pillow during my convalescence. How often did I close my languid and stiffened eyelids, and pray to die—to die as Adela had done, and to be at rest. But even as that impious wish rose within me, the low-voiced breath of prayer murmured beside my bed; and the ministering angel who knew the struggle that was going on within me, recalled me to calmer and more holy thoughts.

Slowly and painfully I was restored to health, but I was no longer what I had been. The chastening hand which had been laid heavily upon me in mercy, had sobered down the effervescence of my nature, and made me a new being. Humble, obedient, and submissive, I offered no opposition to the will of those about me; and when my strength was sufficiently restored to admit of the arrangement, I passively suffered myself to be removed from Glenfillan, and conducted by easy stages to the home of my unwearying friend, under her protection and that of Lord Otterford.

I remained for months beneath her hospitable roof; and, could I have blotted out the memory of the past, nothing would have been wanting to my happiness; but the arrow had been driven home; and I had not strength to wrench it out. I knew that my fair fame was blighted—that my mother had abandoned me—and that the dream of my life was over. Devereux had become a husband. His bride was young, and beautiful, and wealthy as I had been; but upon her the breath of calumny had never rested—his honor was secure from taint! This was indeed a bitter pang, but it was the last. Thenceforward I acquired courage to look steadfastly at my position, and my resolve was taken.

"I will purchase Rooksley from Lady Madelaine," I said, in reply to an inquiry from my hostess. "She will cede it to me without difficulty, for she has no associations with the place which she can desire to retain. There I shall not be quite desolate; for your society and that of the good rector will reconcile me to myself, and teach me to forget the height from which I have fallen. I have no longer anything in common with the happy and the prosperous; but I may still solace the suffering and the needy. You alone will not misjudge me; and I shall require all your support to enable me to endure the long years of life which are spread out before me."

"Speak not so despondingly, my dear Eveleen," replied my listener; "time will do much; you are still in the first bloom of womanhood; and may yet have long years of happiness before you, both as a wife and a mother."

"Never!" I said emphatically. "No man shall take scorn and reproach to his bosom through my means; nor, after my past experience, do I anticipate that, even had I formed a different resolution, an individual could be found so generous to me, and so unjust to himself. No, my kind friend, I have forever done with vague and dreamy visions. Society has rejected me, and I bow beneath its fiat, however I may question its equity. There is much to do at Rooksley; much misery to alleviate; much ignorance to instruct. May I, in my character of a monitress, learn to practice the lessons which I shall endeavor to enforce."

Convinced of my sincerity, Lady O'Halloran encouraged me by her approbation; and soon my return to Rooksley was arranged and accomplished; nor was it long ere the voice of gladness and revel was once more heard within its walls; for shortly after my establishment, Susan was united to the husband of her choice; and the event was productive of no regret to myself, as I retained her bridegroom in my service.

I had judged correctly in believing that my mother would offer no obstacle to my purchase of the property. Aware that it must revert to me at her death, and satisfied that so long as I remained in that retirement, I should not cross her own path, she exerted her energies to expedite the transfer; and in a shorter time than I had dared to hope, I found myself mistress of the coveted domain.

And now, what more have I to add? Who cannot appreciate the tedium, the regrets, and the despair of such a waste of life? Ten, twenty weary years passed over me; and those who looked upon me would have declared me happy—but I was not so. Feverishly impatient to create new interests and new ties, I entered upon the duties and privileges of my new position with an uncalculating and reckless profusion both of energy and outlay, which called forth the expostulations of Lady O'Halloran, and excited the astonishment of Dr. James. The paupers in the almshouses built by my mother had increased pensions; and the children in her

school were newly clothed the old church was cleaned and beautified; cottages were leveled and rebuilt · the idle were employed; the sick tended, and the aged placed beyond the reach of want. Many, in the gratitude of their hearts, spoke of me as a saint, but they could not look beneath the surface. There were times when I was impatient and irritable under my misfortunes; and asked myself why I was thus called upon to suffer, when the errors of so many others were tolerated, without either expiation or reproach. In those hours the tears which I shed beside the bed of pain, or with which I listened to the tale of sorrow, did not flow unreservedly for the sufferer whom I was there to soothe; they were wept also for myself; nor did the words of heavenly consolation which I had learned to utter always reach my heart. That rebellious heart was yet an alien to its own peace.

I struggled, however, in my better moments, to attain to a more wholesome and a more fitting frame of mind; but I had much, indeed, to learn, and still more to unlearn. No one could with impunity pass through the ordeal to which I had been subjected by my ill-regulated passions; and thus, even when I endeavored to press forward, I frequently fainted by the way.

In the midst of these conflicting feelings, I was summoned to the sick-bed of my more than mother; and with my heart torn by fear and misgiving I hastened to her side. How unlike was her period of suffering to that through which I had so lately passed! There was no remorse here to strew the pillow with thorns—no disgrace to cast a gloom over the atmosphere—no abandonment to make the sinking spirit shriek out in its desolation. All was calm, peaceful and full of hope; and the blessing which she breathed, with her dying hand pressed heavily upon my head, rose as a sweet incense to heaven, and hallowed what it offered.

Still I lived on; and I did good; for it is a merciful as well as a marvelous dispensation that the faults of the erring are sometimes made to minister to the happiness of those who suffer; and so it was with me. I imparted the joy which I could no longer feel; I carried with me the consolation of which I myself despaired; and it was not until time had touched me with a gentle but a certain hand, that I began to consider the past in its true colors.

More than once my faded beauty or my known wealth would have enabled me to risk a new venture on the stormy waves of that world by which my very existence had been forgotten; but I no longer aspired to its suffrages; nor did I care to peril my present peace for the uncertain tenure of any earthly affection.

The commencement of my narrative will suffice to prove, that I have long been reconciled to my lot. Childless, widowed, and an orphan I am not, nevertheless, left desolate in my old age. On the death of my mother, which was occasioned by a cold taken on quitting a heated room in a costume ill-suited to any violent transition of atmosphere, and which was too sudden to enable me to offer her my last duty as a child, Lord Otterford hastened at my request to pass his period of mourning at Rooksley. He was rapidly becoming an old man; he had ceased to value society; and had few wants save those which are necessary to a well-furnished table; and thus, as we had no vow of abstinence at my hermitage, it will be readily understood that I prevailed upon him, without much difficulty, to become my permanent companion. His games at chess with Dr. James are interminable; and I might, perhaps, sometimes find them tedious, were my solitude not enlivened by the frequent presence of Mary O'Halloran, who was in infancy the solace of my sorrow, and who is in her beautiful and blooming girlhood the charm of my old age. My worthy neighbors at the Hall insist that she bears a striking resemblance to what I must once have been; and my father-in-law, whose eyes are dimmed by time, and whose perceptions are somewhat blunted by his habits of self-indulgence, eagerly ratifies their verdict.

May she have a better fate! She is my adopted heiress, and the hope of my waning life.

THE END.

THE JEALOUS WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY GROUP.

"Of course, Miss Trevanion—of course it must be as you see fit to decide;" said a stately old gentleman, with snow-white hair, heavy black eyebrows, and a countenance which, although decidedly handsome, betokened alike haughtiness and obstinacy; "I am naturally as well aware as yourself, that you have long passed the age when I possessed a *legal* right to control you; and I can easily comprehend that you presume upon your position, as an only child, to brave my wishes. Beware, however, before it is too late; for none—mark me well—*none* have ever done so with impunity since the commencement of my career. If you doubt this fact, you have only to inquire of your mother."

"Oh! pray, Mr. Trevanion;" expostulated a nervous voice, issuing from amid a mass of costly shawls, and from the depths of a lounging chair; "let no appeal be made to me. It is bad enough to have my quiet disturbed by this altercation between you and Ida, without being required to interfere in it."

"Altercation, madam! What do you understand by the word altercation? You surely can not comprehend its significance. There can be no altercation between a father and his child. The bare idea of such a thing is preposterous!"

"Well, perhaps it is. Substitute any other term you please. It is quite indifferent to me." And the complicated mass of drapery quivered for an instant, and then became once more motionless.

"Idiot! *woman!*" muttered the head of the family, as he paced slowly across the floor; then once more pausing before his daughter, who stood partially supported by a table on which her hand rested, he continued more audibly:—"You see, Miss Trevanion, that you must not calculate upon the *powerful* protection of your mother. She disclaims all interference, and she is right; it *could* have done no good, and it *might* have done much evil." There was an ugly sneer about the corners of his mouth as he spoke, and it was unperceived by the young lady, who had, from the commencement of the discussion, kept her eyes riveted upon a book of engravings which lay open near her.

"I trust that I require no protection, when I venture to urge the happiness of my future life on my own father;" was the calm rejoinder of the lofty beauty, who seemed as resolute of will as her parent; and, as she spoke, her steady gaze, for the first time, rested upon his flushed and angry countenance.

Very beautiful, in truth, was the face thus lifted to his, although the freshness of girlhood had evidently passed away to give place to the rich loveliness of that next phase of female attraction, when every charm is ripened into full perfection; and the mind impresses a new power, unknown to mere thoughtless, unreflecting youth. Miss Trevanion had attained her twenty-sixth year; her intellect was fully developed; and a shade of her father's firmness gave additional expression to the large dark eyes and lofty brow, from which the raven hair was swept back in rich and massy folds. While Mrs. Trevanion crouched and cowered before the displeasure of her lord, his daughter stood erect. As she had said, the happiness of her whole life (according to her own view of the case) was at stake; and she was evidently prepared to maintain her legitimate position to the utmost.

"You know, Ida, that I can not brook opposition"—was the next evasive remark of the old gentleman.

"Nor do I ever seek to offer any, as you are well aware, sir, when the point to be contested is of slight importance; but on this occasion—"

"Well, Miss Trevanion, on this occasion? Where are your rational reasons for such ill-timed rebellion? You are ambitious, indeed, if a peer of the realm will not satisfy your vanity."

The beauty shrugged her shoulders.

"I should not ask so much."

"Ha! I understand;" thundered Mr. Trevanion, hurriedly resuming his walk; "you are in love—*You!* A rare jest, truly, but a dangerous one. Have I not warned you from your girlhood to avoid all follies of that nature until they had received my sanction?"

"You have."

"And how have you obeyed my commands?"

"As a woman ever does, until her heart teaches her that she is a free agent. I scorn all subterfuge. Had you addressed me in another tone, I might have regretted that it was not in my power to fulfill your wishes. As it is—"

"Pray, proceed, Miss Trevanion—pray, proceed."

"You have spared me that regret, sir."

"Ha! Indeed! Well, then, listen to *me*. You are our only child—*my* only child—but that fact shall avail you little, if you thus resolutely thwart my views. My uncle has a son. I hate them both, as you well know, and I have cause to do so; but, sooner than that my wealth should go to enrich the pauper whom you have

chosen to accept as a suitor, that boy, detested as he is, shall be my heir."

A deep flush mantled on the cheek of his listener for a moment, but it faded as suddenly as it had risen, and she stood calm and unmoved as before.

"Yes;" pursued Mr. Trevanion passionately: "you do not require to be told to-day how bitterly I have, through life, resented the arrogance of my more fortunate relatives. How, the son of a younger son, I was insulted by the grudging offers of assistance which were to be doled out to me, in order to secure, at least, the means of existence to a poor relation—a birth on board an Indiaman, or the honor of carrying the colors in a regiment of foot—with full powers to make my own way when I was thus generously started in life. Law, Physic, or Divinity, were too costly to be thought of; they required previous training; and education involved expense. You know, also, how I disdained such pitiful assistance, and threw myself into commerce, in order to attain independence by my own unassisted efforts."

"And you acted nobly!" was the murmured rejoinder.

"Thank you; it is at least consolatory that I have earned the approval of my own child; of the daughter, who, as I once hoped and believed, would have been enriched by my degradation—for that, as I have never forgotten, was the term applied by my aristocratic kinsman to my resolve to suffice to myself—but as you, Miss Trevanion, have willed it otherwise, I here solemnly declare, that should you obstinately adhere to your present insane project, I will leave all that I possess to Sir Jasper's son, and heir."

"In that case, sir;" said the lady steadily; "I must follow your example, and endeavor to suffice to myself."

"Be it so. Then you resolutely refuse to accept the hand of Lord Downmere?"

"I do."

"You had better take time to reflect."

"The question requires no reflection. I can not sacrifice myself to the mere empty vanity of rank."

"You prefer beggary?"

"Decidedly—with a husband, whom I could respect."

"You have more taste for the cotton gown of a pauper than the coronet of a countess?"

"Beyond all doubt—if I can wear it with more honor to myself."

"Ha!" groaned the irritated father; "this comes of an ill-assorted union—The mother's blood! The mother's blood!"

"Now really, Mr. Trevanion;" exclaimed the nervous voice of the closely-enveloped figure in the lounging chair; "you have no right to blame me for Ida's obstinacy; I am sure that I am as angry with her as you can be, for her folly in refusing the poor dear Earl; and, therefore, it is not generous in you to remind me that my father was only a merchant; for you well know that without his gold —"

"Silence, madam!" shouted the exasperated man; "are you, too, about to lecture me? Is it not enough that Miss Trevanion presumes to oppose her will to mine, without your forcing upon me the unpalatable fact that I found it expedient to further my fortunes by marrying your father's daughter?"

"I am sure, Mr. Trevanion—"

"You are sure of nothing, madam; how *can* you be so, when even *I* am thwarted and baffled at every turn? Be satisfied. I have bestowed on you one of the oldest, if not precisely one of the noblest, names in England: but still I can not expect that you should feel as I do, the disgrace which this disobedient girl desires to bring upon a proud and ancient family."

"You might allow me to speak," whimpered the weak and trembling woman.

"You might speak till doomsday, were you likely to do so to any purpose;" was the conciliating reply; "but I am now talking seriously to your daughter, and your idle interference is mistimed."

"Permit me to replace your cushion, mamma;" said Miss Trevanion, as she observed that, in her agitation, her mother had sunk helplessly back in an uncomfortable position; but her attention was declined. The querulous woman waved her away with a repulsive gesture, as she impatiently murmured: "It is all your own fault. Why do you not marry Lord Downmere, and put an end to this disagreeable dispute? I am sure I only wish that I had been so lucky as to—. Well, well, it is no use to talk of that now; but pray let there be an end of all this."

Miss Trevanion turned away; there was a strange expression of blended contempt and pity on her proud lip; but she made no reply.

The persons whom we have thus unceremoniously introduced to the reader, were, although so closely connected, as ill-suited to each other as it was well possible for three human beings to be. Mr. Trevanion, the only son of a younger brother—who had in early life and before he had adopted any settled profession, been so imprudent as to elope with the penniless daughter of an Irish peer, and to drag on a dependent and aimless existence under the roof of his more fortunate brother, the fourteenth baronet—was early left an orphan, his mother having died in giving him birth; while her husband only lived to see him reach his twelfth year. Accustomed, from his earliest infancy, to know himself rather tolerated than loved, by his austere uncle, the unfortunate boy, young as he was, felt all the importance of his loss. In his cares and sorrows, that weak but affectionate father had been his refuge—in his pastimes, his tutor and his playmate—and as he followed him to the family vault, where he was laid to rest with the pomp and pageantry deemed necessary by Sir Jasper to the dignity of the name he bore, the desolate orphan was at once aware that all the love of which he had hitherto been the object throughout the whole of his brief existence, was buried in the grave of his last parent.

It was a frightful moment, and a painful conviction for the boy; it robbed his mind of its freshness, and his heart of his youth. Once he glanced up into the face of his dreaded uncle, but his eye suddenly fell, as in the stern countenance which was half averted from him he read neither sympathy nor grief. Sir Jasper looked, indeed, like a man carved in stone, and the imperturbable composure of his fea-

tures appeared to mock the mourning cloak in which he was enveloped. There was no encouragement in that marble face; and the glance of the orphan returned to fasten, with even more avidity than before, upon the coffin beside him.

On his way to the church, even the presence of his stern relative had failed to moderate his grief, and he had wept as the young ever weep, with all the violence of despair; but, as the remains of his fond father were lowered out of his sight, a change came over his spirit which was destined to influence his character through life. When he turned to leave the spot where all his affections lay buried, and resumed his place beside Sir Jasper in the mourning coach—his eyes were as dry as though they had never known a tear, and a deep color was burning on his cheeks. A word of kindness, the merest approach to a caress, might have melted the rising bitterness, and crushed the demon that was tugging at his heart; but these were not vouchsafed. The baronet sat coldly and magnificently silent; and the homeward drive was performed without the interchange of a single sentence.

When they reached the Hall, its master alighted, and immediately shut himself into his study; while the bereaved boy, totally overlooked even by the menials about him, in his turn retreated to his solitary room, there to brood alike over the past, the present, and, it may even be, the future. He had heard his uncle, by the death-bed of his last parent, pledge himself not to desert the orphan about to be confided to his compassion; but he remembered with a burning and indignant heart, how tardily and grudgingly that promise had been extorted by the supplications of the dying man. He strove to recall one demonstration of interest or regard toward himself, displayed by his enforced guardian from his childhood to that very hour; but he strove in vain. The motherless infant, the child of tears, who drew his first sustenance from the breast of a stranger, had failed to awaken one feeling of commisseration or sympathy in the heart of Sir Jasper Trevanion. The baronet had tolerated his brother, not only because his own credit in the eyes of his fellow-men forbade that he should suffer that brother to starve; but also because his very imprudence had never tempted him to tarnish the dignity of his family. His marriage had been an act of reckless folly, almost amounting to madness, in the eyes of the fortunate possessor of twelve thousand a year, but still it had entailed no disgrace upon his name; and it was at least satisfactory to be able to present a Lady Catherine Trevanion, to the neighboring squirearchy; a circumstance to which may probably be attributed the fact that, instead of settling a sufficient income upon his less well-portioned brother, which might have enabled him to choose his own place of residence, and to enjoy the modest comforts of his own home, Sir Jasper insisted that the helpless couple should reside under his roof; and accompanied the expression of his will by a declaration that, should they decline to do so, no further assistance need be anticipated from himself.

Such were the circumstances under which Mr. Trevanion and his pretty, silly bride, became the inmates of the paternal mansion; where, as already stated, Sir Jasper had, even after the death of the Lady Katherine, tolerated his brother, partly from duty, and still more, perhaps, from habit; but the boy had been from the first moment of his existence, odious to the selfish and cold-hearted baronet. In the first place his birth had caused the death of his mother, whose lively absurdities, and buoyant spirits, had served to enliven the previous stately dulness of the old Hall; while, superadded to this privation (for the presence and companionship of the lively lady had become necessary to the comfort of the saturnine man), a lurking jealousy nestled at his heart. He—the representative of his family—was childless; while his brother—his penniless and dependent brother, to whom his will was law, and his protection existence—had given an heir to the house of which he was himself the head; while he had not even yet encountered a woman worthy, in his opinion, to share his fortunes.

And thus the boy had grown up beside him, unloved: an object of aversion and avoidance.

And the lad knew and felt this, although he was unable to fathom its cause. He remembered that he had never been addressed by his uncle, save in reproof; that his childish caresses had been repulsed, and his boyish errors visited with merciless chastisement; and bitterly did he writhe beneath the consciousness that he was now hopelessly dependent upon one whom he both disliked and feared.

"What will become of me!" groaned the unhappy orphan, as he paced, alone and unheeded, the floor of his little chamber; "Why could I not have died with my father? Who, in this wide desolate world, cares for me now?"

Well might he ask himself the dreary question.

It was late in the evening before any one appeared to have remembered his existence; and then he was summoned by a servant to the housekeeper's room, in which he was accustomed to take his repasts; but his heart was too full; he required no food; and he said so quietly and briefly.

"Nonsense, Master Hubert;" was the retort of the messenger: "be a man and make up your mind to what can't be mended. Fasting won't bring back the dead."

"I know it;" said the boy; "nor tears; and therefore I have ceased to shed them."

"That is reasonable at all events," replied the man; "so come down at once, if you don't wish to catch a scolding from Mrs. Pearson, for making her wait."

"She need not wait;" said Hubert; "I require nothing more to-night."

And he no sooner found himself once more alone, than he flung himself upon his bed, and resumed his musings.

For an entire month the orphan never once met his uncle; nor, in so far as he could ascertain from the attendants, had Sir Jasper even pronounced his name, or alluded to his existence. He was no longer directed to meet the curate, who had hitherto officiated as his tutor, in the breakfast-room, when it was vacated by his uncle; no longer occupied by daily task-work; but was left at perfect liberty to spend

day after day according to his own caprice. And that caprice was a strange one in so young a boy; for, shunning the bright sunshine, and the wholesome avocations of his age, his hours were passed either in the dark recesses of the dense wood which formed the western boundary of the Trevanion property, or in the gothic picture-gallery, among the grim portraits of his ancestors.

One by one he paused before them, and gazed upon each, as intently as though the happiness of his future life depended upon his accurate knowledge of every separate feature; but, more than all, he studied the female portraits—from the stiff and stately dame of far-off centuries to the courtly and sylphic figure of his own mother. While thus engaged, the brow of the silent boy would occasionally flush, and his eye kindle, as he remembered that he, too, was a Trevanion; but the paroxysm of excitement never lasted long, and he soon sank back into his habitual gloom.

Thus had the month gone by; and, in that brief interval, the orphan, abandoned thus absolutely to himself, had ceased to pine either for sympathy or companionship. He came and went like one obeying the impulse of a dream; joyless, tearless, and alone. But he was to be no longer permitted to indulge in this negative happiness; for at the termination of the period named, he was suddenly summoned to the presence of his uncle, and he obeyed the command without the quickening of a single pulse. What had he to fear, or to lose?

"Come in, sir, and close the door behind you;" was the greeting he received; and he had no sooner obeyed the order, than the baronet pursued in a stern tone: "You are now of an age to understand that you can not spend your life in idleness, wandering like a poacher about the woods; or dawdling, like a gaping girl, through the galleries of the Hall. Moreover, your presence here must ere long be importunate, as you will one day comprehend. I supported your father in his uselessness, because he was my brother; but you have no such claim on my forbearance. Nevertheless, as I made to him a promise that I would not abandon you, I have no intention to falsify my word; and I have accordingly sent for you to state that you will, three days hence, be accompanied by one of my servants to the North, where you will remain four years in a school which I have selected, in order to complete your education. At the termination of that period, you will be —or ought to be—competent to uphold with credit to yourself the honor of the name you bear—an honor, young sir, which saved your father from beggary—either in the army or navy; and I give you your choice of either profession."

"I object to both," was the sturdy reply.

"You object!" echoed the baronet, startled into something like emotion by so unlooked-for a rejoinder; "*you*—a boy of barely twelve years of age—tell me that you shall oppose my pleasure. I say, Hubert Trevanion, that I will be obeyed."

The lad remained silent.

"You do well, sir;" pursued the angry voice; "not to repeat your rebellion. But enough of this. You have heard my decision, and it is immutable. Go and make your preparations, whatever they may be; our interview is at an end."

The orphan needed no second bidding; with a silent bow he left the room; but as he slowly traversed the gallery which led from his uncle's apartments, his clinched hands and heaving chest proclaimed the tempest within. His boyhood was now wholly swept away; the elasticity of his spirit was crushed; he had begun his wrestle with the realities of the world; and a dark, hard feeling, to which his tender age should have been a stranger, was working within him.

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE AND NEPHEW.

THE school to which Hubert Trevanion was conducted by his uncle's serving-man, was by no means calculated to inspire any regret on the boy's part, at his abrupt exodus from his inhospitable home; nor had Sir Jasper neglected to provide him with a wardrobe suitable to his station in life. There had been no leave-taking, it is true, between him and his nephew, but this omission was grateful to the orphan, who had few thanks, and less affection to offer to his repelling kinsman; and yet, nevertheless, as he saw his conductor on his return to the Hall, disappear at the end of the poplar avenue which formed the approach to the house, his heart sank within him, at the conviction that he stood alone among strangers, with whom he had neither feeling nor sympathy in common. He was, however, soon aroused from the somber reverie into which he had fallen by the voice of Dr. Birchmore, the principal of the establishment, by whom he was led into the refectory where his future companions were assembled at supper, and where his own place was assigned to him.

The personal beauty of the boy had interested the feelings of the worthy Doctor who was, moreover, not insensible to the credit which his academy would derive from the circumstance of his numbering among his pupils the nephew and ward of one of the oldest baronets in England; and it was accordingly with the greatest gentleness and indulgence, that he commenced his investigation of the progress of his previous studies. That the result was far from satisfactory, will readily be surmised, so long a time having elapsed since the lad had opened a book, or even bestowed a thought upon the lessons of the reverend divine who had formerly been his preceptor at the Hall; but despite the disappointment which this circumstance induced in the breast of the astonished pedagogue, he was encouraged by the evident intelligence of his young pupil, and his voluntary assurance that no application should be wanting on his own part, to retrieve the lost time.

Nor was it; for Hubert Trevanion had at least arrived at the valuable knowledge that without education, he could never achieve the independence for which he yearned; and ere long his assiduity and talent became the proud theme of the school. Still he was not popular

as his silent and somewhat sullen habits disgusted his playmates; nor was it until he had excited a host of enemies, and fought his way manfully through the school, reckless alike of the age or strength of his opponents, that he succeeded in enforcing the respect of those to whom he had refused alike companionship and regard. This accomplished, he was allowed to indulge his own tastes and pursuits in peace; "the baronet," as he was sneeringly designated by the little community, ceasing by degrees to excite either curiosity or anger; and while peals of laughter and shouts of merriment resounded from the playground, he strolled alone and unheeded under the trees by which it was bounded, or flung himself down in some shady nook to study and reflect at ease.

Thus he made no friends, nor did he need them; and for all companionship he sought only the society of the ushers, three of whom being foreigners, he rapidly acquired the modern languages, and a certain acquaintance with the habits and feelings of other countries. And so the four years wore on. As, during the vacations, he was the only pupil left at the establishment, the portly doctor and his precise but kind-hearted wife, in their turn abandoned the classic shade of their academic home, in order to visit their respective families; and Hubert Trevanion was, to his infinite gratification, consigned to the sole guardianship of the German master, who, being as friendless as himself, had known no other home than that of Dr. Birchmore for many long and laborious years.

Simple and sincere, Herr Hauffman was as very a child in heart as the youngest of his class; but he was, nevertheless, a man of deep and varied information, and possessed of considerable skill in imparting the knowledge he had acquired. No companion could, therefore, have been more acceptable to the self-centered and eager Hubert, who, while his more fortunate comrades were reveling in the delights of family ties and paternal indulgence, was storing his mind hour by hour, and feeling his intellect expand without almost an effort.

How brief appeared to him those weeks of tranquil and undisturbed existence! and how heartily did he sympathize in the regrets expressed by his fellow pupils on their return to their old toils, and their old duties; for then, once more, he too was compelled to resume the monotonous routine of the classes, and to spend hours poring over the more abstruse branches of education for which he had no taste, and in which he felt no interest. The dead languages, the Latin verses, and the dull lore of buried ages, so dear to the scholar, and so soon to be forgotten by the busy, active, ambitious citizen of the day, were alike wearisome to him; the mind of the boy had already foreshadowed the future career of the man; and, while he grasped at every species of knowledge which might tend to his advancement in society, he gave but reluctant attention to that which could only be profitable in the closet.

Thus, when he at length terminated his scholastic career, Hubert Trevanion was declared to be the most accomplished linguist and the best mathematician who had ever quitted the establishment; while it was with regret that the principal found himself compelled to temper his approbation by the admission that he was, on the other hand, very deficient in that classic lore, so essential, as the Doctor sententiously observed, to the elevated station in life which he would soon be called upon to fill. On the whole, however, the indulgent pedagogue confessed himself proud of his pupil; while the gentle and kind-hearted Herr Hauffman parted from him with tears of unfeigned regret.

On his arrival at the Hall, the orphan at once discovered the motive which had impelled his uncle to declare that his residence there had ceased to be desirable; when, as he crossed the threshold of the drawing-room, he saw a lady seated in the deep bay of the western window, busily engaged at a tapestry frame, while three spaniels were lying upon their several cushions near her chair; who no sooner, however, became aware of his presence than they rushed upon him open-mouthed, as if to resent his intrusion.

"For shame, Flora; be quiet, Dash; come here instantly, Fido;" expostulated their mistress, as the tall, handsome lad calmly made his way toward her, regardless of the uproar; "I am really ashamed of you! Do not be afraid, Mr. Hubert; the dear pets never bite, it is merely noise."

"I am by no means alarmed, madam," was the quiet reply; "and am sorry that I have been the innocent cause of creating such a disturbance, by intruding myself upon you so abruptly; but I am informed that I should find Sir Jasper Trevanion in this apartment."

"Sir Jasper," rejoined the lady, without rising from her seat, "is, I believe, in the library —Flora, leave those wools alone; you will choke yourself, darling. Do you particularly wish to see Sir Jasper, Mr. Hubert?—or can I communicate to him what you desire to say?"

"As you please, madam," said the orphan, bitterly; "I merely intended to inform him that, according to his orders, I have returned to Trevanion Hall."

"In that case, he need not be disturbed, as that is a matter of course. You will, I believe, find your old room prepared for you; at least, I gave orders to that effect to my housekeeper."

"I am obliged to you, madam, and shall at once avail myself of your attention."

"But, before you leave me, Mr. Hubert, it will be as well to mention that henceforth, whatever you may require, you must apply to myself. I have undertaken to relieve Sir Jasper from all unnecessary trouble and exertion; and it will therefore be quite useless to make any appeal to him."

"I have no inclination to do so, madam."

"You are right, for it would be of no avail; and now that we understand each other, I will not detain you longer." A cold bend of the head, and a glance toward the door of the apartment, followed her words; and amid another storm of yelping and barking, Hubert withdrew from the presence of his new aunt.

A marvelous change had indeed come over the old Hall. The man of marble had become

plastic as wax beneath the firm and determined will of a stronger mind than his own. The arrogant head was bowed; the haughty spirit lowered.

Within six months of his brother's death, Sir Jasper Trevanion had married the wealthy widow of an Indian Nabob, who had returned to England, with a colossal fortune, and an exhausted constitution, only to die and make way for his successor. Lady Trevanion had been a beauty, and was still a fine woman; but the long habit of command had rendered her imperious, self-willed, and despotic; while the consciousness of her enormous wealth had indued her with an arrogance which would have sat ungracefully even upon a duchess, and which the remembrance of her obscure origin (for the well-dowered bride of the high-born Sir Jasper could not trace back her lineage beyond the last generation), had altogether failed to diminish. The cold and haughty representative of the Trevanions had been dazzled by her magnificence, and captivated by her person; while the lady herself, with that yearning for a title which is one of the most potent weaknesses of a vulgar mind, after some hesitation, had consented to bestow herself and rupees upon the man whose greatest pride had hitherto centered upon the antiquity of his race.

Pompous was the display made at the marriage. The country journals had appropriated whole columns to the display of the magnificent rejoicings consequent upon the event. All the county had left cards at the Hall; and all the gossips had been busy with the diamonds and cashmeres of the bride; but it was not long ere the baronet himself discovered that the rod by which he was henceforth to be ruled, however thickly gilded, was not the less a rod of iron. The man of marble had found a mate of steel; the contest was an unequal one; for while the nature of the husband was too haughty for contention, that of the wife was too overbearing for concession; and thus, by the time that the happy couple were thoroughly established under their own roof, the question of supremacy was decided; and Lady Trevanion, whose accumulated thousands remained under her exclusive control, reigned undisputed mistress of the establishment.

All these circumstances were soon made known to Hubert by the indignant Mrs. Pearson; who, accustomed for half a life-time to the lofty carelessness of her aristocratic master, and the negative rule of the trifling Lady Katherine (whom, in imitation of Sir Jasper, she reverenced for her high birth), could ill brook the uncompromising sway of the new mistress of the mansion; "A nobody;" as she emphatically declared; "whose name would never have been seen in print had she not cast her spell over the proudest race in the land. However, Master Hubert," she continued exultingly, "it is only for a time, and you must have patience; you will be Sir Hubert Trevanion yet, as all the old servants hope and desire. *You* have good blood in you on both sides; and what should be, will be. Your uncle, poor dear man! married for an heir—he had better have contented himself with the one that Providence had already provided for him—and you see what has come of it. Here is my lady, three years a wife, and not yet a mother; nor ever likely to be, it's my notion. There's no end to her money, they say; but it's little good it is to us while Sir Jasper has not the handling of it. However, as I have heard that she has no relations that she cares to own, because she does n't dare to introduce them to her new connections, it may one day be yours, and you may be a great man yet."

"Without her help, I trust, my good Pearson," replied the boy, as the blood mantled over his brow.

"With all my heart: without her help, till she sees and feels that you do not need it, and then it will be given less grudgingly; but until that day comes, it is weary work here, Master Hubert. The only comfort we have now, Tomkins the butler, and I, and Sir Jasper's man, is to talk over old times; and often and often do we remember the days when we let you wander about, sad and lonely, and wished you away, that the sight of you might n't anger and worry our poor master, little thinking what was to come next! But that's all over now; and it's you we look to when we hope for better times. You have n't been to the picture-gallery yet? Well, don't go; for there you'll find my lady, full length, covered with precious stones, and with all her horrid dogs about her, hanging side by side with your own dear mother, who *was* a lady, and had always a kind word and a merry smile for every one about her. Don't go, Master Hubert; it will make your very heart ache."

"I will not," said the lad, bitterly.

"You 're not here for long, I take it," pursued the garrulous old woman; "for my lady can't abide your name, and wanted Sir Jasper to send you straight off to sea from school."

"I am not going to sea," said the youth, resolutely.

"Not going to sea! Why there 's a vesse bound for the Indies all ready to take you o board; my lady has made up her mind."

"And so have I," was the calm rejoinder.

"Then mercy deliver us!" exclaimed hi companion; "for we shall have such a storm in the old Hall as it has not seen for many a day But I'm glad to hear you say so, for all that I hate such kidnapping work. Sending you t sea, in the hope that you'll be drowned, or ship wrecked, or cast ashore, or something of the sort, and never heard of again; and all be cause she 's jealous of you."

"She has little cause to be so," said the o phan, sadly.

"I don't know that, Mr. Hubert," replied th housekeeper significantly. "It ain't so plea ant, after all, for a woman of that stamp, wh has nothing to be proud of but her gold, to se a fine young fellow like you ready to tear th lining out of her money-bags; and she witho chick or child of her own to stop you. N no; it can't be pleasant, and that 's the tru of it; for, as sure as my name 's Margare many and many 's the prayer that her prou ladyship has put up to have a young baron of her own; but no one prayed with her, I 'm a nation; not even Sir Jasper himself, wh poor, dear man, has had enough of her race r ready, if I don't mistake. Once on a time, fi

two years back, she had a notion of some such thing, and a pretty fuss there was at the Hall, I can tell you; but it came to nothing, as might have been expected. A young baronet, indeed! Just as if baronets were made of such stuff as that!"

And Mrs. Pearson curled her lip, as though the very idea of such a catastrophe was too ridiculous to be entertained for a moment.

"And my uncle—Sir Jasper?"—said the boy; "how comes it that his proud spirit submits so tamely to her despotism?"

"Ay, there it is," responded the old lady; "that's what puzzles us all—man, woman, and child. You know, Master Hubert, that there was n't a prouder nor a sterner man than Sir Jasper for miles around. At home or abroad, he was always the same; caring neither for lords nor squires, but bearing himself, as he had every right to do, as the head of one of the ancientest families in England—and now look at him! Never does he venture to say 'ay,' when my lady sees fit to say 'nay;' and there he sits for hours shut up alone in his library, doing of nothing—she takes good care of that—but poring over a parcel of moldy old books that had been quiet enough upon the shelves for years, while she overlooks the steward's accounts, and arranges the house expenses, and receives the rents—ay, and raises them too whenever she is so minded, as though she had been a born Trevanion, a lady in her own right, and had married a beggar who had n't a word to say in any thing."

"My uncle must be strangely changed"—observed Hubert moodily.

"Right enough, my dear boy; he *is* strangely changed—body and mind too. And oh, Master Hubert;" continued the faithful old servant, as large tears swelled in her eyes; "we sometimes fear—Mr. Tomkins and I—that the poor dear gentleman may not be able to hold out against it; and should he go, what would become of the old Hall, and of all of us?"

"You would have me for a master," said the lad, with a kindling eye.

"Ay, but the widow—the widow would be left, you know; and she would keep you out of your own while she could."

The boy smiled scornfully.

"At all events she would take care of her money;" persisted the housekeeper; "you would see none of that. There are other husbands to be bought besides Sir Jasper—and then he will have suffered all this for nothing."

"He has, in any case, no one to blame but himself," was the sententious reply.

"That's true enough, too, Master Hubert;" said his companion; "but our mistakes are none the more easy to bear because we find them out too late. What 's done, can't be undone; and here we are, the laughing-stock of all the country, for what I know to the contrary—my honored master and all."

"Is it intended, do you know, Mrs. Pearson, that I should see Sir Jasper during my stay?"

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no;" replied the old dame, oracularly; "all will depend upon how my lady takes to you; and you will have hard cards to play, I can tell you."

"I shall play none."

"Well, Master Hubert, we shall see. Them that live longest, see most; but you must not forget that all will depend upon her ladyship."

"*I* never shall."

"Why bless the lad, what can you do of yourself? You are but a young thing yet, and have no one to look to but her."

"I am at least old enough," said Hubert with a touch of his uncle's haughtiness, "to revolt against tyranny. I would not submit to it from my father's brother; I shall assuredly defy it in the person of my uncle's wife."

"It will be of no use," sighed Mrs. Pearson; "Sir Jasper tried it, you may be sure, and you see how the struggle ended. Take an old woman's advice, Master Hubert; keep well with my lady; don't contradict her, but let her have every thing her own way; it will only be for a time."

"I thank you for your good-will, my old friend," said the orphan, "but I will make no such promise. Ha! there goes the dressing-bell; and now I shall soon be made aware whether I am to be honored with a seat at my uncle's table, or consigned once more to your kindness."

CHAPTER III

A DEPARTURE.

STRANGE, and even affecting, was the meeting between the uncle and nephew in the spacious and lordly dining-room of the old Hall, as, having received no warming to the contrary, Hubert Trevanion calmly passed the threshold, and advanced to greet its master. Cold indeed was Sir Jasper still, but he was no longer stern; and the stripling detected in his eye a yearning which he had never before seen there, as, for the first time, their hands met; but nevertheless no word of tenderness accompanied the look which lingered on his countenance for a moment, and then melted away; he asked no question—he betrayed no interest in his young relative; but languidly resumed his seat, as though he had done all that could be required of him, and eschewed further responsibility.

Lady Trevanion, in all the splendor of a *parvenue*, had already taken the head of her table, whence she glanced at her unwelcome guest with a haughty eye and a lowering brow, as though she already recognized in the calm, self-dependent youth, a formidable antagonist; and thus the meal commenced in comfortless and threatening silence. The servants moved noiselessly over the costly carpet, and performed their duties with the quiet vigilance of well-tutored automatons; the successive courses were served and disappeared—and Hubert remarked that, while his uncle ate sparingly and in silence, the lady of the mansion partook largely of the luxuries before her, although constantly evincing displeasure, and affecting to cavil at their quality. At length the cheerless repast came to a close; the dessert was placed upon the table, and the servants withdrew, evidently to the discomfort of Sir Jasper, who, although still silent, betrayed a fidgetiness wholly at variance with the calm self-centered manner for which he had formerly been so conspicuous; while Hubert, who had nerved him-

self for every contingency, remained impassive, coldly awaiting the pleasure of his companions.

As he had anticipated, it was the lady who took the initiative. "I presume, Mr. Hubert Trevanion," she said, superciliously, as she carefully arranged an emerald bracelet by which her left arm was encircled, "that you do not anticipate a long sojourn under the roof of your uncle?"

"I leave its term in my uncle's hands, madam."

Lady Trevanion smiled, but it was not a pleasant smile; it said, as plainly as any words could have done, that Sir Jasper was no longer omnipotent in his own house; "Down, Fido; Have I not yet taught you that I will be obeyed? For shame, to set so bad an example. You do right, young sir"—she was now speaking to her husband's nephew—"to disclaim any will of your own in such a case, as it saves trouble to all parties, Sir Jasper having made up his mind upon the subject. You have already been a great expense to him; a very great expense; and although, so long as he remained a bachelor, he was, of course, at liberty to dispose of his property as he saw fit, he has now other duties to perform, and he is prepared to act accordingly. Not," pursued her ladyship, with ill-bred eagerness, "that his marriage with me has impoverished him—far from it—very far from it—but he, like myself, is weary of dependents. He bore with your father as a duty, and with your mother as your father's wife; and with you, while you were still a child; all very right and commendable, no doubt—I do not mean to reproach him. I would have done as much for my own relations, had they required it."

"It was fortunate alike for them and for yourself, that you had none, madam," was the composed reply of the lad, as he remembered the tale so lately told to him by his humble friend in the housekeeper's room.

The lady flushed crimson. The first stone had been flung, and had hit its mark; but, like an able general, she scorned to acknowledge, or even to recognize the check, and, with a still more bitter smile, she continued:

"Your father, Mr. Hubert Trevanion, was, as I have heard, a mere inane and indolent man of fashion, and your mother the penniless daughter of a peer—poverty wedded to helplessness; but that was not your fault, my poor boy; and be assured that neither Sir Jasper nor I mean to upbraid you with it."

"I can believe so, madam," said the orphan, calmly meeting the hard eye which was fastened upon him, "and even had it been otherwise, I should have felt no shame in hearing myself rebuked on such a subject. Dependent as I may be, for the moment, I can proudly trace my descent for centuries on both sides; and feel richer in my apparent poverty with such a consciousness, than had I been born to inherit thousands, bequeathed to me by accident, and of which I should feel ashamed to trace the source."

"Sir Jasper Trevanion, am I to be insulted in my own house by a stripling?" demanded the lady, vehemently.

"Hubert, you forget yourself," gasped out the baronet.

"In what way, sir?" asked the lad, coldly; "I have but given utterance to feelings which you can not do otherwise than respect. You, the descendent of a long line of ancestors, will surely understand my reverence for high birth, and sympathize in my contempt for wealth which has no illustration less plebeian than its own vileness."

"Sir Jasper," exclaimed his wife, passionately, "this boy shall not remain another hour under my roof. Hark ye, young sir, I nurse no vipers in my bosom. You know best by whom you have been tutored; and were it not that you bear your uncle's name, I would cast you off, to learn the worship which the world will pay to your high birth and proud descent without a penny to enforce your claim. As it is—"

"I ask nothing of *you*, madam," said Hubert, as he rose from his seat; "I do not recognize either your power or your authority. I am the son of your husband's brother—the last of the race of Trevanion; and should its present representative see fit to deny me his protection and support, I must abide by his decision—but I acknowledge no will save his—I will abide by no desertion save his own."

"Do you dare to brave me, Hubert Trevanion?"

"I have no such desire, madam. I simply question your right to decide my destiny."

"You are wrong, Hubert—very wrong," interposed the baronet, evidently quailing beneath the anger of his wife; "you owe alike obedience and respect to Lady Trevanion."

"I am ever ready to render both, sir, where they are due;" said the orphan, with deep emotion; "but I appeal to yourself whether I have been met by her ladyship in a manner to induce either? She, probably, thinks merely of my age, and regards me as a child bound only to do her bidding; but she can know little of my boyhood when she so argues; and you, Sir Jasper—you who received me from the hands of an indulgent and dying father—you, at least, may convince her of her mistake. From the hour in which I lost my last parent I ceased to be a child, and grew, not so much by time as by trial. I had no youth, but sprang at once from the boy into the man. There were no home affections, no heart yearnings, to fling back my feelings upon others; I was alone—coldly, cheerlessly, frightfully alone—left to combat with my own passions, and failings, and necessities—given over to the purchased care of strangers—abandoned to the narrow sympathies of hired teachers, and uncongenial associates. You, at least, can utter no reproach, for I am but what you yourself have made me."

"And this, then;" exclaimed the lady, with a reproachful glance at her husband; "this is the boy of sixteen who was to bow to my will, and to know no pleasure but my own. Upon my word, Sir Jasper, I must compliment you upon your discrimination, and upon the admirable method in which you have reared your brother's son."

"We have been separated for four years," said the baronet, deprecatingly.

"And will do well to separate once more for a longer period;" observed Lady Trevanion.

as she rose in her turn; "at all events, Sir Jasper, you have only to choose between your nephew and your wife; for this young gentleman shall assuredly not remain under the same roof as myself."

"You know, my dear, that the vessel will sail within a fortnight," urged the master of the house.

"Until which period Mr. Hubert must be accommodated with a home elsewhere," was the haughty rejoinder.

"Pardon me, sir;" interposed the youth firmly; "but, if I just now understood your meaning you have it in contemplation to send me out of the country?"

"You are provided for," said the baronet nervously; "Lady Trevanion has procured for you a midshipman's berth on board an Indiaman which is shortly to sail; and has also had the kindness to interest in your favor some of her very influential connections in that country."

"Her ladyship does me honor," replied Hubert, bowing profoundly; "but I have no intention to embrace such a career, and no inclination to enter life under such auspices."

"Better and better!" sneered the irate lady; "and you will, perhaps, be so obliging as to inform Sir Jasper and myself of the precise nature of your future projects."

"Willingly, madam; I had already expressed my utter aversion to both services, and stated this distinctly to Sir Jasper, years ago—nor have I seen any cause to alter my decision. That I should not have the alternative of the learned professions, the nature of my education sufficiently evinced; and I have consequently left no effort untried to fit myself for the only honorable career, which was left open to me."

"And pray what may that be?"

"Commerce, madam. I aspire to the respected name of an upright English merchant."

"Trade, sir!" exclaimed the baronet, thoroughly aroused from his apathy; "am I to understand that you would degrade the presumptive heir of the Trevanions into a trader?"

"Such is, in fact, my purpose."

"You are a disgrace to your name, young man," said the lady, loftily.

"I regret, madam, that you should be involved in that disgrace," was the reply.

"I will not give you a shilling if you persist in such degradation," gasped the baronet.

"I ask nothing," said the lad, although his heart quailed for a moment; "I am informed by a letter which was placed in my hands by my father on his death-bed, that I inherit certain jewels once belonging to my mother; and I will owe my existence to her bequest. I know not that I could apply it to a more pious purpose."

"They shall be delivered to you," said Sir Jasper, coldly.

"A diamond mine, no doubt!" sneered Lady Trevanion, as she glanced at herself in a mirror; "one, however, which will be little missed, and may well be spared. I presume, Sir Jasper, that the young gentleman may at once take possession of his inheritance, and leave the Hall?"

"One moment"—faltered the baronet; "only one moment. You are mad, Hubert, thus to brave your family. Remember that you have no other home."

"Home, sir!" echoed the stripling. "I have never known a home—I can never hope for one, until I have earned it; and until I have done so, I must be content to find a resting-place among strangers."

"You talk like a child. Without means you can not make your way—and though revolted by your disobedience, I will not turn you adrift upon the world to starve. You do not even know in what direction to bend your steps."

"Pardon me, sir; I shall proceed immediately to London, where I shall dispose of my poor mother's jewels; and thence I shall at once make my way to Germany."

"And why to Germany?"

"Because I am assured of a welcome in the family of a firm, though humble friend, to whom I owe much more than I can ever repay; and, even should I fail to realize the hope which has been held out to me of a successful career in that country, the blessing of a welcome under any roof will amply repay me for subsequent disappointment."

"May I venture to inquire the name of this valuable friend?" again demanded the baronet.

"Certainly. It is Herr Hauffman, the German professor at Dr. Birchmore's."

"An usher!" interposed Lady Trevanion, with a bitter laugh.

"Even so, madam, if you prefer the term. An humble usher, who has long been to me a brother and a friend. A man who has coined his mind into wages, and nerved his heart to receive thankfully the salary won by his talents. I am proud of the regard which he has bestowed on me."

"You are lost, Hubert Trevanion!" groaned Sir Jasper. "It should have sufficed, young man, that you were born under this roof, to have preserved you from such groveling companionships as these."

"Groveling indeed!" echoed the lady, sarcastically; "and now, Sir Jasper, have you heard enough? or are we to pass the evening in listening to the revelations of your hopeful nephew? Surely there need be no more waste of words upon the subject. The young man has formed connections for himself more desirable in his eyes than those which he rejects; and I see no reason why you should not leave him at liberty to cultivate them."

"You forget, Lady Trevanion, that he is the last of his race."

"I forget nothing, sir;" was the sharp reply; "except that I have been insulted in your presence by one of your own blood, and that you have not deigned to chastise the offender."

"His only fitting punishment will be immediate exile from the home of his ancestors;" said Sir Jasper; but his lip quivered as the childless man suddenly remembered that he was, in order to conciliate his offended wife, about to banish, probably forever, not only his brother's son, but what to his selfish nature was infinitely more sacred, his own presumptive heir and successor. What might be the fate of the lad, thus cast forth into a cold and

heartless world by his natural protectors? Struggle and hardship, contumely, and—it might even be—shame and death!

A clammy dew started to the brow of the baronet, and his head sank upon his breast, as his glance passed rapidly from the placid and proud countenance of the silent stripling, whose sense of wrong was too powerful to relieve itself by any outward emotion, to the exulting face of his inexorable wife, who with her tall figure rigidly erect, and her dark cheek flushed with passion, seemed to await the termination of the scene without one misgiving of its result.

No further opposition, as she at once felt, need be dreaded from Sir Jasper upon any point, when she had secured this victory over his young kinsman; and thenceforward the desolate man would be totally dependent upon herself for sympathy and companionship.

The same idea had, however, flashed dark and threatening on the mind of the baronet. Should Hubert, indignant at his desertion, refuse all further communication with his family, the ancient race would become extinct, and the name of Trevanion fall into oblivion. Sir Jasper felt that he must temporise with the youth, even at the risk of exciting the wrath of his wife; and, acting upon this conviction, he turned resolutely toward him, and crushing down alike his haughtiness and the vague terror which had grown upon him, he said sternly: "You have heard my decision, sir?"

"I have."

"Henceforth, then, you will possess the control over your own career which you appear to covet. The world is before you, and you must struggle with it as you can. Do not, however, imagine that I have so utterly lost sight of my own dignity as to permit you to go hence without the means of support necessary to uphold, in some degree, the honor of the name you bear—or, better still, if you will favor me by relinquishing that name until you have ceased to disgrace it—to enable you to give some show of respectability to the one which you may see fit to assume."

"I have no intention to resign the name of my father, Sir Jasper Trevanion."

"Perhaps if I propose to you, in the event of this concession, to increase the provision I have offered, you may be induced to change your mind."

"By no means; for while conscious that I am not in a position to reject your offer, I beg you distinctly to understand that I accept it as the son of Aubrey Trevanion, and not as your nephew."

"Then, sir, you shall be authorized to draw upon my banker for two hundred pounds annually, on condition that you inform him of your place of residence."

"I admit no conditions."

"Do not insist, Sir Jasper;" interposed Lady Trevanion; "if you are indeed prepared to commit so great a weakness as to reward this estimable young man for his disobedience, be it so; but pray do not descend to ask as a favor what you have every authority to enforce as a right."

"Then our conference is ended," murmured the baronet. "My steward shall communicate to you the address of my banker in town, Mr. Trevanion; and you are at liberty to leave my house at any moment when you may find it convenient."

"I would beg to suggest an early one," said the lady, as with a lofty bow she swept from the apartment.

The uncle and the nephew were alone; only a few paces separated them; and for an instant they stood gazing earnestly at each other. The heavy breathing of the agitated baronet was audible amid the silence, and Hubert almost pitied him, as he witnessed the violence of the struggle which shook his frame. For the first time his heart yearned toward the weak and spirit-bowed man, whom he remembered so stern of purpose, and so haughty of demeanor, but it was only for an instant, for, ere long, resentment swallowed up compassion, and contempt usurped the place of pity.

"Have you any further commands for me, Sir Jasper?" he asked, as he prepared to leave the room.

"None, sir, none. All is over between us."

And with a cold and distant salutation, the uncle and nephew parted forever as both believed in this world.

CHAPTER IV.

HUSBAND AND FATHER.

All was indeed over! And Hubert Trevanion, in his sixteenth year, stood alone in a world where the battle is too often to the strong, and the race to the swift. It is scarcely wonderful that after his uncle had left him, he should gaze around upon the once familiar features of his childhood's home with a strange sinking of the heart. The last hour had decided his destiny; he had returned to the halls of his ancestors only for one brief day, and he was once more about to abandon them for ever. But he soon subdued the emotion which this consciousness had called up; for, from what was he, in fact, about to separate himself? From mere inanimate objects which could be dear only from association, and which would remain unchanged, whatever might be the vicissitudes of his own fortune. No tear would fall for him—no heart regret him—no wholesome human sympathy be awakened either by his struggles or his success; he was an alien from the home of his fathers, and he must go forth to seek another, and forget what might have been, in what was.

And thus he *did* go forth, after a warm leave-taking with the old servants, who wept when they wrung his hand, and could not control their sorrow as they saw that his own eyes were tearless.

"It is not because you do not feel, I know that;" sobbed the soft-hearted Mrs. Pearson; "I don't like the wild strange light in your eyes, and I would sooner a thousand times.

see you cry like a child, than seem so cold and placid. It is n't natural, Master Hubert."

"Nothing is natural under this roof, my good old friend," replied the youth with a ghastly smile; "neither my uncle's supineness, nor his wife's tyranny, nor my own exile —nothing is natural, save, indeed, the kind hearts which are now throbbing about me. But I see that the chaise is ready, and I shall scarcely reach the post-town in time for the mail, so now, and perhaps forever, farewell! I need not ask you to remember me, for I feel sure that you will do so." And once more grasping the hands of the excited domestics, Hubert turned away; after having, with a mockery of courteousness born of the bitterness of his spirit, deposited his leave-taking cards upon the hall-table; and springing into the hired vehicle which awaited him, he drove rapidly from the splendid mansion which was no longer to be his home.

In accordance with the resolution that he had expressed to his uncle, the young adventurer at once proceeded to Germany, where he ultimately succeeded in obtaining a situation in a substantial house of business, through the good offices of the family of Herr Hauffman. Years passed on; and the knowledge which he had acquired of the different European languages served him well with his employers, by whom he was gradually intrusted with the whole of their foreign correspondence, and to whom his services ultimately became so indispensable, that he was received into the firm, and became the head of their London establishment. Here, as may have been already gathered from the conversation with which our tale commences, he had contracted a marriage with the daughter and heiress of a wealthy merchant; not without a certain repugnance consequent upon that pride of birth which he had never ceased to feel, but without hesitation, as the most rapid means of securing the independence which he had sworn to achieve.

Mrs. Trevanion was a weak, half-educated, *quasi*-fine lady, who had passed her life between the fashionable establishment where she had received her education, and her father's villa at Richmond. She had early lost her mother, and was petted and indulged accordingly. Before she had attained her eighteenth year, she had exhausted every circulating library within her reach, could paint flowers, work crochet, and "perform" on the piano. Small in stature, and slight in figure, there was nevertheless a grace and prettiness about her, which easily induced a casual observer to forgive the expressionless character of her face, with its abundant screen of pale, yellow hair, and its light and prominent blue eyes, in favor of an exquisite complexion, and a peculiarly pleasing smile. Hers was, in short, a style of beauty which resembled a clever, but incomplete sketch, without sufficient coloring to give it character, and which, place it in whatever light you would, never satisfied the eye, or thoroughly defined itself.

The *morale* of Miss Rotheringbury was in perfect accordance with her *physique*. She had passionate impulses; what spoiled child has not? but she did not possess sufficient strength of purpose to carry out her will. Timid by nature, she was easily overawed; and while she indulged herself freely in tyrannizing over those who readily yielded to her pleasure, she was cowed by a look from any individual who was bold enough to oppose her.

Such was the bride whom Hubert Trevanion, without much difficulty, wooed and won. His worldly position and commercial ability were satisfactory to the lady's father; while the lady herself, fascinated by his handsome person (which recalled at once her ideal of half-a-dozen of her favorite novel-heros), and dazzled by the hope of a some-day reconciliation with the stately baronet and his jewel-laden wife, and a possible sojourn in the ancestral home of her high-born lover, with the self-mystification common to young and unreflecting girls, who mistake the captivation of their fancy for a nobler and better feeling, saw only a proper sense of dignity in the unbending coldness of her betrothed husband; and had learned, long ere he led her radiant in Brussels-lace and orange-blossom to the altar, to defer to all his wishes, and to bend before his will, as entirely as if thenceforward she was to be a mere puppet in his hands.

And such in truth she proved, after one or two abortive struggles at supremacy, which only tended to rivet her chains still closer, by affording to her impassive husband an additional opportunity of enforcing upon her conviction her utter incapacity of self-government. To every appeal he replied by reminding her of her past violence, expatiating upon its extreme ill-breeding, and pointing out to her the necessity, now that she had become the wife of a man of family and station, of some effort on her part to prove herself equal to the position she had attained. For a time the poor girl pouted and grew sullen as she listened to these inferences of her inferiority, and received perpetual warnings to abstain from certain habits and expressions, which, as Mr. Trevanion coolly informed her, were totally incompatible with high breeding, and could not be tolerated in *his* wife; and at others she wept over herself as she remembered that, until the hour in which she became such, no words of blame had ever reached her ear. She was so miserably alone too: for with the exception of her father and the maiden sister who presided over his establishment, her fastidious lord would admit none of her former associates beneath his roof.

"You are now in a responsible position, Mrs. Trevanion," was his reply, as she endeavored to expostulate against the exclusion of her two favorite cousins; "and must learn to suffice to yourself."

The struggle was soon over. The total want of moral courage evinced by his wife, while it excited the contempt of Mr. Trevanion, admirably seconded his views; and when the violent grief of his victim at the sudden death of her father occasioned the premature birth of her expected infant, and stretched her for months upon a bed of sickness, he at once felt that he had no further opposition to apprehend. Enchanted with the lovely little girl, which throve upon the bosom of a stranger

while its childish mother was still a helpless invalid, Mrs. Trevanion neither sought nor wished for other companionship. She watched with pleased and puerile curiosity all the details of the nursery; and was never weary of wondering at the astounding fact that she was herself the mother of the rosy smiling little creature before her—that it was her own—that it already knew her, *almost* as much as her nurse; and would stretch forth its little hands toward her, and crow with delight as it looked into her face.

It is true that there had been one drawback even to this innocent and natural felicity; and that one, as we need scarcely say, came from her husband, who, while occupied with the men of law in the settlement of Mr. Rotheringbury's affairs, had been summoned to the bedside of his suffering wife, whence, with childish eagerness, she directed his attention to her new treasure.

"Ha!" was the cold remark of the gentleman; "so you have given me a daughter, Clara. I anticipated as much. And now, take care of yourself, and you may yet one day make me the father of a boy."

He did, it is true, stoop down and kiss her pale cheek, but he turned no second glance upon the infant; and, in compliance with a hint from the nurse, he immediately afterward left the sick room.

Ere the recovery of Mrs. Trevanion was complete, her noble fortune had almost wholly passed into the hands of her husband; the villa at Richmond had become her own property; and the weak but well-meaning old aunt by whom she had been brought up had returned to Cumberland, anxious to end her days under the same roof which had witnessed her birth. Her other relations had, as we have already stated, long ceased to find a welcome in the house of Mr. Trevanion, and, in consequence, gradually forbore their visits; and thus the young wife was thrown entirely upon her husband for society.

Under these circumstances, nothing could be more natural than that as her grief for the loss of her father insensibly wore away, her whole happiness centered in her child, whose extreme loveliness soon won for it a deep affection, even in the heart of its greatly disappointed father; while, as years went by without any addition to his family, Mr. Trevanion at length brought himself to believe that the one-despised little girl might one day even better serve his ambition than the son for which he had so fondly hoped.

At the period of the infant's birth he had been sanguine in his belief that it would some day bear the title, and sustain the honors of his house, and his mortification at its sex was consequently deep and bitter; but when, a year or two subsequently, he ascertained that Lady Trevanion had, contrary to all expectation, become the mother of a son, his dream vanished; and he forthwith resolved to rear his daughter in such refinement as should, combined with her extraordinary beauty and noble fortune, render her a fitting bride for the proudest noble in the land.

Thus, as the child emerged from infancy into girlhood, she was placed under the immediate charge of a decayed lady of rank, to whom the luxurious home of the wealthy and high-bred merchant offered a welcome refuge from the cares and privations to which she must otherwise have been exposed; and surrounded by the most eminent masters, whose services were requited with unbounded liberality, and rendered with equal zeal. No interference was permitted on the part of Mrs. Trevanion, who had long before this period become so passive under the authority of her husband, that she uttered no remonstrance; and, finally, satisfied by the affection of the loving girl, whose tenderness suffered no abatement even under these unpromising circumstances, she ceased to assert the slightest wish to control or guide her actions.

Lady Mary Brookland was the ruling spirit of the house; and while Mrs. Trevanion lounged on her sofa engaged upon a novel, or took her solitary drive, the young heiress, accompanied by her high-born monitress, was introduced to the gayeties of London life; frequented the opera, the parks, and the public gardens; and, thanks to the able chaperonage of the accomplished woman of fashion, soon became a marked object of attraction in that sphere in which her father was anxious that she should move.

In due course of time the lovely Miss Trevanion was presented at court by her obliging friend Lady Mary, and welcomed to the intimacy of her aristocratic connections. Her great beauty and splendid expectations were sedulously whispered abroad; her extraordinary accomplishments and refinement of manner were the theme of general admiration; and, before she had attained her twentieth year, more than one highly-descended suitor had become a candidate for her hand.

The exultation of Mr. Trevanion was great, although perfectly undemonstrative; he felt as if, through his daughter, he was resuming his legitimate place in society; and already looked forward to the coronet which was to adorn her brow as the reward of his own humiliation and struggle. As his thoughts occasionally glanced to Sir Jasper and his heir, his lip curled rather with pride than resentment. He should yet teach them that he could win an illustration for which he was indebted solely to himself, and which was independent of their influence.

Under such circumstances as these, it does not require to be explained that Lady Mary Brookland gradually became all-powerful in the merchant's house. He had, as we have already shown, from the very period of his marriage, discountenanced the associates, as well as the family of his wife; and as his daughter grew to womanhood they were slowly and almost imperceptibly replaced by those of his aristocratic inmate, who was by no means averse to indulge her high-born but far from affluent nieces and cousins by a participation in the luxuries of her new home. First, it was the Honorable Miss Stapleton, who, at the entreaty of her aunt, consented to pass a month with her interesting charge, and to accompany her to exhibitions, and picture galleries; to appear in her opera-box, and to share in her riding excursions; then it was the charming widow of Sir John Snowdon, whose son and

heir being at Eton, rendered it peculiarly desirable that his fond and anxious mother should occasionally reside in town for a few weeks, in order to assure herself more satisfactorily of his health and progress than she could possibly do in her Highland castle; and on the occasion of these gratifying visits, flocks of noble ladies availed themselves of the opportunity to welcome them to the metropolis, and to make the acquaintance of the charming Miss Trevanion, who formed so attractive a feature in the fashionable *fêtes* of the season.

The beautiful Richmond villa soon became immensely popular with the *beau monde*, who were enchanted with the *déjeûners dansants* and *matinés musicales* provided for their amusement; and who, as they strolled over the velvet lawns and flower-studded conservatories, many of them proud of their own condescension, and others careless of all beyond the passing amusement of the hour—little suspected that they were mere pawns upon the diplomatic chess-board of their host, and were unconsciously working out the one great purpose of his existence.

The unexceptionable breeding of Mr. Trevanion, his ancient descent, and the uncalculated munificence of his establishment, insured the respect and deference of all by whom he was approached; while his sterling good sense and general information were alike appreciated by the more reflecting portion of his guests. Dowager dames and middle-aged nobles soon learned to prefer his society to that of the pleasure-hunters who fluttered through his saloons; and his dinner-table in Westbourne Terrace was in due course of time as much and as satisfactorily filled as his Richmond shrubberies.

Early accustomed to submission and supineness, Mrs. Trevanion evinced no mortification at the fact that Lady Mary did the honors of her house, seemingly satisfied that by such an arrangement she was relieved alike from exertion and responsibility; and, as she was always courteous to her guests, amiable, and well-dressed, she was generally considered as a lady-like, quiet little person, somewhat uninteresting, but perfectly presentable, whose destiny was a most enviable one, and for whom the world must evidently be *couleur de rose*.

Nor was the existence of Mrs. Trevanion, in point of fact, by any means an unhappy one; she was proud of her husband even while she feared him; and still more proud of her daughter, whose unfailing affection had been proof against all the temptations to arrogance and heartlessness by which she was surrounded; while she was at the same time dazzled and delighted by the perpetual stream of gayety and splendor upon which she was borne unresistingly along. She was amused by the eager pursuit of pleasure in which she was too indolent to share, even had she been permitted to do so; and flattered when her comfortable sofa was shared by a titled dowager or a withered man of fashion.

For years the courtly Lady Mary, who had become strongly attached to her young charge, had earnestly encouraged the ambitious dreams of her host, and watched the patrician admirers by whom the fair girl was approached with a jealousy equal to his own; but, a few months previous to the opening of our tale, she had relaxed wonderfully in her vigilance. Whether it were that she considered Miss Trevanion at six-and-twenty, and, in other respects, her own mistress, equally competent to judge and act for herself in the most important circumstance of her life, or that some other undivulged reason existed for her sudden quiescence, it is at least certain that her lectures upon the subject of eligible marriages, and the expediency of forming desirable connections, altogether ceased; while it was equally apparent that the beautiful heiress, although courteous and affable to all her suitors, evinced no preference toward either. And as the popularity of his daughter increased, so did the worldly dreams of Mr. Trevanion grow more and more brilliant. It was a matter perfectly settled in his mind that she was destined to accomplish a splendid alliance—a conviction which was strengthened by the peculiar disposition and habits of the young lady herself, who, reared in indulgence and luxury, was at once self-relying and refined, and entirely unsuited for an existence of obscurity or struggle.

How many visionary coronets danced before the mental sight of the proud father, poised only by a silken thread above the polished brow of his child, which it required but her touch to snap. With what silent delight did he anticipate the moment when as a peeress she might look down in disdain upon the haughty relatives by whom she had hitherto been overlooked and neglected. The otherwise high-minded and right-judging man, whose sense of honor was acute upon all other subjects, was alike blind and weak on this. He did not give a thought to the happiness of the bright being who made the sunshine of his home; but, his better feelings warped by ambition and resentment, he looked only to her worldly greatness, and to his own revenge. Every luxury of attire which could enhance her beauty was lavishly bestowed upon her; and even he himself, unbending as he was to all around him, treated her with a deference which to his jaundiced mind was already a triumph.

CHAPTER V.

A FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE.

THERE was a brilliant fête at the far-famed villa of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke at Putney; and as Mrs. St. Maur Fulke was the fashion, "all the world" had been intriguing for the last month to procure tickets. Various were the rumors which had been circulated on the subject of the approaching festivity; and the invited were meanwhile busied in preparing their fancy dresses for the occasion, and congratulating themselves upon the charming idea of their hostess, who had positively refused to sanction the admittance of such guests as should present themselves otherwise than *en costume*. The extensive grounds of the villa swept down to the river, where gayly-caparisoned boats with silken awnings lay moored beneath the over-hanging willows; gipsy-tents, dancing-booths, and

marquees fitted with counters, and crowded with glittering trifles, which were to be distributed by lottery, dotted the lawns and shrubberies; hidden orchestras made the summer air vocal; and on every side groups of fair women and gallant cavaliers in many-colored raiment, rendered the whole scene one parterre of moving flowers.

We are not about to describe these more minutely; a fancy-fete of this description may be readily imagined; pecresses were content to play peasant girls for the hour, while private gentlemen strutted as kings among the brilliant crowd

And a crowd in truth it was; for, although Mrs. St. Maur Fulke had resolutely turned a deaf ear to many an earnest entreaty, declaring that she merely sought to assemble her more immediate friends, she was so popular an individual, and so singularly favored in that respect that upward of seven hundred intimates graced her entertainment. The lively and wealthy little widow herself made a charming *grisette*. Nothing could be more perfect than the arrangement of her magnificent hair, nothing more becoming than the tightly-fitting boddice, and nothing more captivating than the fairy-like foot and ankle which were revealed by the short *jupon*. No wonder that many of the women and all the men were enraptured with Mrs. St. Maur Fulke!

Nevertheless, however, there was one more brilliant and stately beauty who fairly divided with her hostess the admiration of the courtly revelers, and that one was Miss Trevanion, whose dark loveliness was rendered striking by her gypsy garb. Many was the palm extended to invite her predictions and many the low-breathed and anxious question to which she replied with a dignified composure well calculated to extinguish the hope that her bright eyes had inspired. For a time her attentive chaperone, Lady Mary, moved majestically beside her, habited as a sybil; but gradually, as the human kaleidoscope varied its figures, the two ladies became separated by the crowd; other gypsies with dark eyes and hair bewildered the titled duenna in the distance; and finally she relinquished all idea of pursuing her lost charge.

It was a glorious summer day; one of those rare days all balm and sunshine, which make the very sense of existence doubly enjoyable; the flexile branches of the trees danced in the light and perfumed air; the flowers lifted their glowing blossoms to the sky; the ripples of the river were brilliant as diamond dust; and every sun-touched leaf glittered like a living emerald; while the long dark avenues of flowering shrubs, over-arched by forest timber, offered their welcome shade to those who sought escape for a season from the heat and hurry of the open lawns.

Through one of these bowery areades, a few hours after the commencement of the fete, slowly wandered two figures engaged in a low and evidently engrossing conversation; who, ever as they approached the termination of the *allée*, retraced their steps, as if anxious to secure themselves against intrusion. One of these was Miss Trevanion; but all the dignified playfulness which had won for her the admiration of the groups by which she had been previously surrounded, had totally disappeared. Although her movements were steady and measured, her head was bowed, and the hand which grasped her cloak was so tightly clinched that her small fingers were rigid and bloodless. Her companion, who was dressed as a minstrel, and carried a guitar slung across his shoulder, was evidently several years her junior in age; his fair hair clustered massively about his cheeks and brow, and his large eyes, of a deep and intense blue, were fringed by long dark lashes upon both the upper and the under lids; in person he was tall and slight, symmetrically and vigorously formed; and there was a distinction in his finely chiseled features and lofty carriage peculiarly attractive.

"It is worse than vain to indulge in such a hope, Sydney;" said the lady despondingly, as they turned onee more into the deepest shade of the shrubbery; "even Lady Mary herself would not dare to broach the subject to my father, great as her influence undoubtedly is; and now, as if to render our difficulty still more insurmountable, I am persecuted by the insane pursuit of that superannuated old peer."

"But surely, Ida—"

"Nay, nay—" interposed Miss Trevanion, striving to smile; "you need waste no words on him. I have no inclination to purchase a coronet, and as little desire to wear one."

"And can not you convince your father of that fact? You are all-powerful with him."

"Perhaps I might, but our position would still remain unaltered. For that purpose, as I have already explained to you, I have been reared and educated. My own inclinations have never been consulted; nor will I hesitate to confess, that until I knew you, I never cared to speculate upon the future; and my father has consequently lived on in the firm conviction that his wishes would not be thwarted. From this fatal mistake I can anticipate nothing but unhappiness; for, whatever may be my final decision as regards yourself, I can foresee only displeasure and disappointment on his part."

"And can there be any doubt as to that decision?" asked the young man, earnestly.

"I fear not;" was the subdued reply; "but still I shrink from the contest like a coward. It is not your want of fortune which will operate against you, for as an only child I have more than enough; but it is—"

"My obscurity;" said her companion, bitterly.

"Sydney!" exclaimed Miss Trevanion with haughty indignation; "You are a gentleman, both by birth and breeding, or I never could have loved you; but you have no title to offer to me—and, then—," she paused, and blushed deeply.

"Say on, Ida. What more? I will endeavor to bear all which it may be your pleasure to inflict."

"Your youth"—murmured the lady.

"Now you are in truth fighting against shadows!" was the impatient retort; "a marvelous disparity of six years if I mistake not. Can Mr. Trevanion possibly infer from that circumstance that I am unable to protect you?"

"I was not thinking of my father when I

urged the objection;" said his companion; "No, Sydney; it was born of my own fears. You have assured me, and I believe you, that I am the first woman whom you have ever loved; but where can I find the assurance that I shall be the last?"

"In yourself. Who that has won the affection of Ida Trevanion can ever turn a thought of love upon another of her sex? You do yourself injustice by such an apprehension."

"At this moment you feel all that you declare: of that, I have no doubt;" was the low reply; "nor will I be guilty of the pitiful affectation of seeming to think otherwise; but time, Sydney, time is a sad magician; and the day may come when even you may feel the imprudence of having bound yourself to a wife even those six years your senior."

"Never!" exclaimed the young man energetically.

"And mark me, Sydney;" pursued Miss Trevanion, laying her hand heavily on his arm, and raising her eyes steadily to his; "mark me—for this moment may be the turning-point of both our lives—I could bear all but that. Were such a contingency possible, I could share poverty, hardship, and even exile with you; but one symptom of change, one suspicion of coldness, one dream —mark me, I say once more—one *dream* that you had bestowed upon another the love which you had vowed to me, would kill me. Reflect, therefore, before it is too late. I fear that you have not yet learned to understand my character; to see that under an habitual quietude of manner I conceal a strength of purpose and a depth of feeling which must make me either supremely happy or supremely miserable. I must be all or nothing to the man into whose hands I resign my destiny."

"Ida," said her companion, "I have not deserved this doubt. Did I not feel that from the moment in which you become my wife my whole being will be centered in yourself for ever, I would not expose you to the trial which awaits you."

"Again I say, reflect;" continued Miss Trevanion solemnly; "it is my perfect consciousness of my own nature which causes me to hesitate. Little did I dream when we first met, that in you I saw the arbiter of my destiny; nor can I yet understand that the ordinarily keen-sighted Lady Mary should, up to this hour, have failed to remark the progress of our intimacy."

"My aunt is by no means so blind as you suppose," said the young man with a quiet smile; "nor would it appear that she considers Sydney Elphinstone so ineligible a match, even for Miss Trevanion, as that young lady herself. Her own sister married a commoner, and was a far happier woman than Lady Mary."

"Do you really mean to infer that she is aware of our attachment?"

"Has she not lost you in the crowd, Ida? Does she not occasionally doze at the opera? Can you have failed to remark the long, prosy conversations in which she indulges from time to time, with persons whose intellect she despises, and with whose modes of thinking she has no sympathy?"

Miss Trevanion became suddenly thoughtful, but only for an instant. "No, no; it is not possible;" she said firmly; "my father trusts her so implicitly; and it would be too cruel were he to be deceived in us both."

"My assurance that she is our friend gives you no pleasure then, Ida?" said her lover reproachfully.

"Do not mistake me. I only fear that Lady Mary, in her affection for her nephew and her friend, is unconsciously incurring a frightful responsibility, and may hereafter have cause to regret her indulgence."

"Listen to me," broke in the young man impetuously. "My position is a painful one. Loving you—and you can not doubt how well! and how entirely for yourself—I may, and must, to the world appear sordid and interested. This consideration was bitter enough, but it has hitherto been my pride to feel that you at least acquitted me of so base a motive. Would that you were a beggar, Ida; for then, at least——"

"Shame on you!" exclaimed Miss Trevanion; "Do not suffer your mind to be sullied for an instant by such a thought. Money!"—and her proud lip curled with all the scorn of one who had never been taught to feel the value of the riches for which she evinced so unequivocal a contempt; "surely you have already betrayed annoyance enough upon that odious subject, and it is quite superfluous to renew it."

"Forgive me; and you *will* do so, when I explain that, conscious of my own suffering upon that point, I was anxious to exonerate my aunt from a similar suspicion. She loves me; I have acknowledged to her that my every hope of happiness depends upon an union with yourself; and thus, if indeed she has betrayed her trust, I can but bless her for the weakness."

"But did she not endeavor to impress upon you the imprudence of such an attachment?"

"I suppose I must acknowledge that she did. She told me, I remember, that Mr. Trevanion was ambitious, and that she could hold out no hope; that my suit would be considered by him, and probably by yourself also, as presumptuous and absurd."

"Absurd?"

"Even so."

"And wherefore?"

"Because it was so evidently hopeless."

"Did not the word imply another meaning?"

"None that I could discover."

"And yet it might be that she meant to show you the absurdity of asking the hand of a woman older than yourself."

"*Again*, Ida!"

"I can not help it. The conviction haunts me pertinaciously, that, in overlooking so serious a fact, I am wilfully risking our mutual happiness. Women are so frail, Sydney; they fade so soon; they are at the mercy of a thousand casualties, from which men are free. They are, moreover, so susceptible of wrong, that, although they may appear to forget as well as to forgive, it is strange but true that every new sorrow recalls the memory of past

suffering. Griefs and trials which had seemed for a time, even to themselves, to have been outlived and obliterated, add their mental pang to the new wound; and scars, which had apparently closed, bleed again; for the heart is more difficult to heal than the body, and more tenacious of the hurts by which it has been injured. If, then, such be the fate of the most forbearing of the sex, judge what must be the destiny of those whose nature forbids them either to forget or to forgive—for whom the first insult is final—who can hate as fiercely as they can love. Should they not be wary? Should they not shrink from rushing upon their own destruction?"

"Ida, you torture both yourself and me."

"And it is because I love you, Sydney, that I do so. Because my love is so selfish and so engrossing, that I seek to forge arms against myself. Because I would not that hereafter you should look back with pity or with scorn upon my weakness."

"And do you in reality believe that I could ever prove so vile an ingrate?"

"I think less of you individually, Sydney, while thus listening to the voice of reason and common sense, than of human nature in the mass. Who can answer for the effect which may be produced upon his nature by time and circumstances?"

"It is in the power of every man of honor to do so."

"But I would owe nothing to the honor of my husband upon a point like this. Such a safeguard to my pride would but revolt my affection."

"You distort my meaning, Ida. Is this generous?"

"I know not!" said Miss Trevanion sadly; "I only feel that in becoming your wife, I should so utterly resign my every chance of happiness into your hands, that, were I to deceive myself, the wreck would be a fatal one."

"You do not, then, consider me worthy of the trust?"

"As you are, Sydney? Oh, yes! Worthy—most worthy. I only tremble when I reflect upon what you may one day become."

"This discussion is idle and most painful, Ida," said Elphinstone in an unsteady voice, "I have but assurances to offer, to which you apparently assign no credit. I was not prepared for such mistrust on your part."

"Do not wrong me," was the eager rejoinder. "I do *not* mistrust you—this interview is a sufficient evidence to the contrary; but—"

"But you dare not confide your happiness to my keeping?"

There was silence for a moment, and nothing could be heard in that quiet and secluded avenue, save the sounds of far-off music, the ringing of distant laughter, and the whisperings of the wind through the dense foliage of the overarching trees; and then came a low murmur of "I do—I will;" and the extended hand of Miss Trevanion was passionately clasped in that of her companion.

"Ida—my own."

"Now, and forever."

"Without doubt or misgiving?"

"In all faith and trust."

"I will merit both."

"I believe it, Sydney; and on my side I will endeavor to prove to you that I deserve your full and entire affection; and I will strive to forget—"

"Forget nothing, save that you have been unjust to yourself; and if a life-long devotion can repay you for the blessedness which you have conferred on me, it is, and must be yours. Do not imagine for an instant that I am unconscious of the sacrifice which you are willing to make in order to secure my happiness; do not suppose that I am blind to the worldly advantages which you so generously resign for my sake; I am but too keenly alive to their extent. I know that you will be blamed, and even pitied, for bestowing yourself upon a poor and nameless suitor, in the fullness of your beauty, and the zenith of your fashion, when the noblest and the proudest are contending for your favor; but you shall have no cause to regret such a concession."

"I accept the assurance," said Miss Trevanion tenderly; "I will henceforward throw all misgiving to the winds, and trust implicitly in your affection. We have, however, still to struggle against very formidable difficulties, Sydney; and I confess, that when I think of my father's anger I feel terrified."

"Surely, with such an auxiliary as my aunt, you will be able to overcome the objections of Mr. Trevanion."

"I repeat that I believe them to be insuperable; but, as it has now become my duty to make the attempt, I will not shrink from the task, onerous as it is."

"Would that I could spare you the trial!"

"Impossible! I must meet the displeasure which I shall have incurred, alone; and this Sydney, will be a sufficient proof of the sincerity of my affection; for, peculiar as he may be on this one point, my father has hitherto been to me all kindness and indulgence; and I can no involve him in mortification and disappointmen without suffering severely on my side. My only consolation will exist in the conviction that he desires my happiness, and that I shall have secured it by uniting myself to the only man who has ever won my love. And now let us part, or our absence will be remarked."

"So soon, Ida?"

"Believe me, it is better so."

But still they lingered awhile, her hand in his, and conversing in those low tones which are audible rather to the heart than to the ear, but which are nevertheless trumpet-tongued to those who love. And then their hands were more firmly clasped together; their eyes met in a long and eloquent look; the lady emerged into the sunshine, and the gentleman plunged yet deeper into the shadows of the shrubbery. The cheek of Miss Trevanion was pale, but she betrayed no other symptom of emotion; and if she played her adopted part less gayly than before she indulged in that sylvan *tête-à-tête* there was a graceful languor in her whole deportment which rendered her only the more fascinating and attractive to her assiduous admirers.

Nothing could go off better than the fête of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke; and numerous were the compliments which she received from her reluctantly-departing guests, warned by

rising moon, and a rising mist from the river, that even the most refined pleasures must at last terminate. Nymphs and goddesses folded their shawls and mantles about them; knights and courtiers resolved themselves into mere mortals; carriages thundered to the gates; the voices of servants and policemen were loud in every direction, and Miss Trevanion handed to her chariot by a minstrel, whose plumed hat completely overshadowed his countenance, was soon rolling along the road to London, seated beside the silent and somewhat conscience-stricken Sybil, to whose care she had been confided.

CHAPTER VI.

A REVELATION.

"And so," said Mr. Trevanion on the following morning, as he rose from the breakfast table, and transferred the "Morning Post" to his wife; "the *fête* of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke was the most brilliant affair of the season. Do you concur in this opinion, Lady Mary?"

"There can be no doubt that it was admirably arranged, and very successful;" was the quiet reply. "In fact I never saw a collection of more effective costumes, or listened to more agreeable music. What say you, Ida?"

"That if the guests were not amused, it was assuredly not the fault of the hostess," said the young lady.

"You, at least, have every reason to be satisfied," observed her father; "as I find it recorded in 'The Post,' that 'the lovely and accomplished Miss Trevanion was one of its brightest ornaments;' although I still maintain that the costume which you selected, was by no means that in which I should, had I been consulted on the subject, have counseled *my* daughter to appear."

"I think that you would have altered your opinion, had you seen how admirably Ida enacted her assumed character," said the indulgent and politic Lady Mary; "I can assure you that it excited general remark."

Mr. Trevanion acknowledged the courtesy by a gracious bow.

"And it was, moreover, excessively becoming," pursued the family friend; "I never saw the dear girl appear to more advantage. I was quite proud of my charge."

"I hope, madam, that you will never have cause to be otherwise," observed Mr. Trevanion, haughtily; "but that ere long—"

"No doubt, no doubt, my dear sir," interposed the lady somewhat nervously; "there can not be a question that the social success of your daughter will augment, while that of so many less highly-gifted girls is terribly apt to diminish. Ida's fashion is now so perfectly established, and the set into which I have had the privilege of introducing her is so thoroughly unexceptionable, that her future station depends entirely upon herself."

"I am convinced," said Mr. Trevanion, with a second lofty bow of acknowledgment, that she will not lose sight, either of her obligation to you, or of the immense responsibility which now rests upon herself."

"I am sure," whined the thin voice of Mrs. Trevanion, from behind the broad pages of the newspaper, by which she was entirely concealed; "that if Ida is not happy and satisfied, I can not tell what could make her so."

"My young friend has certainly drawn a prize in the great lottery of life;" said the bland Lady Mary in her smoothest accent.

"A fact of which I trust that she is fully aware;" was the sententious rejoinder of the gentleman, as he strode loftily across the floor; "for, truth to say, I can scarcely imagine a want or a wish on her part which she is unable to gratify—young, handsome, and fashionable, with the prospect of a fine fortune, and the offer of a peerage—"

"Can *I* speak a few words with you in private, papa?" asked Miss Trevanion in a firm voice, but with a heightened color.

"In private, Ida! Are we not now sufficiently private for any communication which you may find it necessary to make? Is not Lady Mary one of the family? While your mother—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Trevanion;" said the noble widow with alacrity, at the same time rising from her seat; "I have letters of some importance to write, and shall be glad to commence them as early in the day as possible; you must therefore allow me to retire to my own room."

"As you will, madam, as you will;" replied the host, holding back the door with the ceremonious courtesy which he always observed to the other sex; "if such be the case I can of course offer no objection, but were it otherwise—"

"Not a word more, my dear sir; believe me that no apology is necessary; I was about to withdraw as Ida spoke;" and gathering the rich folds of her gray damask dress about her, the portly lady disappeared.

"And you, Mrs. Trevanion?" said her husband interrogatively.

"I would rather that mamma should remain;" was the calm remark of his daughter.

"Her opinion on the subject to be discussed, of whatever nature it may be, can not but prove valuable;" observed Mr. Trevanion, contemptuously.

"That is precisely my own sentiment;" said the young lady, "for I have firm faith in her affection for her only child, and as I am about to speak frankly and seriously upon a matter involving my future happiness in life, it will be a sincere gratification to me should she see and feel as I do."

"You have then some doubt as to *my* sympathy—" said her father tartly.

"I confess it; but I do not despair of convincing alike your heart and your reason, for I have also an unshaken trust in your paternal tenderness."

"Enough of this verbal skirmishing, Ida. What have you to say? I have business in town to-day, and expect the carriage round every instant."

"I shall not detain you long, sir. You have for the last four years expressed a great desire

to see me settled in life, and I consider it my duty to tell you without procrastination or concealment that my election is made."

"You accept Lord Downmere?"

Miss Trevanion smiled disdainfully. "Decidedly not. I have no ambition to become the wife of a man old enough to be my grandfather."

"A peer of the realm—"

"A selfish sensualist."

"Pshaw! The only chance of married happiness to a woman is to unite herself to a man of twice her own age, who knows how to appreciate her youth and beauty at their proper value. A sensualist! And why not? How can that affect your comfort? An egotist? Trash! Let him indulge himself as he may, you are not likely to suffer from his selfishness. Upon this subject I shall admit of no argument, as I have already promised your hand to Lord Downmere."

"Sir!" exclaimed the young lady indignantly; "I can not surely have understood you rightly; did you say that you had promised my hand?"

"I did."

"And without my sanction?"

"Even so."

"Then you must excuse me, if I at once declare that I am as little disposed to defer to the tyranny of a father as to that of a husband. We are not, happily, in Circassia, where parents make a trade of their children, and dispose of them to the best bidder; and thus I do not acknowledge the right even of my own parent to transfer me like a bale of merchandize."

"You might at least have spared me that taunt, Miss Trevanion!" exclaimed the merchant with vehemence; "it comes badly from you, who are indebted to my self-sacrifice for all the advantages upon which you pride yourself."

"Pardon me, sir; I intended no sarcasm," said his daughter deprecatingly; "nor can I comprehend how you should for an instant attach such a meaning to my words. My very rejection of the suitor whom you have proposed to me is a sufficient guarantee of my utter indifference to the empty distinctions of rank and name. No one can have a more profound respect for high blood and ancient lineage than myself, but I have no inclination to immolate my happiness at the shrine of mere rank."

"I shall not bandy phrases with you, Miss Trevanion," was the tart reply; "my straightforward mode of speech is no match for your sentimental eloquence; and it would appear that my paternal authority is no curb to your will. Be good enough, therefore, to inform me of your pleasure, in order that I may not waste time which can be more profitably employed."

Tears rose to the eyes of the young lady, but they did not fall. She remained silent for an instant; and then, grasping the hand of her father, as it rested upon the back of the chair from which he had risen, she said beseechingly, "Do not be harsh with me! If you only knew how much it costs me to thwart your wishes upon so important a point as this, I am sure that you would rather pity than condemn me; but believe me when I assure you that it is its very importance which gives me strength to do so. You have been so invariably kind and indulgent; you have so long made my happiness your chief care, that I dare not bring myself to suspect your affection when I am about to put it to the test."

"What more?" was the cold inquiry, as Mr. Trevanion withdrew his hand from her clasp.

"I have already declared," said his daughter, retreating a step or two, as if stung by his tone and gesture, "that my election is made—my promise is given—my hand is pledged. That promise and that hand were mine to bestow or to withhold; and I have acted upon the firm conviction that I possessed an undoubted right to decide my own destiny."

"And this conviction has induced you to counteract my wishes, and to disappoint my views. What compensation have you to offer? What brilliant establishment have you secured for yourself which may tend to reconcile me to your disobedience?"

"Will not my future happiness—"

"No romance, if you please, Miss Trevanion. Mine has been a life made up altogether of realities, and I have little taste for supplying incidents for a novel in my own family. Happiness in this world, young lady, as you ought by this time to be aware, implies wealth, station, and influence; and once more I ask you if you have secured these?"

"And on my part, sir, I frankly answer—No."

"Better and better!" was the sarcastic reply of the merchant, as his cheek became livid with suppressed passion; "but pray proceed."

"I will; my hand is pledged, and pledged irrevocably, to Mr. Sydney Elphinstone."

"To Mr. Sydney Elphinstone — Indeed!" sneered Mr. Trevanion; while a "Good gracious me" came from the lounging chair in which his wife had hitherto sat silent and disregarded.

"A beardless boy, and a pennyless pauper!" pursued the gentleman after drawing a long breath "you do honor to your birth and breeding even by such an inclination, Miss Trevanion. Rest assured, however, that no folly of the kind shall ever be perpetrated in my family; I positively forbid all further mention of the young man's name beneath my roof."

"I much regret, sir —"

"And so do I, madam; so do I; deeply, bitterly regret the degeneracy of a child from whose sense of personal dignity and filial affection I had looked for obedience, and a ready co-operation in my own views. Do you imagine, Miss Trevanion, that I have bestowed a fortune upon your education, and petted and pampered you like a peeress, in order that you may make me the laughing-stock of my haughty relatives?"

"I had flattered myself, sir, that I was indebted for all the advantages and indulgences which I have enjoyed, to your fatherly affection alone."

"Listen to me;" said Mr. Trevanion, sternly

"Let my motives be what they might, you owe me tenfold the gratitude which a parent could claim from an ordinary child. Your very birth, madam, was a bitter disappointment. I had married your mother in the hope that she would make me the father of a son; that I might meet Sir Jasper upon equal terms; and that the heir to my wealth might illustrate the family name as proudly as he who was its representative. You know me, and the one ambition of my life, well enough to feel that I became a husband from no selfish seeking after personal gratification; I could and should have sufficed to myself, had I not had an ulterior aim—but enough on that subject. *You* were born; a girl—a woman—and my first hope was frustrated. Your mother bore me no other child, and new prospects opened before me. You were handsome, and I was careful that your beauty should be enhanced by every extraneous aid. I have reared you rather like the daughter of a duke than the heiress of a commoner. I have spared neither gold nor care; and, I believe I may be permitted to hope that neither has been expended injudiciously. I have done more. I have secured to you the services of a woman of rank—do you mark me, Miss Trevanion? I say—and I say it advisedly,—the *services* of a woman of rank; for, whatever you may feel inclined to think upon the subject, you may trust me when I assure you that there is no leveller like wealth; and however respectfully we may see fit to treat Lady Mary Brookland, it is not the less certain that her poverty has compelled her to bow her pride; and that she is as completely my hired dependent as the butler who officiates at my sideboard. And now, allow me to inquire what return you are anxious to make for all my solicitude? I believed, and I had every right to believe, that the false position in which I had so long lived, must necessarily end when you attained to womanhood, and were competent to secure such a marriage as *my* birth, and your own personal and acquired advantages, rendered expedient. I secured for you the homage of a nobleman, and I was satisfied. I felt that my task was ended, and my object accomplished. I had toiled and waited for years, but I had ultimately effected my purpose; and I turned back no regret upon the past."

"Yet surely, sir, my future happiness may be considered as worthy of some consideration."

"I have already requested that you would have the courtesy to spare me all phrase-making;" was the impatient retort: "we are wasting words. Will you, or will you not, Miss Trevanion—I must now insist on your definitive reply—accept the hand of Lord Downmere?"

"I can not;" said the young lady with a quivering lip, but with unabated firmness; "I do not even respect him; and I will never give myself to a man whom I despise."

"This is, if I rightly understand, your final determination. Good. Listen, in your turn, to mine. Become the wife of your pauper-lover, and share his poverty; marry your boy-suitor, and expose yourself to the ridicule of the world; but do not expect me to take any part either in the privations or the sarcasms to which you are willing to expose yourself. Do not, moreover, expect that I shall render myself responsible for your obstinacy, or your error,—for I am willing to give it whichever name you please. Whatever may be my disappointment or my mortification, I have still moral courage enough left to assert myself; and no hardly-earned gains of mine shall go to enrich a son-in-law whom I will never recognize."

"My *dear* father—"

"You have heard my decision, Miss Trevanion. It now remains for you to make yours."

"It is made, sir. My word is pledged; and I should not be your daughter if I failed to redeem it."

"The flattery is delicate, but useless and ill-timed. We then thoroughly understand each other?"

"I fear so."

It is a fatal error to compel, by unreasoning severity, a feeling which was perhaps not yet sufficiently strong to withstand tenderness and entreaty, into direct and deliberate opposition, and to assail it too roughly by giving to it the stimulus of anger; while it is a common mistake, and a fatal one, to suppose that by harshness and intemperance we can succeed in crushing it, as though it were a mere brute antagonist to be overcome by physical force. There is a recoil against oppression in every heart; and many may be persuaded and convinced by gentleness, who become only the more resolute when opposed by violence.

Whether such would have been the case in the present instance it is impossible to decide, as the trial was not made; while the look of calm defiance which passed between the mortified father and his indignant child at this period of the conversation gave ample evidence that neither was disposed to yield.

"Now, don't be obstinate, Ida;" whined out the thin voice from the arm-chair; "your father does not like you to marry Mr. Elphinstone—I do not like it—and I am quite sure that Lady Mary will be furious."

"Your opinion is, no doubt, a valuable one, Mrs. Trevanion;" said her husband sarcastically; "but, nevertheless, I take the liberty of dissenting from it; as I am quite prepared to believe that we are indebted to that very lady for the pleasant position in which we now find ourselves."

"I can assure you—" commenced his daughter, as a flush of generous indignation burnt upon her cheek and brow; "that you wrong Lady Mary Brookland, sir, by such a supposition. It is true that she originally presented Mr. Elphinstone to me; and surely nothing could be more simple than that she should introduce so near a relative to the members of a family in which she resided; but, beyond the fact of this introduction, Lady Mary has never made the slightest effort to force Mr. Elphinstone upon my acquaintance."

"Probably not;" was the cold reply; "Lady Mary is a woman of taste and tact, and not likely to commit herself by any overt exertions to that effect; but there are such things, Miss Trevanion, as negative helps—assistance ren-

dered rather by omissions than by actual services."

"Is not this ungenerous, sir?"

"It may be so; but I apprehend that it is not unjust. I can not be deceived in believing that the admirable 'understanding'—Is not that the conventional term applied to such dignified and womanly arrangements as that to which it would appear that you have lent yourself?—must have taken place at the *fête* of Mrs. St. Maur Fulke. Now, will you permit me to inquire how your chaperone had disposed of herself when this very romantic scene was taking place? Was she present?"

"She was not. We had been accidentally separated by the crowd."

"No doubt. I suspected as much; and the great extent of the pleasure grounds naturally rendered it quite impossible that you should meet again until the gentleman had carried his point. It is precisely as I thought; and confirms me more steadfastly than ever in the conviction, that in every affair of life there is nothing so desirable as to secure the co-operation of persons of sense, who appreciate so admirably the extent of what is required of them; while simpletons on the contrary, are like grey hairs—they are always obtrusive, and never can be kept in their right places. I was quite sure that poor Lady Mary had, in some way, lost sight of you altogether."

"Pardon me, sir, if, in my turn, I remark that we are losing sight of our subject;" said Miss Trevanion with dignity; "I have already exonerated Lady Mary from all blame, and am quite willing to take upon myself the responsibility of my own actions. I am no child to obey the leading-strings of a nurse—no puppet to dance obedience to the wires of an exhibitor—but a reflecting and anxious woman, conscious that I hold in my own hands the control of my future destiny."

"So be it;" contemptuously retorted her father; "and I congratulate you that they are so full, as you are likely to have little else to grasp in them."

"The jest is a bitter one, but I will not resent it;" said the young lady. "I see and feel, painfully feel, that on the one most important action of my life there exists no hope of our sympathizing. But still, oh, my dear father, still have mercy on me; and do not refuse to me at least your blessing and your forgiveness. Reflect that, in taking so decided a step in opposition to your wishes I am already sufficiently to pity; and do not let me have in addition to apprehend the misery of your permanent displeasure."

For an instant the lip of Mr. Trevanion quivered, but only for an instant. The proud spirit of the disappointed man was stronger even than his paternal love, and he rallied ere his daughter had time to remark the passing emotion. "My blessing!" he exclaimed vehemently; "my blessing! on what? On your deliberate disobedience? My forgiveness? Of what? Of your premeditated overthrow of all my hopes? Look for neither, madam; look for neither. Avail yourself of your boasted privilege of free-will—give yourself to a beggar—the law will be your sanction, and I your victim. Let that consciousness suffice you. All further words are needless. I withdraw all opposition—I will offer no impediments to your folly; go, and like other lunatics, rush upon your fate."

"Father!"—

"Enough, Miss Trevanion;" was the stern rejoinder; "I still feel sufficient pity for your madness to accord you four-and-twenty hours to reflect; but, if at the termination of that time, you adhere to your present insane purpose, you will no longer have a father, and will be at perfect liberty to replace his protection by that of any husband you may see fit to select."

As these words were uttered, Mr. Trevanion hastily left the room, while his daughter sank back upon the sofa, and buried her face in her hands.

For a moment only there was silence, as the weak and timid wife had no sooner ascertained the disappearance of her husband than she roused herself from her habitual apathy, and querulously upbraided her agitated daughter, with what she characteristically designated as her silly and nonsensical obstinacy. The reproaches of Mrs. Trevanion, however, fell upon the ear of Ida with no greater force than the whistling of the subsiding wind amid the cordage of a tempest-tossed vessel, when the deep booming of the death-dealing waves has passed away; and as they concluded by an instruction to her daughter to ring for her maid, and to reach her eau-de-cologne, the poor girl having obeyed, hastened to escape from the room, in order to reflect in solitude upon the exigences of her painful position.

CHAPTER VII.

A NOBLE SUITOR.

It is marvelous that although daily experience should suffice to prove that we are at best the poor creatures of circumstance, the mere puppets of accident, we are all prone to believe that nothing can go on satisfactorily unless, even while professing to trust in Providence, we undertake to guide the whole action of the machinery ourselves; and thus, too often, instead of being, as we fondly and blindly imagine, the spiders that weave the web, we find ourselves in the end, merely the flies that have been caught in it.

Such was, in a great degree, the case with Mr. Trevanion, who having for years fondly hugged the belief that he had taught all around him to bend to his indomitable will, suddenly found himself opposed by the very being upon whose obedience and submission he had calculated the most securely; and as he rolled toward London, in his well-hung and luxurious chariot, he felt like a person stunned by some sudden blow. Calm and concentered was his rage; and none who looked on him would have suspected the bitterness of the feelings which were masked by the stern and cold demeanor that he successfully maintained.

For the first time in his life the proud and self-reliant man was compelled to acknowl-

edge to himself that the obstacle flung upon the path of his ambition *might* prove beyond even *his* strength to remove. There was that in the eye of his daughter during their late conversation, which convinced him that she had inherited no small portion of his own resolute spirit; and while he dwelt in moody and wordless anger upon her ingratitude, and recapitulated to himself all the advantages and indulgences by which he had surrounded her from her very cradle, he never once suffered himself to remember that these had been conferred for his own sake rather than for her's; and that he had built up a dazzling edifice of greatness upon her loveliness, grace, and talent, of which he would not have laid a single stone, had she been less eminently gifted by nature to work out the cherished purpose of his existence.

He thought of his ancestral home, and his haughty relatives with a pang at his heart—his cloud-dream of crushing the arrogance, and revenging the neglect of Sir Jasper and his wife by presenting to them his daughter as Countess of Downmere, had vanished; and how was it replaced?

As the question shaped itself in his mind, Mr. Trevanion crushed the arms which were folded across his breast almost into the flesh, and set his teeth closely, while his lips grew ashy white. He could better have borne any thing than this. Then his thoughts reverted to Lady Mary Brookland, whom, despite his daughter's disclaimer, he was far from exonerating from at least a tacit connivance with her nephew; but on her, he bitterly felt that it would be impossible to wreak his displeasure. A rupture with the person whom in his heart he silently designated as a titled viper, would effectually disorganize his whole household, and overthrow the work of years. Thanks to the persevering system of contempt which he had pursued toward his wife, she had ended by becoming a mere cypher under her own roof, whose authority was not recognized beyond the circle of her dressing-room; while the free-masonry of rank would, as a matter of course, induce half his aristocratic acquaintance to adopt the cause of the peer's daughter, and to find food for satire rather than sympathy in his own mortification. No; happen what might, he felt that he must at least keep up appearances with Mr. Elphinstone's aunt, although it by no means followed that he should for the future place the same implicit reliance on her prudence and loyalty as he had hitherto done.

In any, and every point of view, his position was accordingly a perplexing one; and had he not been made of sterner stuff than the generality of his sex, who, however, self-sufficing so long as the wheels of life's chariot run smoothly along the broad highway of prosperity and comfort, are prone to turn for help and solace to others when those same wheels become clogged by the mire, and arrested by the masses, of doubt and difficulty, he would have been sorely conscious on that unlucky morning of the height and breadth of the barrier which he had himself built up between his own will and the free agency of those about him. As it was, however, he merely sought to discover the most effectual means of meeting and combating the exigences of the emergency in which he was placed, single-handedly, and resolutely.

As we have already shown by the history of his past life, the nature of Mr. Trevanion was eminently energetic; with him to will had hitherto been to accomplish; and even now he would not suffer himself to believe that he should finally be defeated; Ida's exhibition of spirit had rather startled than convinced him. Women were impulsive, he knew; but he clung to the belief that they were by no means equally consistent. It was the first occasion upon which the wishes of his daughter had been seriously opposed, and she had, almost as a natural consequence, indignantly and determinedly resented that opposition; but when she had taken time to reflect, she must and would see her folly in its true light. It was absurd to suppose that, reared in luxury as she had been, and habituated to have her every desire gratified as soon as expressed, she could be mad enough to cast from her all these advantages to share the comparative penury of a younger brother. No—no—he had only to give her time. Her woman-vanity would do the rest.

The mental argument was a comfortable one; and before Mr. Trevanion reached town the pressure of his folded arms relaxed, his eye lost some portion of its dark fire, and he breathed more freely.

Suddenly a thought struck him; he pulled the check-string, and the carriage, turning down a lateral street, rolled rapidly toward Piccadilly.

The Earl of Downmere was at home; and as Mr. Trevanion had long been a privileged visitor, he was instantly admitted to the breakfast-room, where his mature lordship sat discussing in solitary state a most *récherché* repast.

Henry Ferdinand, Earl of Downmere, and Baron Woodlyn, was a portly personage of tall stature and stern countenance, who bore his sixty years of life with considerable dignity; smoothly and composedly too, without any attempt to disguise their amount by hair-dye or cosmetic, like one who scorned such puerilities as at once utterly beneath his own notice, and beyond that of others. An equal independence of feeling was also visible in his costume, which, although unexceptionable in material, was worn with a careless disregard to every consideration save that of ease, which betrayed the innate selfishness of the individual; one slipperless foot rested upon the seat of a chair in front of him, and looked suspicious of incipient gout; while the knee of the other leg was covered with a napkin which had become considerably sullied during the process of the meal to which his attention was directed. The *Times* lay on the table, luxuriously bathing one extremity of its colossal sheet in the savory jelly of a *dindon aux truffes;* while his valet, infinitely better dressed than himself, stood behind his chair, reading aloud from the *Morning Post* the fashionable news of the day. The room in which the peer was seated was gorgeous with gilding, and paneled with family portraits, the most recent in date being a like-

ness of himself taken in the year of his majority, and forming a woeful and saddening contrast with his present appearance. A heavy sofa, and a well cushioned *fauteuil* stood near the fire-place, and a large folding screen partially vailed the door; it was indeed evident in all the details of the apartment that the "creature comforts" of this life were by no means disregarded by its owner; and a feeling of surprise was elicited involuntarily that so thorough a self-seeker as my Lord Downmere, should for a moment contemplate the possibility of so great a risk as marriage, tending, as it could not fail to do, to the disturbance of his long cherished habits of personal indulgence.

The secret lay, however, in the fact that Henry Ferdinand, Earl of Downmere, was the last direct scion of his noble house; his nearest relative and presumptive heir being a second cousin, whom he had never seen, but whom he had nevertheless honored with his unqualified dislike. Earlier in life he had resisted all the entreaties of his widowed mother to give a new mistress to Woodlyn Castle—"Time enough yet!"—was his constant reply to her representations; "I will marry when to do so becomes a duty to my family, but I will not sacrifice myself until I am convinced that it will be necessary to nip the hopes of Mr. Augustus Mordaunt in the bud. Time enough for that, my dear lady-mother."

And so time went on, until the venerable Countess was laid in the family vault; and the dashing young noble grew into a staid, middle-aged gentleman, who began to weary of hunting, and to sit longer at the dinner table; to forswear waltzing, and to patronize whist. Nor did time even then stand still, but most pertinaciously did it persevere in its progress until the dark hair, which had once been abundant, grew scanty on the summit of his head, and became thickly streaked with threads of a dull grey; while crows' feet began to gather beneath his eyes, and to pucker the corners of his mouth. In short, as we have already shown, his lordship had attained to the ripe age of sixty; when even he was reluctantly compelled to admit that if Mr. Augustus Mordaunt were indeed to be baulked of the coveted peerage, it might be as well no longer to delay the bestowal of his name and rank upon a wife.

Then came the difficulty of selection; for, aware of the greatness of the honor to be conferred, the broken-down *roué* was by no means inclined to bestow such advantages upon any woman who could not secure to him a very ample equivalent. Young she must be,—that was a *sine qua non*—handsome, that was equally indispensable—and wealthy, for he was resolved to exact the price of his coronet—beyond these requisites, however, he asked nothing more; he could dispense with high birth, provided that the respectability of her family was unquestionable; and to her disposition and temper he was perfectly indifferent, being most agreeably satisfied that no wife, be she who she might, would long venture to oppose his will.

Even when he had conceded thus much, however, the difficulty was no slight one, as many young, beautiful, and well-dowried women were to the full as conscious of the value of their advantages as Lord Downmere of his own, and unhesitatingly declined to barter them for an empty title; and thus he had been half a dozen times civilly rejected by as many reigning beauties, when he accidentally made the acquaintance of Ida Trevanion. The repulses to which his lordship had by this time been subjected had, however, taught him caution; he began to understand that people as frequently overdo things in this world by a want of judgment, as they neglect what is necessary to be done by a want of energy; and he consequently resolved on the present occasion to ascertain how far the *prestige* of his rank would influence the father of the lady in his favor, and to what extent he might trust to Mr. Trevanion's authority over his daughter, before he committed himself by a direct offer of his hand.

No proceeding could have been more judicious under the circumstances; and accordingly but a few weeks elapsed ere the peer, who had most graciously extended the right hand of friendship to the princely merchant, became satisfied that Mr. Trevanion would consider no sacrifice too great by which he could place a coronet on the brow of his beautiful heiress. Lord Downmere easily detected his weakness, but he was far from suspecting the motive; and while he haughtily, and somewhat contemptuously, assured himself that the man of commerce estimated his rank and birth at their full value, he was little aware that in this instance the commoner was by far the prouder individual of the two—the true nobleman in heart and feeling—and that the ancient blood which throbbed and leaped in his pulses when the earl at length confided to him the passion which he professed to feel for the fair Ida, was quickened, not by the prospect of a titled son-in-law, but by that held out to him of social self-assertion.

The character and temperament of Mr. Trevanion had, moreover, satisfied Lord Downmere that he was not a man likely to yield his own judgment or wishes to those of his child upon so serious a point as marriage, when he saw him steadily enforce them on all around him, upon occasions of comparatively minor importance; and thus, having secured the consent of her father, he took little pains to ingratiate himself with the young lady in any other way than by making the most liberal settlements; a generosity greatly increased by his consciousness that the magnificent fortune of his intended bride rendered it altogether supererogatory; and while Mr. Sydney Elphinstone was breathing his tale of love into the ears of the listening beauty, his self-complacent rival was trotting his hack in the ring, and dozing over crown points at the whist-table of his club.

When the pretensions of Lord Downmere were made known to Miss Trevanion by her father she smiled incredulously, and merely asked if the poor old gentleman were insane; but when she found his suit urged upon her firmly and imperatively, she coldly declared that she would never consent to listen to its repetition. The rage of Mr. Trevanion was unbounded at this open opposition to his will,

but he succeeded by a strong effort in controlling it; and abruptly informing her that he should ere long insist on her obedience, he sternly left the room; while his weak-minded wife who "loved a lord," not, like her haughty helpmate, as a glittering tool wherewith to work out his own purposes, but purely and wholly for the pleasure of feeling that she was of sufficient importance to be the associate of nobles, poured forth a rapid flood of wondering reproaches upon the devoted head of her daughter; could not conceive what she could expect if she could afford to refuse an earl—to wear a countess's coronet—and perhaps, for any thing she knew to the contrary, to become a member of Her Majesty's household. It was really too bad—it was cruel to *her*, for she should have liked so much to have been the mother-in-law of a peer. However, she had one consolation, and that was, that she knew Mr. Trevanion well enough to be quite sure that Ida must yield in the end, for it was of no use to attempt to oppose his will.

"And is it possible, mamma;" asked the proud girl with an indignant blush; "that you can wish to see the happiness of your only child sacrificed to such puerilities as those you have mentioned?"

"Nonsense, Ida;" was the peevish retort; "surely, with my experience, I must know best what constitutes happiness; I tell you that if I had married a peer, I should have been the happiest woman alive."

Miss Trevanion sighed. She had too much respect for her spirit-crushed mother to express the contempt with which she listened to her childish wailings; and from that day neither of her parents had reverted to the subject of Lord Downmere's proposal until the morning upon which we first introduced them to our readers.

CHAPTER VII.

SOCIAL TACTICS.

EVEN at the close of the unpromising conversation recorded in the last chapter, Mr. Trevanion had not, as we have already stated, abandoned all hope of ultimate success; but, misjudging the lofty nature of his daughter, had so far deluded himself before he reached town, as to believe that the vanity of the young beauty was piqued by the carelessness of Lord Downmere's courtship.

"Natural enough! natural enough!" he murmured to himself with a grim smile. "He has played his cards badly, and deserves to lose her; nor would I move a finger to assist him, were it not for my own sake. But he is necessary to my scheme of vengeance, and I must give him a hint to be more cautious for the future."

And, full of his newly born-hope, the stately merchant entered the breakfast room of his noble friend.

"Hah! Trevanion, my good fellow;" was the greeting of the peer, as, with a portion of *pâté de foie gras* provided upon his fork, he extended two fingers of his left hand to his visitor; "You are early to-day. Have you breakfasted? or will you join me?—No—well, then, take a seat, and excuse me if I finish my breakfast. How are the ladies?"

"Perfectly well, my lord, I am obliged to you; and my somewhat untimely visit—"

"Never ill-timed, Trevanion, never ill-timed;" interposed the host; "always delighted to see you, as a matter of course. I was about to drive to Richmond to-day to pay my respects to my fair enslaver, and to inquire after her health."

"I am glad to hear it," said the merchant, "and trust that you will still persist in your intention, for I will frankly tell you that it was to suggest a little more devotion on your part to Ida that I drove to Piccadilly this morning. Young ladies, as your lordship must be aware, like to be wooed as well as won, and I begin to fear that the paucity of your visits has already produced a bad effect upon the mind of my daughter."

"Pooh! pooh!" chuckled the old earl, "you deceive yourself. Girls are fond enough, no doubt, of being dangled after by a bevy of smart young fellows, who, like French poodles, are skilled in the art to fetch and carry; but when a man reaches my age, he is only in the way in a lady's drawing-room; and I am much mistaken if Miss Trevanion does not see the matter with the same eyes as myself. She is a fine creature, a very fine creature, and will adorn her coronet, but I have no intention to make her purchase it too dearly. I am a man of the world, Trevanion, and have a most particular aversion to degenerating into a bore."

"My *dear* lord—"

"Nay, nay, no disclaimers. We are both rational beings; I have a sincere regard for your daughter—I admire her exceedingly—she is a superb woman—and as Countess of Downmere, will, I am convinced, do honor both to her father and her husband; but I do not expect impossibilities; and I am as little inclined to interfere with her comfort, as I am to sacrifice my own. I have, moreover, already seen enough of Miss Trevanion to feel certain that I am pursuing the best method of securing her favor."

"You must pardon me if I persist in doubting it," replied the visitor; "Ida has been so long accustomed to adulation and homage, that her vanity can not fail to be piqued by your apparent indifference, contrasting as it does so forcibly with the devoted attentions of the other candidates for her preference. I can quite understand that your lordship conceives (and very properly), that the honor which you have conferred on her by the offer of your hand must necessarily more than counterbalance all such puerile considerations; but women, especially handsome ones, are capricious and exacting; nor can we, while our mighty world itself works on such pigmy hinges, afford to be too severe upon them."

"Well, well," said Lord Downmere somewhat impatiently, "I shall decidedly drive to Richmond to-day, and come to a more explicit understanding with the young lady herself. I should, no doubt, have done so before, had you not assured me that I might safely leave the affair in your hands; an arrangement which

struck me as being, under all circumstances, an excellent one. I never, even in my young days, was a lady's man; nor should I have so far disorganized all my habits at my present time of life as to take a wife, were it not that the duty which I owe to my name demands it. I ask of the Countess of Downmere to give me an heir in return for the coronet which I place upon her brow, and I exact no more. As for love, my good sir, it is a mere myth in the fashionable world at the present day; an *ignis fatuus*, a will-o'-the-wisp, just as unattainable as the rainbow; and I am too reasonable a man to clutch at the vapor."

"But surely, my lord, you will not be rash enough to explain yourself thus to my daughter?"

"No, no, Trevanion; I have not walked through the by-ways of society for so many years not to understand the sex at least better than that. I have, as you may perceive, no remnant of romance left in me, always supposing that I ever possessed any; and I have no faith in 'mutual affection,' and 'disinterested sacrifice,' and 'self-immolation,' and all this fiddle-faddle which supplies the raw-material of the novel-writers. When I officially offer myself to Miss Trevanion, I shall do so by urging upon her acceptance my rank and the family diamonds; I shall talk to her, not of my own feelings, but of Woodlyn Castle and Downmere Abbey; not of the color of her eyes, but of the style of her equipage; I shall appeal to her ambition, not to her heart; excite her self-value, not her sensibilities; and, rely on it that my method is the only rational one with any woman who has passed her teens, and learned to look at life in its true aspect. Taxes upon vanity do not require to be voted by parliament; they can always be levied without difficulty; and I am greatly deceived in you, my good friend, if you have reared your daughter for the purpose of seeing her settle herself in a cottage over-grown with honeysuckles, and over-run with earwigs."

"Far from it, my lord; far from it," replied Mr. Trevanion; "nor is Ida Trevanion at all calculated for a life of privation and struggle; a conviction which tends to increase my satisfaction when your lordship did me the favor to demand her hand. Indeed, so thoroughly resolved have I ever been that she should only marry into that sphere in which she is so well calculated to shine, and thus to re-integrate not only herself, but me also, in the position which I lost through the injustice of my relatives, that I assured her—and with truth—that in the event of her disappointing my wishes, not one shilling of my property should ever devolve to her."

"A forcible argument," smiled the earl complacently, stroking down the leg which rested on the chair before him, "and one which will, no doubt, prove more efficacious than a whole volume of sentiment. You are a sensible man, Mr. Trevanion, a very sensible man; and the conviction that you were superior even to your present position—highly honorable as that is in itself, I admit—was, to me one great inducement to overlook what some of my friends were inclined to consider as an inequality of rank, when I offered my hand to your daughter."

The blood rose to the cheek of the merchant. "Your lordship does me honor," he said coldly, "but I trust that even elevated as your position undoubtedly is, the contemplated marriage can scarcely be regarded a *mésalliance*. My own family —"

"I know it, my good sir, I know it;" hastily interposed the peer; "on her *father's* side Miss Trevanion had every right to pretend to the rank which I am happy enough to offer to her —while, as regards her maternal descent, why, we must accept her youth, beauty, and accomplishments as a substitute for blood. I have already carefully considered all the bearings of the question, and am satisfied with the result. It is, however, unfortunate that you are not on terms with your uncle, as his presence at the ceremony would have given a *prestige* to the affair which would have told well in the world. Not that the thing is material, certainly not; *my* position is one which, as a natural consequence, renders me independent of such considerations; and I confess that I shall regard myself as a very happy man when I become the possessor of so much youth and beauty; and feel, as I shall have every right to do, that I have fulfilled to the letter the duty which I owed to my family."

"I am obliged by so flattering an assurance;" said Mr. Trevanion, though he looked infinitely less gratified than he sought to appear; "nor do I apprehend that your lordship need fear any very severe animadversion on the part of your friends when the dowry of my daughter is taken into consideration in addition to her personal merits."

"True, true;" replied the earl, somewhat impatiently; "but, after all, are we not rather premature in our self-gratulation, if, as you hinted a while back, I have failed to find favor in the eyes of the young lady herself?"

"Nay, nay; I can admit no such construction of my remark;" objected the merchant; "I merely sought to impress upon your lordship the policy of a little more attention on your part."

"While I on the contrary give myself no small credit for my diplomacy, my good friend;" said Lord Downmere; "charming as she is, my fair bride-elect is still a woman, and she may have no especial taste for a husband whose years outnumber those of her father; thus, rely on it, the less I absorb her time and attention the more likely she will be to overlook the disparity, which is, I flatter myself, the only valid objection which she can offer to our union."

"I think, my lord;" said Mr. Trevanion, "that you do Ida injustice as well as yourself; Time—when we bring ourselves to look the truth steadily in the face—is to the full as much our friend as our enemy. He plants wrinkles in our foreheads, I admit, but even while doing so, he engrafts wisdom in our hearts; he strews threads of silver among our hair, but he condenses experience and warning in our minds, and thus more than compensates for his petty larcenies by a full-handed liberality which we are too slow to acknowledge until its actual value is forced upon us."

"A very happy view of the case, my good sir, and one which deserves to become popu-

lar;" replied the peer, petting his gouty leg with increased tenderness; "though, unfortunately, it is never likely to do so. It is a trite saying that gray hairs are honorable, and there can be no doubt of the fact; but it is equally certain that it is an honor with which every one is satisfied to dispense as long as possible. However, as you advise me to venture upon a more assiduous course of homage, I shall follow your counsel, only hoping that you may have been able to inspire your brilliant daughter with a portion of your own wisdom."

"I am glad that you have arrived at such a resolution, my lord, for trust me when I assure you that no woman's heart is to be won by proxy."

"Heart! pshaw! do not let us travel back into Utopia, Trevanion; I have already been sufficiently explicit as to my aticipations on that score. Hearts are merely heavy luggage with which to be hampered on the journey of life, and it is far better to travel untrammeled. It is Miss Trevanion's *hand* which I have asked of you, and which I shall ask of herself; she is a gentlewoman and a woman of the world; she will, therefore, understand what is due to both of us, and I require no more. I wish I could induce you to try one of these *côtelettes au jus*—my cook is famous for them."

"I am obliged to you, my lord, but I have already breakfasted."

"I am sorry for it, for I can conscientiously recommend them. However, you know best. Well then, I will decidedly drive to Richmond this morning, and settle the business. I am no friend to delay, when once a thing is settled in my own mind; and, under all circumstances, I think that the sooner matters are concluded on this occasion the better. The season is nearly over, town is beginning to thin, and Miss Trevanion will not, in all probability, be averse to spending her summer at Woodlyn Castle."

We have said that Mr. Trevanion was a proud man, and so in truth he was; and yet, so resolutely did he cling to his one darling project, that he ben this haughty spirit to tolerate the insolent egotism of the cold-hearted noble, who was, should he succeed in overcoming the repugnance of his daughter, to render that daughter the instrument of his revenge upon his relations. Had he witnessed a similar exhibition of self-abasement in another, his contempt would have known no bounds, but he was blinded to his own degradation by the wretched idiosyncrasy which he had nourished for years, and which had been the hidden spring of his every thought and action.

That Ida, the proud, the beautiful, and the gifted, should be wooed after such a fashion might well have revolted him, but he would not look beyond the fact that the wooer was one whose rank and station must compel the haughty spirit of Sir Jasper to bend before him; while they would, in all probability, induce him to sue for a renewal of that intercourse which he had been so eager to terminate for ever. The only doubt by which he was tormented was caused by Ida herself; he did not forget throughout the interview which he had courted, and during which he had suffered an amount of mortification greater than any to which he had ever been subjected since the day on which he became an alien and an outcast from the home of his ancestors—he did not for one moment forget that when he had parted from his daughter, he had left her in no mood to tolerate the addresses of her titled suitor; she might persist in the insane resolve which she had announced to him—she might peremptorily decline the hand of the Earl, and thus thwart the hope of his whole life—she might—but no! Lord Downmere had truly said that, after all, beautiful as she was, gifted as she was, she was a woman, and

'Therefore to be won,'

as she no doubt would be, by the glitter of a coronet, with its concomitant attractions. And so Mr. Trevanion sagely resolved to think no more of the matter until he returned home to ascertain the result of the peer's visit; and he accordingly proceeded to the city, transacted business as usual, authorized the transfer of thousands, dictated letters, and occupied himself as he was wont to do, haunted throughout every detail by the flashing eye and firm demeanor of his rebel child, and wincing from time to time as the suspicion would force itself upon him, that her will might after all prove as unbending as his own.

CHAPTER IX.

A LOVER AND HIS MISTRESS.

THE life of Miss Trevanion had hitherto flowed on with all the smoothness of a rivulet, shadowed perhaps at times by some slight sorrow, as the stream is darkened by an overhanging bough, but soon recovering its brilliancy, and once more gliding gladly onward under the broad light of a sunny heaven. Happy in the present and confident in the future, the petted heiress had known no real care; nor had she even guessed how fatally her own nature was constituted to ruffle the current of its existence when its tide should be impeded by adverse circumstances, until she became conscious of a growing partiality for Sydney Elphinstone. When the suspicion of this preference first arose in her mind, she struggled resolutely against it, for not only did she at once perceive that such an attachment must inevitably prove distasteful to her father, to whose ambition she was no stranger, but it also revolted her own good sense when she remembered that she was several years his senior; while it must at the same time be confessed that her vanity took the alarm, as such was by no means the realization of her previous dreams.

Accustomed from her earliest youth to regard high rank as the foundation of all earthly honor and even happiness, she had ever associated the idea of marriage with luxury and station. She had, in fact, dreamed as girls ever dream before that inner life, which is the most powerful position of existence, is aroused; and while fancy supplies the place of feeling, such baseless visions suffice to employ the imagination; and where the nature is finely organized they

seldom endure long; the heart makes its low whispers heard, faintly indeed, it may be, for a time, but so perseveringly that they can not long remain unheeded; and then commences the stern conflict between the real and the ideal, the sharp warfare between the outer world of action, and the inner world of passion, which may indeed be hidden from the crowd, but never wholly deadened, save in despair or in the grave.

Miss Trevanion was startled by the vehemence of her own feelings. Accustomed as she had been to see herself the first object with all around her, the idol and the pride of her family, to whom her every wish was a law, she had never suspected the depth and strength of her own nature; but when, ere Mr. Elphinstone had ventured to hint at his admiration for herself, she on one occasion saw him apparently engrossed by a fair girl for whom she had previously felt a warm regard, she became painfully aware that she could hate as intensely as she could love; and that her life was destined to be one of perfect happiness or misery. The discovery startled her, and she strove earnestly to liberate herself from the growing thraldom of a passion which both her reason and her pride condemned; but she found both pride and reason powerless before it; high-sounding titles became mere empty words; wealth and station worthless units in the heart's reckoning; and when, after a brief and ineffectual struggle against a weakness for which none could blame her more bitterly than she accused herself, she consented to pledge her faith to the nephew of Lady Mary Brooklands, she yielded up her whole soul to the new and delicious feeling which the assurance of his affection rendered legitimate and sacred.

Still, however, there were moments when she shrank appalled from the strange knowledge which she had so suddenly acquired of herself —when she became aware of the smothered fire within, which, should it ever burst forth, must involve not only her own wretchedness, but that of those who were most dear to her; her pride, her vanity, and her ambition were but as straws borne before the lava-stream of her passion, and buried beneath its burning tide. She learned—and it was a fearful lesson—that while she could give away her whole heart without one reservation, so could she, in like manner, revenge the perfidy by which the full and perfect gift might be cast back upon her.

As this conviction grew upon her mind, she thrust the massy braids from her burning brow, and literally gasped for breath. "It is unwomanly—it is fiendish"—she murmured to herself; "and yet I feel that even so it is. I love him with all the impetuous fervor of my nature; but should he fail—should I be deceived in him—that love will burn into a flame of hate that must destroy us both. Why did he ever cross my path? Why was he thrust upon me? Tutored as I have been for a far different fate, why should he have been gifted with the power of teaching me that I had a heart? I might have gone through life as I had commenced it, toying with trifles, and emulous only of admiration; but now I have cast all my chance of happiness upon one stake, and should I lose it, I shall be worse than beggared!"

It was from such a train of thought as this that Miss Trevanion was aroused by the announcement of the earl's visit. A more timid spirit than her own might have been occupied by her late misunderstanding with her father—the first, be it remembered, which had ever occurred between them—and by his threat of making her want of obedience to his wishes the signal of their total estrangement; but not even for an instant had her thoughts been engrossed by that circumstance, important as it was to her future fate. The intensity of her passion, and the wild jealousy of an exacting nature, rendered all other considerations insignificant in her eyes. She remembered, she felt, only the *possibility* of change in her heart's idol; she cared not for the struggle, the sacrifices, by which she must win him to herself; she dwelt only on the dread that when won, he might be found wanting——And then?—what would remain to her then? The suffocating throbs of her tortured heart, the fire which shot from her flashing eyes, and the fierce clinching of her slender fingers, afforded a mute but eloquent reply.

As Lord Downmere entered the apartment, Miss Trevanion rose calmly from her seat. It is often in moments of the most intense emotion that strong natures exhibit the greatest power of self-control. She did not dislike the titled egotist who sought her hand, she simply despised him; and although she intuitively suspected the purport of his visit, she received him with as much indifference as though it had merely been dictated by common courtesy.

The storm of passion which had just swept over her spirits had meanwhile tended to heighten her peculiar style of beauty; a warm flush burnt upon her cheek; a brilliant light danced in her eye, and there was a proud statelines in her whole appearance which for a moment startled even the unimpressionable peer.

"I will ring and inform my mother of your lordship's visit, with your permission," she said coldly, as she advanced to the bell; but ere she had reached it, she was arrested by the voice of the earl, who exclaimed eagerly:

"By no means, Miss Trevanion. I beg that Mrs. Trevanion may not be disturbed on my account. My visit was to yourself."

The lady withdrew her hand, and resumed her seat.

"You will no doubt divine its purport;" continued Lord Downmere with more embarassment than he had ever before felt in the presence of any individual upon whom he believed himself about to confer a favor; "your father was with me this morning, and he has led me to anticipate—to hope—that my presence here to-day will not be unwelcome to you."

"By no means, my lord;" was the reply; "this is the hour at which we are accustomed to receive our friends."

"But it is not simply as a friend that I am here;" resumed the earl; "you must be quite aware, Miss Trevanion, of the admiration—the regard—which I have long felt for you; and you will not therefore be surprised to learn that my errand is to lay myself and my coronet at your feet, and to declare to you that I shall be the

happiest of men should I prevail on you to accept the offering."

"I am not surprised, my lord;" said Miss Trevanion, retaining all her previous composure; "I will not be guilty of the pitiful affectation of assuming an astonishment which I do not feel; but while I beg of you to receive my acknowledgments for the honor which you desire to confer on me, I am compelled to decline it."

"Very prettily expressed;" smiled the peer emphatically; "I am aware that such is always the first reply of every lady under similar circumstances; but after what has passed between your excellent father and myself, I feel confident that before we part we shall come to a better understanding. In short, my dear Miss Trevanion, after mature reflection, I have arrived at the conviction that you are the only woman upon whom I could confer, without one misgiving, the title of Countess of Downmere. I am not a young man, but I can still appreciate all the perfections of your sex; and in yourself—"

"I entreat of you, my lord, not to deceive yourself;" interposed his listener; "my words were so far from being words of course, that I must request you to receive them in all the strength and fullness of their meaning. I am greatly flattered by your good opinion, and shall be proud to retain you as a friend, but that can be the only bond between us."

"You can not be serious, Miss Trevanion—"

"Perfectly so. In seeking my hand your lordship has been guilty of a grave mistake. We are by no means suited to each other."

"Is it the incompatibility of age?" demanded the earl.

"By no means;" was the reply, as a slight flush rose to the cheek of the lady; "I do not deem the question of age of the slightest consideration in affairs like the present."

"What then can be your objection? I can offer you rank, wealth, and station."

"I am quite aware of the fact, and must be excused if I confess that I attach little value to mere worldly advantages."

"The finest diamonds in England, not excepting Her Majesty's;" followed up the persevering peer.

Ida smiled a smile of scorn; as she said, disdainfully: "Affection and regard are not marketable commodities even in this commercial country; and, as to the diamonds, your lordship will, no doubt find little difficulty in inducing some far more worthy person than myself to wear them."

"I confess," said the discomfited suitor; "that I do not understand your meaning, Miss Trevanion, when you so unhesitatingly declare that we are not suited to each other; I am by no means of an exacting nature; you will have no interference to apprehend from me, and I can not help thinking that when once united we should find many points of resemblance; or, at all events, constant communion would soon induce it."

"Your lordship must pardon me if I declare that I should consider the experiment to be highly dangerous," was the reply; "souls of mere ordinary caliber may lose their distinctive qualities, and, blending into one common mass, neutralize each other; but when individuals are possessed of refined and elastic minds, they do well to remember that there is a point at which attraction may change into repulsion, and not rashly incur so great and fatal a risk."

"In the present case there can at least be no danger of such a result," said Lord Downmere; "and I confess that after my late interview with her father, I was altogether unprepared for such determined coldness on the part of Miss Trevanion; nor is it quite fair to augment my regret at her obduracy by foreing upon me the conviction that she is a wit as well as a beauty."

"Do not say so, my lord; do not say so;" exclaimed his companion, earnestly; "I am the last of my sex, to strive after the reputation of a wit. It is like laying down the cestus of Venus to brandish the club of Hercules, and a woman's strength is, or ought to be, unequal to the task. But your lordship has twice alluded to a recent interview with my father. You surely can not seek to infer that he led you to believe—to anticipate—"

"Pardon me, Miss Trevanion; I received every encouragement from your father to prosecute my suit—every promise of his own influence—and, such being the ease, you will readily understand that I am not to be lightly discouraged. Despite your disclaimer, I suspect that I have in reality taken you by surprise, and that you require time for consideration. You shall have it. I can afford to wait for a few days in order to secure so rich a prize. I will not intrude upon you further upon this occasion. I have faith in the future; and shall leave Mr. Trevanion to explain to you certain points—worldly points—which in the enthusiasm of your age, you have in all probability overlooked."

"I am obliged by your intention, my lord, but I must request that you will not leave me with so mistaken a view of my character and sentiments," said the young lady. "I grieve, deeply grieve, that my father should have misled you, and trust that you will at least exonerate me from the imputation of a similar error."

"Good morning, Miss Trevanion;" said the Earl, blandly stretching forth his hand; "I leave my ease to the advocacy of your father, for, as I before remarked, he can, with more propriety than myself, place before you in their fitting light the advantages which you appear so willing to forego. Be good enough to offer my respects to Mrs. Trevanion. I shall wait your final decision with impatience."

And as he ceased speaking, Lord Downmere bowed himself out of the room.

CHAPTER X.

A TRIAL OF STRENGTH.

The dressing-bell had rung before Mr. Trevanion had reached home, and he was consequently compelled to wait with such patience as he could command for the information which he was anxious to obtain of the result of Lord Downmere's appeal to his daughter,

a circumstance which by no means tended to tranquilize his nerves, as the more he suffered his thoughts to dwell upon the previous conversation between himself and Ida, the less confidence he felt in his power to shake her resolution. Like a child who has succeeded in building up a card-house story by story until it has reached a height almost unhoped-for, he dreaded lest his next movement might bring the whole unstable edifice in ruin about him; and yet the move must be made; the work must be terminated; and every moment of suspense became intolerable to him. He hastened his toilet, and descended to the drawing-room, although aware that even should his daughter be already there, a subject of such intense importance to both of them could not be broached with any prospect of a final arrangement in the brief interval between that time and the announcement of dinner; but as the moment approached which was to decide the fruition or the overthrow of his cherished hope, he became restless and irritable, and the self-control which he had exercised throughout the previous portion of the day altogether abandoned him. He threw himself heavily into his well-cushioned chair, caught up the daily paper which lay upon his reading-table, "pished" and "pshawed" over its columns as if each had contained some intelligence peculiarly distasteful to him, and finally suffered it to fall from his hand, and sank into a deep fit of musing. That his reflections were any thing but pleasant ones might be detected at once, for his brow darkened, and he beat nervously upon the floor with his foot, as he sat with his head bent upon his breast, and his gaze riveted upon the carpet. Throughout the whole of his career, with Mr. Trevanion to will had been to accomplish. Even as a boy he had never, as we have shown, suffered himself to be discouraged even under the most trying circumstances, but having fixed his eye steadily upon one point, he had exerted all the energies of his mind to reach it. For this purpose he had compelled his haughty spirit to commerce—for this purpose he had united himself to a woman for whose intellect he entertained the most sovereign contempt, and to whose person he was utterly indifferent; for this purpose he had tolerated and even courted a man whose only recommendation was his exalted position in society; and now, when the goal was almost reached, he suddenly found himself thwarted by his own child; found an apparently impassable barrier raised upon his own hearth; and after having compelled success on the broad highway of the world, discovered that utter defeat might await him in his home, where he had hitherto believed himself to be all-powerful.

To his stern and unbending nature this first check, end as it might, was gall and wormwood; he felt humbled, when he found himself compelled to measure his strength with that of a mere girl, for as such he still regarded his daughter; it was monstrous to feel that she could venture to oppose his wishes, be they what they might, and still more monstrous to know that she held his destiny in her hands. He was impatient for her appearance; he believed that he could instantly divine from her manner the determination at which she had arrived; but first Mrs. Trevanion entered the room with her faint greeting, to which he replied only by a slight movement of the head, as she slid into her accustomed seat, and drew her shawl about her without hazarding a second remark; and next, Lady Mary Brooklands sailed majestically in, heralded by the sharp rustling of her rich dress, and smiling blandly upon her host, who, had he dared to betray the real feeling with which he once more met her, would not assuredly have welcomed her appearance by the words of studied courtesy which he compelled himself to utter; and then, just when the last bell rang, the butler as he threw open the door, at once admitted Miss Trevanion, and announced dinner.

The merchant turned one glance—and but one—upon his daughter, ere, according to his usual custom, he offered his arm to Lady Mary, and the result of that glance was unsatisfactory, affording as it did no solution of the mystery which he sought to penetrate. She was as calm, as graceful, and as self-possessed, as though her fair brow had never been ruffled by an anxiety or a care; and as he proceeded to the dining-room, the stern expression of Mr. Trevanion's features became sterner still. Had she betrayed emotion of any kind, had he detected the faintest flush of anger upon her cheek, the slightest flash of defiance in her eye, the least tremor in her voice, as she moved across the floor to assist her mother from the room, he would have been satisfied, for he might have read irresolution, fear, or temper, in such indications of feeling, but he had not studied human nature so closely for years, without learning that a settled purpose never betrays itself by petty weaknesses.

At table, Miss Trevanion was neither more silent nor more voluble than usual; her well-modulated voice retained its accustomed tone as she addressed himself; she listened to her mother's captious complaints, and to Lady Mary's brilliant small-talk, as patiently and as courteously as was her habit, and vainly did her father watch for one symptom of discomposure or uneasiness.

"The struggle will be a sharp one," murmured the merchant to himself, as on the termination of the meal the ladies retired, and he rose and paced the floor like a caged lion; "well, be it so, it will not be the first from which I have come out the victor. She conceives my threat to have been an idle one, and does not believe that I shall meet her determination with one as firm. She presumes upon my affection while she makes no effort to retain it. She does not know that, like a child playing with the fire, she will be the victim of her own folly. But it it shall be so; I will not be the only sacrifice. The labor of a whole existence shall not be lost through the headstrong obstinacy of a woman, without her bearing her own share of the suffering. Let her refuse Lord Downmere at her peril. She shall become his wife—she shall work out the one great purpose of my existence, or I will disown

her forever—cast her off to the poverty which she affects to treat so lightly—leave her free to beggar herself with her penniless husband, and to feel how widely the fact of such a sacrifice differs from its theory. But I must learn what passed between her and the earl. I was a fool to urge his coming here to-day, while the spirit of resistance was still strong upon her; no doubt the selfish dotard piqued her pride by his assumption of superiority. I should have been present at the interview; but all is not yet lost; the hour of weakness is over; she owes me the obedience of a child, and I will exact it."

Full of this resolution, Mr. Trevanion passed into the library, and ringing the bell with violence, directed that his daughter might be informed that he desired her presence. His summons was promptly obeyed, and he had scarcely seated himself, when with a calm step and a steady eye, Ida entered the apartment.

"I have sent for you, Miss Trevanion," he commenced, as she advanced toward him, "in order to learn the result of Lord Downmere's visit; with his motive I am already acquainted; and I now wish to hear what reply was made to his proposal

"It was declined, sir, definitively, but I trust courteously."

"And did his lordship bow to such a decision, may I ask? Was he satisfied to receive as a final answer the rejection with which you saw fit to requite the honor that he had done you?"

"I hope, sir, that I left no doubt upon his mind of the sincerity of my meaning. I should scorn to trifle with the feelings of an individual who had evinced toward me the preference expressed by Lord Downmere."

"That is no answer to my question, Miss Trevanion," said her father harshly; "I desire to know whether his lordship parted from you, convinced that his suit was unsuccessful?"

"As far as regarded my own feelings and determination, most certainly."

"But he did not, nevertheless, consent to resign his pretensions—is that what I am to understand?"

"Precisely. He professed to leave his cause in your hands, sir, believing, or affecting to believe, that his rank, his wealth, and his family diamonds, would plead in his favor more forcibly with yourself than with me."

"Be careful, young lady, you assume a tone strangely unbecoming in our relative positions. Do not add disrespect to your disobedience."

"You mistake me painfully if you suppose me capable of sarcasm," said Miss Trevanion, and for a moment her lip quivered; "no, sir; the contempt which my tone perhaps involuntarily betrayed, was called forth by the scorn I felt for the man who could suspect *my* father to be guilty of so much meanness."

"Seat yourself, Ida, and listen to me," said Mr. Trevanion more mildly than he had yet spoken; "it is essential that we should perfectly understand each other, for this is an important crisis in both our lives. Henceforth we must be every thing or nothing to each other. Reflect seriously on what I am about to say. My life has been, as you know, one long period of mortification, brightened only by the vision of one day paying back into the bosoms of those who injured me, the bitterness with which they filled my own. This I could not do simply by amassing wealth—had it been otherwise I should have required no co-adjutor in the struggle—but by placing myself on an equality with the noblest and the proudest in the land. My hope rested on you, Ida—on you, so richly gifted by nature, to overcome the last obstacle with which I had to contend. It may now be realized—you have a peer of the realm at your feet—the coronet of a countess awaiting your acceptance—will you disappoint my hopes? will you compel me to curse the hour in which I trusted to the strength and devotion of a daughter's love?"

The beautiful head of Ida drooped as she listened. She had nerved herself to contend against violence and opposition; she had felt strong in the conviction of her right of free action, and of her privilege to bestow her hand where she had already bestowed her affections; but although her resolution did not waver for an instant, the altered manner of her father sent a pang to her heart, and for a moment rendered her unable to reply. Mr. Trevanion instantly perceived his advantage, and hastened to profit by the impression which he had made.

"You will not do this," he pursued earnestly; "I feel that you will not by one mad act negative the anticipations of years. Remember, Ida, all that I have been to you. Look around you, and ask yourself if you have hitherto found cause to envy, not merely the fate of those of your own rank in society, but that of others far more highly born. You have been the child of luxury and indulgence; you have never formed a wish which I have not sought to gratify; I have spared nothing—neither gold nor exertion—to fit you for the station which I was resolved that you should attain; and, up to this day, you have seconded me nobly; nor can I believe that you will fail me now."

"I am grateful—most grateful"—faltered out his listener.

"And you have cause to be so," continued Mr. Trevanion, overlooking in his eagerness to compel his daughter's submission to his will, that an open avowal of his motives for the indulgence upon which he dilated must necessarily weaken his hold upon her feelings, "for, I need scarcely explain to you, who so well understand my nature, that I should never have made such sacrifices had I not had an ulterior object in view. I acted in regard to yourself upon the same principle which has regulated every action of my life. Once more I tell you, frankly, that you have been reared and educated to assist in the prosecution of my one darling scheme; I have watched and waited patiently for the moment in which it should be realized—that moment has come at last, and I look to you to secure me against a failure which would blight my whole after-life."

"And you ask me to farther the gratification of a vindictive feeling by the sacrifice of my own hopes of happiness, if indeed I understand you rightly," said the daughter, with a heightened color; "and you seek to impress upon me that I owe the tenderness and care which have been lavished upon me to no affection on

your part—to compel me to feel that I have been regarded less as a child than as a tool which has been gradually tempered to its destined use! Surely, sir, you employ strange arguments to enforce your purpose. Have the talents which you pride yourself on having nurtured; the beauty which you confess has reconciled you to my sex; no higher value in your eyes—in the eyes of a parent, and he the parent of an only child—than any mere base and sordid agent by which you may hope to accomplish your wishes? You have said that it is essential we should understand each other; do we do so now? In pity tell me, no! I have so long paid you back every kindness in love and reverence, that I dare not trust myself to think that my affection has been unrequited."

"I shall believe in that affection when I see its fruits;" said Mr. Trevanion coldly; "it is easy to profess a feeling which involves neither sacrifice nor trial; it is only to be trusted when it stands the ordeal of both."

"Thus then suffer me to test the depth of yours, my father!" exclaimed his daughter imploringly; "am I not your child—your only one?—and will you seek, for the vain gratification of a vengeance which may after all fail in the attainment of its object, to condemn me to a blighted and loveless existence? Can an alliance with a Lord Downmere, a man whom, were it not for the mere accident of rank, you would despise, ennoble you in the eyes of your estranged and haughty relatives? Will they not rather scorn you for a weakness which must shame your noble nature?"

"Permit me to be the best judge of the result of my own actions, Miss Trevanion;" was the curt rejoinder; "you, in your ignorance of the world, are quite unable to form a rational opinion on such a subject. Perhaps, when you find the door of your father closed against you, and are put forth to strive and struggle with the world, as it was once my fate to be, you will be better able to appreciate my feelings. At present your ideas of such a destiny are doubtless vague enough—your romantic notions would probably drape beggary in a tinsel petticoat and nourish it upon chickens' wings; but I beg to assure you that it is fed and clad far otherwise; and that I owe the privilege of having exchanged its rags and black bread for the comforts of existence, to a resolute will and an indomitable energy. Do not imagine, however, that I have forgotten to whom I was indebted for the chance of failure; or that I will not repay the wrong. If I have been content to wait, it has been because mine was no weak and timid spirit likely to be seared by difficulties; I know with whom I have to deal; I know that there is one method, and but one, of revenging the cruel injuries which have been heaped upon me. Could I have bowed the pride of my puling uncle or his arrogant wife by gold, I should have needed no co-adjutor, and your marriage with a pauper would have been a matter of indifference; but it is not so; and your alliance with this peer, scorn him as you may, is consequently an imperative necessity."

"Hear me in my turn, sir;" said his daughter with calm dignity; "had you been poor, or even dishonored, and that my self-abnegation, the sacrifice of my whole life, could have restored you to affluence or to honor, I would have placed my fate in your hands without a murmur, too happy to have been thus enabled to repay the debt I owe you; but I will not consent to be made the victim of a chimera—the tool of a caprice. From the moment when you first acquainted me with the intentions of Lord Downmere, I frankly told you that he was not merely indifferent, but positively disagreeable to me—"

"But you did not in your boasted frankness, add that such was the case because you had seen fit to form another attachment," interposed Mr. Trevanion.

"I did not, because at that time I had come to no resolution on the subject; but even had I decided against Mr. Elphinstone, I should not assuredly have accepted the earl as a substitute; I declare, however, that I was then free, in so far as regarded any pledge or promise to another; for I was well aware, that the suit of Sydney could not be otherwise than unwelcome to yourself, while I was at the same time keenly alive to the apparent risk which I should incur by an union with a man my junior in age; nor was it until I had become conscious that my happiness depended upon this marriage that I could bring myself to incur your displeasure; and I entreat of you to believe that I did so ultimately with a reluctance and regret which have cost me many bitter tears."

"You will have many still more bitter yet to shed, should you persist in your present insane purpose, Miss Trevanion;" said her father; "for although you have been pleased to designate my legitimate desire to re-integrate myself in society as a 'chimera' and a 'caprice,' I beg to assure you, that I will not be thwarted by a whim. Lord Downmere has, you say, left his cause in my hands and he has done well, for as your parent I have a right to enforce your obedience. I am aware that you calculate upon your *legal* power to set my wishes at defiance: I do not dispute it; but you have forgotten to calculate upon the opinion of the world. Are you prepared to encounter its ridicule and its blame? Are you strong enough to spurn its avoidance and its contempt? you are no longer an ignorant and willful girl, whose folly might be poetized into romance; you have seen enough of society to know that its sympathies will not be enlisted on the side of a woman who has reached her six-and-twentieth year, and who deliberately throws herself away upon a penniless boy."

"I care little for the opinion of the world, sir;" said Ida, firmly; "I have, as you say, seen and judged it; and I know, and can fully appreciate, its hollowness. Were that the only difficulty with which I should be called upon to contend, I should not waste one thought upon the subject."

"But, as I need scarcely again inform you, it is by no means the only one;" coldly observed the merchant; "although I may be permitted to remark that even were it so, it is not to be dismissed so lightly. Hitherto you have, surrounded by affluence and adulation, found the world a warm and willing friend; you will, in a reverse of fortune, find it a keen and bit-

ter enemy; and one which no woman can defy with impunity; and mark me when I tell you —for I do so advisedly—that you will have to make the trial."

"So be it then;" said Ida, sadly; "I can no longer hesitate. Had you sought to detach me from Mr. Elphinstone by entreaty and affection, I might perchance have yielded—I know not—but it might have been so; now, however, the die is cast, for I were unworthy the love of any honorable man if I could abandon him from mercenary motives. I understand the threat which you have held out—I am to be disinherited. If such be indeed your will, I must submit; I may feel the injustice of the sentence, but I can not question your right of action."

"That is at least fortunate," observed her father, ironically.

"Nor shall I suffer myself to be dismayed by the prospect," pursued Ida. "It is hard, no doubt, to wrestle single-handed with the world, but in such a strife even defeat is not altogether without honor; our hands, heads, and hearts were bestowed upon us in order that we might be enabled to help ourselves; and the honest struggle for independence has ever an ennobling effect, while the poor tame spirit that is content to remain a burden upon others at the expense of its best and worthiest feelings, rather than boldly to launch out into the ocean of life, and resolutely to buffet its billows, must necessarily, with its own loss of dignity, incur the contempt of all around it."

"Very eloquently put," said Mr. Trevanion, still in the same accent of sarcasm; "but you must excuse me if I say that your well-rounded periods on this occasion remind me of a coarse daub set in a costly frame; it may be surrounded by glitter, but it remains as worthless as ever. However, you have explained your determination, and fully understand mine; we shall shortly see which is of the most avail, you either marry Lord Downmere, or you cease to be my daughter."

"Father—*dear* father!" exclaimed Ida imploringly.

"Do not exhaust your talents at the commencement of the tragedy, Miss Trevanion;" said the merchant; "I ask for deeds, not words; and if you decline to prove your affection, I beg of you not to express it. As Countess of Downmere, you are my heiress—as Mrs. Elphinstone, you are without a home in my house."

Ida rose; her cheek was very pale, and there was a convulsive movement about her mouth, which betrayed the depth of her agony. She leant for an instant upon the table before her, as if unable to support herself, as she turned a long and appealing look upon her father; but the eyes that met hers were cold and stony; and after the lapse of a second, Mr. Trevanion with ceremonious politeness threw open the door of the library, and so soon as his daughter had crossed the threshold quietly closed it behind her.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS TREVANION TO MR. ELPHINSTONE.

"I PLEDGED myself to write to you, Sydney, and I redeem my promise. I assured you that I could be firm when our mutual happiness was at stake, and I almost begin to fear that I have been firm even to sin. Nor is this all—for while incurring the displeasure of my father, I have, I fear, rendered our union impossible. Be honest with me, Sydney, and above all be just to yourself; when I tell you that in becoming your wife I cease to be the daughter of Mr. Trevanion. I shall no longer be the petted and pampered heiress, but a disowned and disinherited child, whose poverty can only tend to aggravate your own. I know my father well—such has been his declared decision; and I am well aware that even although in secret he may weep tears of blood, he will never reseind it. For myself I care not; for beggary as your wife would be a happier fate for me than the most fabulous affluence with another. Let not that consideration, however, have any weight with you; a woman's world is her home—her ambition does not travel beyond her own hearth; but with your sex it is far otherwise; and you Sydney, are still very young, too young to sacrifice all your hopes and prospects in life to an affection which—bear with me when I remind you of such a possibility—may one day fail. And even were it to endure through every trial and hardship, yet remember that home-cares and home-anxieties must cripple your exertions and weaken your energies. You were born for a brilliant destiny, and you deserve it. Renounce your claim to my hand; assert yourself, and do justice to the noble talents that you possess. Do not suppose that I say this lightly. In liberating you, I desire no freedom for myself. If I never bear your name, neither will I accept that of any man on earth. My future happiness and pride shall consist in watching your career, in exulting over your success, in praying for your prosperity. Reflect seriously—for the crisis is an awful one to both of us—whether indeed the affection which you have vowed to me has not been unconsciously to yourself, deepened by the circumstances under which we have hitherto met. You saw me the spoiled child of fortune, whatever beauty I possess, heightened by dress, and perfected by art; whatever accomplishments I may have acquired, exerted amid scenes which lent them a *prestige* not their own. You may have deceived yourself, and how fatal must such an error prove alike to yourself and me. Look beyond the present, Sydney; endeavor to realize that years have passed over us both—years of struggle. You will still be in the full pride of manhood and of hope, competent to struggle with the world, still an object of admiration—a mark for that world's homage. But I, Sydney, what will those years have done for me? Already far before you in the race of life, I shall have reached the turning-point; and withered, changed—I can not proceed, Sydney—but I can feel the rest! No, no; it must not be—look on the past as a

dream; have the courage to awaken; and in after years I shall hear you thank me for your release. IDA."

Calmly, and with a steady hand, Miss Trevanion sealed and closed her letter, but her fingers were as cold and bloodless as marble; and although her eyes were tearless they were dilated, and the transparent lids hot and discolored, as though the drops which should have fallen had burnt and blistered there. For a time she sat thrown back upon her chair, with her gaze fastened upon the fateful missive. It contained indeed the destiny of her future life, and she dared not ask herself how it would be answered.

After a while she raised her head, and looked languidly about her; luxury surrounded her on every side; her glance traveled from silken hangings to gorgeous mirrors—from costly toys to jeweled cabinets and flowers, and birds, and books, and all the other appliances of wealth and taste with which her hitherto indulgent father had delighted to environ her; and as she noted each in its turn, an expression of loathing passed over her countenance. It was for vanities such as these that she had been urged to barter away her self-respect—to sell her liberty—to perjure her faith—to crush her heart; and it was from the fear of losing these that she had voluntarily offered to resign Sydney Elphinstone. But no, no; not from this fear for herself, but for him—and could it be that he would prize them so dearly as to accept her self-abnegation in order to secure them? Did she not wrong him by suspicion? And yet who should say? And then once more arose the fatal thought—"He is so young—the world and all its gauds are still so bright for him. Let him but look into the future, as I have urged, and then—" she did not pursue the anticipation further, but with a convulsive shudder that shook her whole frame, she clasped her spread hands on the table, near which she sat, and buried her throbbing brow in their open palms.

How long she had continued thus motionless in her misery she knew not, when she was aroused by a gentle knocking at the door of her room, which slowly opened, and Lady Mary Brooklands entered, and closed it behind her.

"My dear Ida;" said her visitor as she tenderly approached her, and took a seat by her side; "what is the meaning of this terrible emotion? What has happened?"

"Oh, my kind friend, I am very, very, wretched;" was the faint reply, as one large scalding tear rolled down the fever-crimsoned cheek of the unhappy girl; "I have just gone through a scene with my father which has nearly destroyed me."

"*Just* gone through such a scene, my sweet child;" exclaimed the noble widow; "you have surely had time to compose yourself since the interview took place, for I have myself been closeted with Mr. Trevanion in the library for the last two hours."

"But he has surely not expressed any displeasure toward you?" said Ida anxiously; "whatever cause of complaint he may have against myself, you, at least, are guiltless in this affair."

"No, no; apprehend nothing on my account;" replied her friend with proud composure; "Mr. Trevanion is a man of the world, and has sufficient regard for my rank, whatever may be his feelings toward myself personally, to avoid any undue exhibition of temper in our intercourse. On the contrary, throughout the whole of the interview to which I have alluded, nothing could exceed his suavity; and although I detected a certain coldness in his manner which betrayed a suspicion that I felt to be totally undeserved on my part, I refrained from any observation which might tend to show him that I was conscious of the change, feeling that situated as I am in this family, my *rôle* should universally be that of a mediator; and as such you are aware that I have universally striven to act."

"I am indeed well aware of it, dear Lady Mary;" said Miss Trevanion affectionately "but as my father appeared to think that you had favored the addresses of Sydney, and refused to receive my assurances to the contrary, I feared that he might have expressed the same suspicion to yourself."

"That he does so believe, I am convinced;" was the quiet rejoinder; "but as I felt that such was not the case, I would not afford him the triumph of perceiving that I considered the suspicion to be possible; for had I done so I could not of course have remained under his roof; and the rather, as you know how utterly unjust it would have been, since I had never been admitted to your confidence—that my advice had never been sought, and that I was of course completely ignorant of the engagement between yourself and my nephew."

"It is true that I did not solicit your advice;" said Miss Trevanion; "because I felt that had I done so I should have rendered your position one of difficulty and delicacy from your relationship to Mr. Elphinstone, although I could not doubt that you must have perceived our mutual attachment."

"By no means, my dear girl, by no means;" was the ready disclaimer of the lady; "I had now for many years been so accustomed to see you an object of admiration to all by whom you have been approached, that I considered Sydney only as an additional mote sporting in the sunshine of your smiles, or you may rest assured that I should have warned you of the policy of such an attachment. It is true that the poor boy is handsome and intellectual as well as high-born; and, I really believe, truly amiable and honorable; but still he is poor, and I therefore imagined it impossible that with all your advantages you would ever dream of making such a sacrifice."

"Surely, dear Lady Mary, you at least should have known me better than to suppose that I could marry for mere wealth or rank."

"Forgive me, Ida, if I have so far done you injustice," was the fond reply of her visitor as she passed her arm round the waist of Miss Trevanion, and drew her gently to her bosom; "but you must remember that I was fully aware of your father's views and wishes; and I knew him to be absolute in his family; and that from the nature of your education, and your great success in the world, I had every reason to anticipate that you would become so

wife of a man of decided rank. How, then, do you conceive it probable that I should even for a moment dream of your bestowing yourself upon poor Sydney. Why, my sweet child, much as I am compelled to admire your beautiful disinterestedness, I can even now scarcely bring myself to credit the fact."

"But tell me, my dear friend," said her listener, involuntarily soothed by the placid kindness of her manner, "had I ventured to confide the truth to you, should you have blamed me for my love of Sydney?"

"Blamed you, darling? No, I should not certainly have, had the heart to blame your unselfish generosity; but still I should have felt it my duty to discourage the attachment as one which could not fail to excite the displeasure of your father, who had, as you must yourself admit, every right to be ambitious for such a daughter; and even now my errand is to dissuade you from persisting in this unpropitious engagement."

"At my father's request?" asked Ida.

"Yes, love, at Mr. Trevanion's request, who appears to place great faith in my influence, far greater than I fear it deserves. He has strenuously urged me to exert all my eloquence in pointing out what he considers as the madness and folly of such a marriage, and you see that I am conscientiously doing so. He moreover requested me to represent the policy and propriety of your union with Lord Downmere; and I must be confessed, Ida, that, in a worldly point of view, there can be no comparison between the two."

"Is Lord Downmere the husband you would have selected for me, Lady Mary?"

"Perhaps not, dearest, perhaps not precisely; but he is, you know, as a peer of the realm and a man of enormous wealth, a very desirable match. There can be no doubt that you can do much worse."

"I scarcely think it possible," said Miss Trevanion, with a shade of haughtiness, "that is, however, a point which we need not discuss, as it is one upon which my mind is unalterably decided. Happen what may, I will never become Countess of Downmere; I should despise myself, could I be mercenary enough to barter my happiness for such considerations to such a man."

"Well, my love, you know best, of course; while it is quite certain, that if you have really resolved to give your hand to my nephew—if you really feel that he possesses your affections—we can only hope that Mr. Trevanion will, after a time, become reconciled to the marriage. Still I must, as I have promised, caution you, that all your friends will regard it as an imprudence. But if you feel that your happiness depends on him, I actually have not the courage to distress you by any further arguments. Indeed, under the peculiar circumstances, I almost feel it a treason against Sydney to say another word upon the subject; for I can not forget that he is my sister's son, and that he is, moreover, a man of whose alliance any father might be proud. However, I must not suffer the affections of a relative to seduce me into a failure against friendship, and I am anxious to be able to assure Mr. Trevanion that I have performed my onerous mission faithfully."

"Of any after-reconciliation with my father, when I have once become the wife of Sydney, I am utterly hopeless," said Ida sadly; "I know that once to have incurred his anger and thwarted his will, is to have forfeited his affection for ever. No, he will never forgive me."

"Nonsense, silly child," exclaimed Lady Mary Brooklands, laughingly; "do you forget that your father is a wealthy man, and that you are his only child, and must, consequently, one day inherit that wealth? Do you suppose that after having throughout life exerted all his energies to make his daughter a mark for the admiration and envy of the world, he will long permit his affections to be alienated from the idol which he has himself set up? No, no; trust me, he will desire to see his ample fortune produce its legitimate effect, and for that purpose, if for no other, you are certain of forgiveness."

"I can not entertain any such hope, my good friend," sighed Miss Trevanion; "I do not seek to do so for a moment, as I feel convinced that ultimate disappointment must ensue. My father, with all his noble qualities, never forgives—he is truth itself—and he has assured me that in the event of my disobedience, he will bequeath every shilling of which he is possessed to the son of Sir Jasper."

Her companion visibly started. "You know him well, my dear Lady Mary," she pursued, "and therefore you will readily understand that he will fulfill his word; while I do not hesitate to confess that bitterly as I feel, and ever shall feel, his displeasure and his estrangement, the thought that instead, as I had fondly hoped, of enriching Sydney, and of affording him the opportunity of displaying his brilliant talents with the effect that they deserve, I shall go to him helpless and almost penniless, and thus increase his struggle with the world, is yet more painful."

Lady Mary remained silent for a moment, and then said in a constrained tone, very different from that in which she had hitherto carried on the conversation: "I can well believe it, my dear, for in the present factitious state of society, it is impossible for any individual to do justice to himself, however highly gifted he may be by nature, unless he has the means of improving his advantages. I do not for a moment suspect Sydney of any mercenary views; indeed I believe him to be incapable of such considerations, particularly when *you* are the object of his affections, but still the imprudence of undertaking the responsibility of a family under such circumstances, will, undoubtedly be very great; nor, my love, must you be hurt if I venture to remind you that this imprudence will be considerably increased by the disparity of age which exists between you. You will, as I before urged upon you, really do well to reflect before you decide; as these particulars may not have struck you before, I considered it my imperative duty to point them out."

"Pardon me, madam," said Miss Trevanion, haughtily, as she rose with a flushed cheek and a flashing eye; "I am not the heartless egotist you think me. I have considered all and more of the difficulties which a marriage with me might entail upon Mr. Elphinstone, than even

you have enumerated. Nor have I simply grieved over them in selfish sorrow; there—" and as she spoke she pointed toward the letter which still lay upon her desk; "there, I have forced them upon the attention of your nephew himself—there, I have urged him to consider them as insurmountable, and to resign his claim upon my hand. If I am fated to a life of suffering, I am at least willing to suffer alone."

"You are warm, Ida!"

"Perhaps so." said Miss Trevanion, and she sank back into her seat, "but you must pardon me—it is hard, very hard, to be abandoned by all in whom you have trusted; but I thank you, Lady Mary, for having kept me no longer in suspense as to the support I might expect from your affection. You have indeed complied even to the very letter with the request of my father—your mission has been fulfilled as conscientiously as you could desire; and now I have but one request to make of you, and I make it unhesitatingly, as it can not by any possibility involve your interests. Should Mr. Elphinstone, your nephew, after having received that letter, persevere in seeking the disinherited daughter of Mr. Trevanion as his wife, it is more than possible that Lady Mary Brooklands, may be solicited still to remain his guest, and to do the honors of his house—and oh! if indeed it should be so," she added, as her voice sank and her lip quivered, "be kind to my poor mother, I shall not be there to support her weakness, and to conceal from her the isolation of her neglected and wasted existence—and believe me, that, careless as he may appear of her happiness, my father will in his heart, thank you for the care of her."

"Miss Trevanion, I do not understand you," faltered Lady Mary.

"No—you are right, you do not understand me;" was the reply; "but you may one day do so: meanwhile, this interview has ceased to be pleasant to either party, and I will not detain you longer."

"Ida, your impetuous feelings will be your ruin," said her companion harshly.

"It may be so," murmured the unhappy girl, despondently; "it may be so: at present I am only the victim of the passions of others."

"What am I to say to your father, Miss Trevanion?" asked Lady Mary, as she rose to depart.

"Tell him all that has passed between us;" was the indignant rejoinder; "I have no cause to shrink from one word that I have uttered, I have no intention to retract it."

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XII.

DOUBTS AND FEARS.

Miss Trevanion was now, indeed, as she had said, alone. To her mother she knew that it was in vain to cling for council or support, for the poor lady had been so long self-centered, and crushed beneath the iron hand of her husband, that her heart was dead to sympathy, and engrossed by its own petty feelings of discontent. The marriage from which she had anticipated alike honor and happiness had been a mere gilded slavery, and she had worn her chains with a passiveness which had gradually but surely benumbed all the most generous qualities of her nature, and so broken her spirits that the only enjoyment of which she was still susceptible was that of perfect quiet every event that tended to interrupt it being regarded as a personal and willful injury. Weak, as we have already shown, both intellectually and morally, a neglected if not vicious education had caused her greatly to overrate mere worldly advantages; a meanness of mind which had been fostered in after-life by the puerile course of novel-reading in which she delighted; and although it is probable that had she been permitted to perform the part of mother to her child, and to exercise the privileges of the maternal character, that sacred tie might have awakened her to holier and higher feelings, the fact of her having seen her legitimate duties delegated to another, had caused her to regard her daughter rather as the heiress of Mr. Trevanion, than as one upon whose love she had a claim, and whose happiness she was bound to promote. Awed by the rank of Lady Mary Brooklands, it never occurred to her on the first domestication of the titled stranger beneath her roof, to control her own right, or to assert her own dignity while as Ida passed from infancy to girlhood she had looked with bewildered surprise upon the bright and beautiful being whose talents were the theme of every tongue.

Even the affection which was lavished by on her by the brilliant girl, who never for an instant suffered the indulgence of which she was the object, to induce her to fail in respect or assiduity to her neglected mother, could not lessen the estrangement. Mrs. Trevanion was vaguely conscious of their utter incompatibility of mind and feeling; and thus by slow but inevitable degrees, a barrier had grown up between them which neither could ultimately overpass. In her secret heart the childish and vapid woman felt herself wronged by the superior qualities of her own child, and consequently met all her advances with querulous discontent, if not with actual distaste; yet still her daughter, with the persistence of a generous nature, even when she was compelled to admit to herself that she had little respect for her mother's judgment or understanding, continued to act as though she possessed the firmest faith in her.

In such a crisis as the present, however, Miss Trevanion at once felt that it would be idle to make any appeal to her, for even as she had herself become the wife of Mr. Trevanion, in the weak hope of attaining a rank in society superior to that in which she was born, so was she comparatively angered and annoyed by the refusal of her daughter to accomplish a marriage which would have made her the mother-in-law of an earl. Like her husband himself, but from a far different motive, she cared little what might be the qualifications of the individual through whose agency this desirable object was to be effected; she merely fastened upon the fact of its possibility, nor could she control her

irritation at what she denounced as the obstinacy of Ida, when, to her extreme amazement, she learned that not even the commands of her father could induce her to accept the hand of a peer of the realm.

"It is really too bad, Lady Mary," she said, peevishly; "a great deal too bad, and using me extremely ill, when she knows how much I wish it. What can she possibly want, I wonder! I'm sure if Mr. Trevanion is satisfied, she has no right to look higher."

"I quite agree with you in that opinion, madam," replied the titled dowager with a quiet sneer; "there can be no doubt that even Miss Trevanion should be satisfied with the rank of the Earl of Downmere; that is not, of course, her objection."

"Then what can it possibly be?" asked the lady, vacantly.

"I should presume that it is to Lord Downmere himself."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Trevanion, with more energy than she had exhibited for years; "I see nothing objectionable in him, and even if there were, what can it signify?"

Her companion shrugged her shoulders, and remained silent.

"I am sure," pursued the mortified mother with unusual garrulity, "that I was not at all in love with Mr. Trevanion when I married him, for, to tell you the truth, he always frightened me, he was so cold and proud, but when he told me of his uncle, Sir Jasper, and Trevanion Hall, and his poor dear mother, who was, like yourself, an earl's daughter, I felt at once that I was never likely to do better, and so, you see, I consented to be his wife."

"A resolution, madam, which I trust that you have never had reason to repent," was the sarcastic rejoinder.

"Well, I don't know exactly, I am not quite certain," said the poor lady, musingly; I sometimes fancy, and particularly since I have become convinced that Mr. Trevanion's great relations are never likely to be reconciled to him, that we were not altogether suited to each other, and that I might perhaps have been happier, had I married John George Harris, my father's head-clerk, who early went out of his mind when he found that I had engaged myself to 'the Don,' as they called my present husband in the office."

"It is possible," said Lady Mary, "that some similar idea may have struck your daughter, and that she may have acted upon it."

"If I thought so—" commenced Mrs. Trevanion; then suddenly checking herself, and turning toward her companion, she added, with what she evidently intended to be an accent of severity; "at all events, Lady Mary, I believe she has more good sense than to think in earnest of throwing herself away upon your nephew."

No; Miss Trevanion was right; she could anticipate neither counsel nor comfort in her trial from such a mother.

Thus then there was but one individual to whom she had looked for sympathy and support, and that one was Lady Mary Brooklands; the near relative of the man on whom she had consented to bestow her hand; the attached friend who had been the guardian of her girlhood and the companion of her riper years; by whom her attachment had been, if not openly applauded, at least covertly encouraged, and even this last stay had failed her at the very moment when she had placed the firmest faith in its stability—failed her because what her haughty and calculating ladyship had coveted for her nephew was, not the heart of the loving girl, who had for years clung to her as to a second mother, but the hand of Mr. Trevanion's heiress.

This was a bitter conviction, and as it grew upon her, a stronger feeling of desolation crept over the affrighted Ida; "*He* too," she murmured to herself, "he too, will now perhaps become suddenly aware of the imprudence which he was lately so anxious to commit—he may discover in our disparity of age, which he has hitherto treated so lightly, an obstacle and a ridicule. I am prepared for every thing; deserted on all sides, I must learn to suffice to myself, and I will do so. They may destroy my happiness, but they shall not bow my pride. My heart may break—it must—but I will ask no pity; I will submit to none. I am no weak girl to be a mark for the whispers of the idle; my father's spirit of endurance is strong within me; and like the Spartan boy I shall know how to hug my agony without a groan. And yet how I had garnered up my heart in him—how madly I had loved him, and love him still; the better, perhaps, that I thought he would owe all to me. It can not be that Sydney will prove hollow and heartless like his worldly aunt; but should it indeed be so, better now than after I had become his wife, for now I would struggle to forgive; while then—" and she paused and grasped her burning brow so tightly that it grew pale beneath the pressure; "then I should have scorned to make the effort; never would I have forgiven him had he pleaded to me upon his knees. And it might have been so—yes, yes, it might have been so; in some ten short years, and how quietly would those ten years pass, my boasted beauty will be on the wane, and the world will be full of young and blooming faces, fair and fresh, with the first light of life bright upon them—and how then? Would he—he, still in the unfaded glory of his manhood, remain true to me? true to herself? I dare not doubt it—for his sake—I dare not for my own. Now I am wretched, but not guilty—but then—then what would not his falsehood make me! Lady Mary is right. I have forgotten my own sense of dignity—I have been the victim of my own vanity—he will do well to rebuke my folly by submitting to her judgment, by following her counsels. I shall at least be spared the pang of his neglect, and the bitterness of his contempt!"

Worn with excitement, and crushed by mortification and anxiety, the painful picture which the jealous imagination of the excited girl had conjured up, overcame her little remaining strength; and when her French maid entered her room an hour subsequently, she found her stretched upon a sofa, cold and insensible; nor was it until after a considerable time, and the application of all the restoratives within reach, that she slowly recovered her consciousness.

As she did so, the first object upon which her eyes fastened was a letter, and the *femme-de-chambre* no sooner perceived that it had attracted her attention than she placed it in her hand. Mademoiselle Seraphine was enchanted. In one instant she had composed a most touching romance. Her haughty mistress must now confide in her; and her little black eyes would twinkle in spite of herself as she decided that her assistance must at last be needed, and her talents recognized. Eagerly did she watch the effect of her ready zeal; but her hopes were destined to be disappointed: the letter was no sooner in the possession of Miss Trevanion than one glance sufficed—it was the handwriting of Sydney; and faintly murmuring "Leave me," the agitated girl closed her eyes and fell back upon the cushions, with the fateful packet tightly grasped within her rigid fingers. For awhile she remained motionless, not a sob, not a sigh escaped her, but her heart labored painfully, and her pulses throbbed with an excitement strangely compounded of hope and dread. Her destiny lay hidden within the narrow folds of the paper that she held, and she had not courage to learn its secret. But suddenly she started from her recumbent position, shook back the masses of her dark hair, and with febrile energy, tore open the seal.

Thus ran the letter:—

"I know not, Ida, whether to be pained or rejoiced at the tone of the note which I have just received from you; for while much of its contents is calculated to cut me to the heart, it also contains much which has made me supremely happy. That you should have been subjected to so severe a trial of your feelings is to me a source of wretchedness greater than even you can comprehend; but you must not blame me if I confess that the conviction, that you willingly endured it for my sake, has almost made me selfish enough to forget at times how dearly my own triumph has been purchased. Mine is no common love, Ida; it has become part and parcel of my existence. I feel that I can not live without you, and that with you I could brave every trial which the tyranny of the world could heap upon me. You say that should you persist in fulfilling your promise to become my wife you lose all claim to the affection and inheritance of your father—proudly, then, shall I feel that you will owe all to me—that we shall be every thing to each other. This, dearest, is my idea of happiness; I am young alike in years and hope: my energies are strong, and with you beside me to cheer me in my labor, and to rejoice in my success, I can not fail. I will *not* resign my claim to possess you; you have promised, and you must perform. And yet, may I not, in my miserable egotism, be condemning you to sacrifices so great that even my tenderness can not requite them? Oh, if it indeed be so, let me not drag you down from the proud eminence on which you stand, only to ensure my own happiness. Like you, I will strive to be generous—to exult in your prosperity, in your success—I know not if I shall have strength to do so, but I will try, even though my heart burst in the effort. Care not for me, however, if, on mature reflection, you find that you shrink from the contrast between what is and what must be, when you can no longer command the luxuries by which you are now surrounded. If you doubt that my love and devotion—a love and a devotion which can end only in the grave—will not suffice to replace them. I can not now offer you affluence—I may not be enabled to do so for years to come. Can you forego it for my sake? If so, trust me that it will come at last. Laboring with you, and for you, I shall compel success—you will be my life, my my light, and my reward. I make no comment upon the fears which you express, that time can weaken my affections; it is true that when we first met, it was your wondrous beauty by which I was thralled, and that beauty will live unchanged in my heart forever; while all your nobler and better qualities will only tend, as years pass on, to render you still dearer.

"Should we part, therefore, Ida, the ruin of our hopes will be your work; for never never will I willingly resign the claim which you have given me upon your hand. I may be unworthy of such a boon in the eyes of those around you, but am I so in yours? It is for you, and you alone, to decide my destiny. I urge you now as I should not have dared to do, had you still been enabled to become mine, rich in the world's gifts; for then indeed my earnestness might have been misinterpreted; but now, when you assure me that it is not so, I may freely own that life itself will be a burden when you are lost to me. I have never loved another; and now my heart is so filled with your image that it can never admit a new one. Let your beauty wane; to me you will be ever beautiful beyond all on this earth; let sickness withe you, I will render that suffering light by my tenderness and devotion; and if sorrow should reach you even in my arms, I will only clasp you the closer that its bitter pressure may not be felt. Ida, noblest, best of women, torture me no longer, tell me only that you are still mine—mine for time—mine for eternity

"SYDNEY."

"Yes, my brave-hearted Sydney, yes," exclaimed Miss Trevanion, vehemently throwing herself upon her knees; yours, and only yours—yours for time—yours for eternity I can not, and I will not doubt you. Years will not change you, poverty will not chill you. You will love me to the end. What are the gaud and glitter of the world beside the possession of such a heart as yours? And I have dared to wrong your noble nature—to believe that the cold reasonings of the selfish and false could shake your steadfast faith! Shame on my sordid spirit? But I can never doubt you more. I will be worthy of your affection by the trustfulness with which I will repose upon its truth and strength. Oh! I am happy—happy—even as the mariner who in his storm-tossed vessel sees a safe harbor near, and knows that after one more fierce struggle, he shall gain the wished-for haven of peace and rest."

When Miss Trevanion rose from her knees, she was no longer pale from exhaustion, and subdued by the long-sustained anxiety which had so lately crushed her, there was a proud light in her eye, and a firmness in her tread, which betrayed her inward exultation. The anger of her father, the treachery of her friend, all was forgotten in that moment of triumphant happiness. Sydney was true—Sydney was all, and more than she had dared to hope—and she had no room for any other memory Again and again she read the letter which she still held tightly clasped, and again and again the smile of the heart's gladness played upon her lip. She drew aside the window-drapery, and threw back the sash, as if to breathe more freely, to have more scope for her joy, more space for her intense and thrilling rapture, and never had she thought the sky so glorious in its blue and tranquil beauty, the trees so graceful in their waving greenery, the flowers so rich in color and in perfume. "Of these, at least, even poverty can not deprive us," she murmured to herself, "we shall need no gold to purchase these. Nature is no niggard of her gifts, and she will not withhold her treasures from the hearts by which she is worshiped. The future can not extort a sigh from me now, nor will I even shrink from the present."

True to this resolution, Miss Trevanion summoned her maid, and calmly devoted herself to the duties of her toilet: every vestige of emotion had faded from her features, and a soft serenity had succeeded the storm of passion to which she had so lately yielded; extreme in all her feelings, she now dwelt only upon the happiness which was, as she fondly believed, so soon to repay her for all the suffering of the past; and as she rejected one after the other the ornaments with which her zealous *femme-de-chambre* was anxious to adorn her according to her usual custom, and placed in her luxuriant hair, and in the girdle of her simple dress of snowy muslin, a few natural flowers from a vase which stood upon her dressing-table, she smiled exultingly as she became aware that Sydney could scarcely consider her less lovely thus, than when covered with the costly gems with which she must henceforth dispense.

The astonished French woman looked on in silence. That her beautiful young mistress, who, she had every reason to believe, was betrothed to an Earl, should suddenly so far forget her dignity as to throw aside her jewels for a handful of paltry flowers, was to her mysterious and annoying in the extreme. What could it mean? And the pale face, which had so terrified her only a few hours previously, and which was now beaming with a quiet joy—that was another problem. Mademoiselle Seraphine was convinced that there was a secret somewhere; and never before had she felt so indignant at the proud reserve which led Miss Trevanion habitually to avoid all unnecessary intercourse with her attendants. The smart *soubrette* would have willingly given a year's wages, which would have been no slight sacrifice, could she have dived into the depths of the heart which was beating so tranquilly beside her, but she dared not ask a question; and, consequently, she flitted and fluttered about the apartment with the indignant air of a grievously-offended person, occasionally murmuring beneath her breath certain doubts as to how far "*Milord*" might approve of the sudden "*caprice*" of his incomprehensible "*fiancée*"—wondering how long this fit of "*coquetterie maladroite et mal entendue*" was to last; and inquiring of herself whether she ought to condescend to live with a mistress who appeared to be steeped in grief one hour, and as happy as a child the next—who preferred rose-buds to rubies, and, worse than all, kept her own secrets.

Upon the object of her speculations, however, all this display of irritation was wholly wasted; Ida was living that inner life which deadens the perceptions to outward things, and she finally dismissed Mademoiselle without the least regard for her injured feelings, in order that she might enjoy in solitude the thick-coming thoughts which crowded upon her heart and brain, and without one suspicion that had not the ill-used woman anticipated a *nôce*, and the glory of arranging the bridal coronal of *Madame la Comtesse*, she would, in the exasperation of the moment, have given her warning on the spot.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAMILY FRIEND.

While Miss Trevanion was occupied with her new and pleasant visions, her father was moodily pacing the library where he was closeted with the family friend; who, although she had told the tale of Ida's resolute rejection of the earl, and her equally determined adherence to Mr. Elphinstone, in her smoothest and blandest manner, had nevertheless raised a storm in the breast of her host which it required all his self-control to combat. The placid smile and studied phrases of Lady Mary jarred upon his nerves, contrasting as they did with the irritation of his own feelings; and as she sat playing with a paper-cutter as calmly as though no subject of importance occupied her thoughts, he inwardly cursed the high-breeding which had hitherto been the theme of his admiration.

"I believe that nothing would ruffle her," he murmured to himself; "nothing, so long as she was secure of a home under my roof; and I believe, too, that this affair has been her own work; and that, in spite of Ida's denial, she forced her beggarly nephew upon the girl for the very purpose that she has accomplished. No, no, my Lady Mary, I am not your dupe, as you imagine; I see through the whole plot; but I will circumvent you yet. I will not be fooled with impunity. I will compel you to act for me, and with me, although as yet you have declined to express your own sentiments upon the subject. But I must be calm; and I will."

And in pursuance of this resolution Mr. Trevanion re-seated himself, and smoothed his ruffled brow.

"Ida assures me, Lady Mary," he com-

menced abruptly, "that you were altogether ignorant of the imprudent engagement into which she has entered with Mr. Elphinstone. Is this really the case?"

"It is."

"But may I ask if it was quite unexpected on your part?"

"Perfectly so, the age of my nephew, and the narrowness of his means, alike rendered it impossible that I could indulge in any idea of the sort."

"And no wonder, madam, coupled as these circumstances were, moreover, by your knowledge of my views and intentions for Miss Trevanion—whom—I now tell you, as I have done frequently before—I would rather follow to her grave than permit to throw herself away upon a nobody"

"I must be permitted to remark," observed the lady with a stateliness of manner intended to reprove the arroganee of her companion, "that Mr. Elphinstone is at once highly-born and well-connected. The equal at least in that respect, even of Miss Trevanion."

A dark cloud gathered on the countenanee of the merchant.

"I do not deny it, madam," he said coldly; "as your relative the gentleman has assuredly that qualification, but still I must be pardoned if I persist in considering him as a nobody. He has no stake in the country. He has even a reputation to make; he is known only by a certain set as 'a man about town,' well-looking and well-dressed; and so obscure an individual can never be the husband of my daughter."

Lady Mary replied only by a listless bow, and having been engaged for the last few minutes in cutting some colored paper into narrow strips, she now began to amuse herself by twisting them into spills.

Nothing could be more aggravating to a proud and impetuous nature like that of Mr. Trevanion, than this assumption of perfect composure. His blood rose to fever-heat, and his temples throbbed almost to pain.

"I trust, madam," he said, after a moment's silence, "that you did me the favor to explain to my rebellious child that I peremptorily insisted upon her accepting the hand of Lord Downmere?"

"I did, with the same frankness that I communicated to yourself, her equally peremptory refusal."

"And do you not yourself—now, Lady Mary, I put the question to you in the full conviction that you will answer it frankly and undisguisedly, even although you chance to be the kinswoman of Mr. Elphinstone—do you not, as a woman of the world, consider that her marriage with that gentleman would be to the last degree imprudent?"

"Since you compel me to declare my opinion, Mr. Trevanion," said the noble matron; "I most assuredly do."

"I am happy to hear it, very happy," exclaimed the merchant; "and may I hope that you expressed as much to my daughter?"

"I did."

"My dear madam;" said Mr. Trevanion, earnestly; "I regret to say that I have wronged you by supposing that you had at least encouraged Ida's infatuation by your silence; I should have known you better than to suspect, even for a moment, that you could be guilty of such monstrous disingenuousness; but if you now, with your usual admirable judgment, disapprove of my daughter's folly, what will be your opinion when I confide to you that I have positively assured her, that, in the event of her persistenee, not one shilling of my property shall ever be hers."

"What *can* I think, my dear sir," smiled the lady; "but that you held forth a threat, which you would never have the courage to realize."

"You mistake me," was the stern rejoinder; "I shall fulfill it without an effort."

The strip of pink paper upon which Lady Mary Brooklands was at that instant engaged, visibly quivered in her fingers; "Remember," she said, in a somewhat unsteady tone; "that Ida is your only child."

"I do," replied the merchant; "but I remember also that I have a nephew; one moreover who bears my name, and will be no obscure recipient of my bounty. If I can not humble Sir Jasper in the way which I had every right to hope that I should have done, I can still, at least, effect my purpose by crushing him beneath the weight of an obligation which he can never cancel."

"Still, my good friend;" urged the lady, discontinuing her employment, and evincing infinitely more interest in the conversation than she had hitherto done; "still I would plead for Ida. Recollect the nature of her education, and how little it has fitted her for a life of privation and struggle. Do not overlook the fact that she has done more than justice to your expectations; that her beauty, her grace, and her attainments have made her universally popular, and caused her society to be courted by persons of exalted rank and acknowledged judgment. In short, do not suffer your own—I confess, very legitimate—disappointment, to render you ungenerous or unjust."

"Miss Trevanion has seen fit to emancipate herself from my authority, madam;" was the dogged reply; "and I most sincerely congratulate her on the fact that her godmother bequeathed to her the magnificent sum of three hundred pounds a year, as she will, should she become Mrs. Elphinstone, have an admirable opportunity of testing the capabilities of such an income; while I equally congratulate myself upon the circumstanee, as I could not conscientiously have left her to starve."

"Mr. Trevanion," persisted the lady; "do nothing rashly, lest you incur the misery of your own reproaches."

"I will run the risk of any remorse likely to be awakened by my assertion of self-respect, madam."

"But the world, sir—you would surely not desire to brave the comments of the world; and believe me when I assure you, that public opinion will condemn so unprecedented an act of severity."

"I will venture even that," said the merchant; "when once the dream of my life is past, the world and myself will have little in common. I ask nothing of it, I owe nothing to it; I have been the architect of my own fortunes, and the edifice that I have raised is substantial enough for me to trust to its stability."

"Consider, nevertheless," resumed his companion, as she laid her jeweled hand lightly upon his arm, and looked pleadingly into his face; "do not, I entreat, suffer it to escape you, that by renouncing the interests, and—if I understand you rightly—the society of your daughter, you also tear asunder the holy bonds which knit together a mother and her child. No, no; you can not have the heart to do this."

"You are an able advocate, Lady Mary," was the rejoinder, as a questionable smile played about the mouth of Mr. Trevanion; "but unfortunately for the success of your argument, we are both sufficiently conversant with the *dessous des cartes* to be quite aware that the bonds to which you allude hang somewhat loosely in this instance. The mother will easily console herself with a new shawl and a new novel; while the daughter, whose temperament and training must years ago have taught her that the lady in question is merely a harmless simpleton, to whom she is indebted for nothing beyond the single fact of her existence, will find little difficulty in reconciling herself to the privation of a very negative advantage. These are, however, idle speculations, as I still hope—and moreover, expect—to see Miss Trevanion Countess of Downmere."

"I sincerely trust, should the resolution which you have declared be really unalterable, that your expectations may be realized," said Lady Mary, as she once more busied herself with the shreds of pink paper; "for I shall be truly gratified on vacating my place at your hospitable hearth, to feel that you have not been disappointed in your hopes."

"I do not understand you, my dear madam," said the merchant.

"And yet nothing can be more simple than my meaning," replied his companion, with a sigh that was only just audible enough to imply that she had failed in her effort to suppress it. "Let my sweet friend bestow her hand upon whom she may, my mission in your family is necessarily at an end; and although I shall, as you must be well aware, deeply and keenly feel my separation from a circle endeared to me alike by sympathy and habit, still—"

"And do you really mean me to infer, my dear Lady Mary," asked the merchant earnestly; "that you contemplate such a separation? and that because my daughter, in the natural course of events, leaves her home, you will also abandon the roof which you have so kindly regarded as your own?"

"In my turn I ask, can you be serious, Mr. Trevanion?"

"Perfectly so," was the calm reply; "you know precisely, my dear madam, how I am situated; and that after the departure of Ida, be it to Woodlyn Castle or to a suburban lodging, there will be no longer a mistress of my house, should you indeed fail me? Nay, don't talk to me of Mrs. Trevanion: she exists, and nothing more. To you alone can I look for companionship and help; and I trust that our long friendship gives me some claim upon your consideration."

"My position, under such circumstances, would be an onerous one;" remarked the lady.

"Pardon me if I can not see it in that light. You have now been my guest, my honored guest, for years; the tie between us has become stronger than that of kindred; I must induce you to rescind your resolution."

Lady Mary was an excellent actress, and on this occasion she put forth all her talent. Although the idea of leaving the luxurious home of which she had for so long a period been the actual if not the nominal mistress, had caused her many an unquiet moment, she was by no means inclined to avow the truth, when by gratifying the secret wish of her own heart she might seem to concede a favor; and she consequently adduced a multitude of arguments against the proposed arrangement, although none of them were powerful enough to defy refutation; and even while she was eager to yield, and thus to secure to herself the advantages she had so long enjoyed, she refused to pledge herself to any thing; there was so much to consider; circumstances might arise to render her determination imperative; she was, of course, both gratified and flattered by so unequivocal a proof of regard on the part of Mr. Trevanion, but the point was a delicate one, a very delicate one. She would not, however, positively refuse, because there was nothing on earth which she should regret so much as to wound the feelings of so old and esteemed a friend; but at the same time she must request to be allowed the opportunity of turning the matter over in her mind. Nothing could be more reasonable; and as her companion entertained a shrewd doubt of her ultimately proving inexorable, he instantly complied with the very natural suggestion. He did not seek to be importunate, although he should await her decision with anxiety; and thus the question was left in abeyance for the time. Mr. Trevanion readily perceived, however, that it had been mooted at an auspicious moment, for a quarter of an hour had not elapsed before he discovered that the certainty of her own impunity in any and every case had singularly tended to modify the noble matron's sentiments on the subject of his contemplated severity to his daughter. She reluctantly agreed, but she *did* agree, that he had a right to be disappointed by the pertinacity of Ida—that he was entitled to compel her obedience—that the Earl of Downmere was in every respect the most eligible husband that he could have selected for her—and that the 'love-affair' was a mere folly, which ought to be discountenanced on every account.

"And now that you have compelled me to speak plainly, my good sir," she resumed; "although I assure you that I had resolved to do nothing of the kind, you may appreciate the difficulty of the position in which I was placed. Sydney Elphinstone is my nephew, and at first I feared (as you are aware, with some justice) that you might possibly so far mistake me as to believe that I should countenance his suit from interested motives, while, after you had informed me of your intention of adopting and enriching your nephew, should your wishes be disregarded, I became equally apprehensive that I might appear to abandon the cause of of my own, because Ida could no longer enrich him with the noble fortune to which she had expected to succeed. Now, however, that we

thoroughly understand each other, there is no longer any reason why I should shrink from acknowledging that I have, from the moment in which it was confided to me, considered the whole affair as childish and absurd in the extreme. Sydney is a fine young fellow, but he is still a mere boy, who can scarcely be supposed to know his own mind; while Miss Trevanion—"

"Is a woman of six-and-twenty, who is as ready to make a fool of herself as any boarding-school Miss of fifteen," broke in the merchant, with a portentous frown; "and who must consequently be treated as such. I will see Lord Downmere to-morrow. Fortunately he has no false delicacy on the subject, and, moreover, knows nothing about the Elphinstone affair; so that in so far as he is concerned, there is no harm done; and after I shall have seen his lordship I will lose no more time in making my final arrangements, in which, my dear Lady Mary, I shall rely on your assistance and advice."

"You know how sincerely both will be afforded, my good sir;" said his companion with dignified suavity; "while I, on my part, am convinced that you will ask nothing from me inconsistent with the tender affection which I feel for my sweet young friend."

"Of that you need have no apprehension;" was the rejoinder of the merchant; "for that very affection must, as a natural consequence, lead you to desire her prosperity and happiness. The path is therefore plain before us, and we have only to follow it steadily and resolutely. And now, *sans adieu*, my dear Lady Mary; I fear that, in my inconsiderate egotism, I may already have detained you too long."

The lady rose with a polite disclaimer on her lips; and then, having carefully collected her scattered treasures, and playfully enriched the silver sandish of the master of the house with a portion of her rose-colored labors, she smilingly took her departure. Come what might, she had carried her own point.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN INTERVIEW.

Henry Ferdinand, Earl of Downmere, and Baron Woodlyn, had, as we have already shown, no very overpowering passion for the beautiful Miss Trevanion; although he was by no means insensible to the fact that with her many graces and attractions, she could not but do honor to his name and rank. His pertinacity in the pursuit of the lady was prompted by other, and to him more serious considerations. His lordship had throughout life restricted his worship to one idol, and that idol had been self; while so zealous had been his devotion, that his large income had gradually failed to meet the demands made upon it by one, who was at once a profligate and a sybarite. More than one of his estates was deeply mortgaged, and this fact not only crippled his resources, but jarred with his pride; and he accordingly looked to the money-bags of the wealthy Mr. Trevanion for release; nor did the unpleasant and mortifying circumstance of his rejection by sundry well-dowered beauties to whom he had previously offered the privilege of relieving him from his embarrassments, tend to weaken his anxiety for success in the present instance. He was deterred by no false delicacy in his pursuit of a woman to whom his addresses were unwelcome, for his past associations with the sex had not initiated him into the shrinking sensitiveness of its purer and better portion. Recognizing no dignity save that of title, he looked upon the marriage which he now contemplated, as a fair and equitable barter. He needed the princely fortune of the heiress to enable him to terminate his life as he had commenced it, in self-indulgence and display; while he was content to give in exchange a name which he had done nothing to illustrate, and a rank which he had done nothing to adorn.

Nevertheless there were moments in which the haughty and self-centered man brought himself to believe that in bestowing his hand upon the high-bred and fascinating daughter of Mr. Trevanion, he was about to make a heavy sacrifice; nor were his private reflections more flattering to Mr. Trevanion personally. That the courtly and dignified merchant desired the alliance for his own sake, the peer could not, and did not believe, for he had wit enough to perceive at once that their several natures were not merely incompatible, but even antagonistic both in principle and feeling. "No, no;" would the earl murmur to himself with a saturnine smile, as he shook his gouty leg, and swallowed an olive to relish the more keenly his penultimate glass of claret; "no, no; the old fellow can not deceive me, bland and smooth as he is; he wants a lift upon the social ladder, and is willing to pay handsomely, provided the stride be a long one, but perhaps it is better so; I am not anxious to marry the whole family."

And Lord Downmere was right; Mr. Trevanion had never for a moment cheated himself into a belief that he was working for the happiness of his daughter in forcing forward her union with the selfish egotist who was to raise her to the peerage; his motive stood bare and unconcealed before him; nor had he ever striven to vail it from the child whom he desired to sacrifice to his own personal views and ambition; and although under such circumstances, policy induced him to affect toward the peer the respect and deference which appeared to be a legitimate homage yielded to his rank, the haughty merchant despised him in his secret heart, and looked upon him merely as a necessary tool to further his own views.

Thus, each thoroughly understood the other; each had a point to carry, and each was equally resolved to carry that point, if success could be ensured by his own exertions

As he had intimated to Lady Mary, Mr. Trevanion on the morrow had another interview with the earl, whom he encouraged to persevere, laughingly reminding him that no woman of spirit would willingly be won unsought, and dropping at the same time, as if accidentally, certain hints regarding the brilliant expectations of his daughter, which wonderfully tended to increase the enthusiasm of the noble suitor

This fact, however, Lord Downmere did not desire to render too apparent, and he consequently considered it expedient to evince something like sentiment, although an attempt to play the lover sat but loosely upon him.

"She is certainly a monstrous fine woman, my dear sir," he said complacently, "a very fine woman indeed, and has no doubt every right to play the coquette a little before she yields, provided always that she yields at last, and as you assure me that she will do so—"

"Your lordship may rest assured of it."

"Well then, I see no objection to the course which you propose, and I will afford her another opportunity of recanting her declared determination. I will call at your house again, but you must promise me the support of your influence and authority. I am so unaccustomed to this sort of thing, that I am quite unable to do justice to myself."

"Had not your lordship better see her alone?" asked the merchant.

"No, sir, no;" was the eager rejoinder, "I consider your presence to be most desirable."

"As you will, my lord," said Mr. Trevanion, somewhat impatiently; "but, perhaps, after all, we had better be guided by circumstances. All that I will venture to urge is, that no time should be lost, as the present state of things must necessarily be unsatisfactory to all parties. My carriage is at the door; will your lordship accompany me at once to Richmond?"

"If you really consider it expedient for me to do so, certainly;" was the reluctant reply; "although I have an important engagement at my club, but 'when a lady's in the case,' you know, there is no alternative; and as you justly remark, there will be many arrangements to make on both sides after the affair is decided, which will occupy a very considerable time, so let it be as you propose; in ten minutes I will be ready."

Lord Downmere was almost as good as his word, and in less than half-an-hour, the two gentlemen were on their way to the splendid villa of the merchant.

When their arrival was announced to Miss Trevanion, she excused herself on the plea of indisposition, but a second and peremptory summons from her father, compelled her appearance in the drawing-room, which she entered, to his intense mortification and displeasure, in a loose white muslin wrapper, with her fine hair hidden beneath a close and simple lace cap.

"Miss Trevanion!" he exclaimed, angrily, "Is that a fitting costume at such an hour, and for the reception of such a guest?"

"Not a word, my dear sir, not a word," said the earl, as with a courteous inclination he rose from his seat, and extended his hand to the pale and shrinking girl; "have you yet to learn that ladies understand all these little matters to perfection, and do you imagine that your fair daughter is not well aware that she is ten times more bewitching in her present costume as when avowedly adorned for conquest?"

"I trusted that my indisposition would have sufficed to excuse my non-appearance," said Ida, addressing her father, as with a cold and haughty inclination of the head, she withdrew her hand from that of her unwelcome visitor.

"Well, well, since his lordship is kind enough to overlook so great a breach of decorum and good-breeding, we will say no worse upon the subject," said Mr. Trevanion, who could not conceal from himself, that had his daughter been influenced by the most refined coquetry, she could not have succeeded in appearing more lovely than in her present plain and simple attire; "and we have moreover, a more serious subject to discuss. Lord Downmere, is here, Ida, to receive your final answer to the proposal with with which he has honored you. Mark me, your *final* answer."

"I regret," was the firm rejoinder, "that his lordship should have considered such a visit necessary after our late interview. I had hoped—"

"Pshaw!" interposed the merchant, impetuously; "all recurrence to the past is idle; and you know my determination, and you have now only to express your compliance with my will."

"And is it thus, that the Earl of Downmere would woo his bride?" asked Ida, contemptuously.

"I am content to woo her after any fashion," said the peer, with a courteous bow; "so that I am happy enough to win her."

"Be generous, my lord;" said Miss Trevanion, "and abandon a suit which can bring you neither honor nor happiness. I should be false, alike to you and myself, did I not at once avow that I have no longer a heart to bestow. I feel, as I have already declared, flattered by your preference, but I can never become your wife."

"So you assured me at our last interview, my dear young lady," replied the earl, perfectly unmoved; "but I am quite aware that it is one of the many privileges of your sex to torture the hearts of your admirers, and I accordingly trusted to time and reflection to operate a change in your decision."

"And your lordship did wisely," broke in the merchant, who with difficulty controled his anger, as he listened to the decided words of his daughter; "for women seldom know their own minds from one hour to another, and Miss Trevanion is at this moment an illustration of the fact. But we have already had somewhat too much of this folly, and she will do well to act more rationally, and to avow at once that she is both honored and happy in the brilliant prospect which your flattering preference holds out to her.

"A devoted heart, and a splendid position;" said the peer, pompously; "what, my dear madam, can you require more than this?"

"Less, much less, would suffice to my ambition, my lord;" replied Ida; "all I ask is the first, and you must pardon me if I frankly declare that it is a gift which you have not to bestow. Let us deal honestly with each other, Lord Downmere: I am not deceived as to my own position in life and am quite aware that,

despite all the indulgences which have been lavished upon me, I am still only the daughter of a merchant, who, however wealthy and however honored he may be, is still merely a merchant; and that thus I am no fitting wife for the Earl of Downmere. Pardon me, father," she added, as she marked the displeasure of Mr. Trevanion; "but this is no moment for idle pretense or frivolous vanity; we must all look the truth steadily in the face, and not seek to deceive ourselves or each other by flimsy fallacies. I would not that Lord Downmere should suspect that the merchant, whose reputation is as untarnished, and whose blood is as ancient as his own, is now courting his alliance from any mean pandering to his rank and to the ennobling of his child, from a mere paltry love of title and aggrandizement, for I well know that it is not so—nor would I that my father, when urging me to plight my faith to a man whom I do not love, should so far delude himself as to imagine that the proud peer who condescends to sue for an affection which he can never gain, is influenced by any affection for myself. I see and bitterly feel the truth of my position. On one hand, I am to be made a medium of vengeance, and on the other—"

"Enough, Miss Trevanion, enough!" exclaimed the merchant, vehemently; "this insolence is intolerable and unprecedented. So far I have listened patiently, but my forbearance, great as it has been, has nevertheless a limit."

"I can not, of course, presume to decide the motive which you were about to attribute to my addresses, my dear madam," said the earl, waving his hand deprecatingly toward his exalted host; "but of this I can conscientiously assure you, that if you believe them to have been prompted by any other than my profound and ardent admiration of your many perfections, you not only do me a grievous wrong, but are unjust to yourself. As to the disparity of rank to which you have alluded, it is a mere chimera, when you do not require to be reminded that your grace and loveliness would do honor to a throne. And remember, madam, remember;" he pursued emphatically; "that as my bride—as my wife—as Countess of Downmere—you will stand near the steps of one among the noblest and proudest of the realm. A rumor has reached me that I have a rival, younger no doubt, and more likely to captivate the eye of one so lovely as yourself, than I can hope to do; and although I had been assured the report was false, your own declaration that you have no longer a heart to bestow leads me to believe that such may nevertheless be the case; but let me entreat you to reflect, my dear young lady, before you consign attractions so brilliant as your own to comparative obscurity. You can be little aware of the extent of the sacrifice which you contemplate. You were made for the world, and you owe it to the world to fulfill your destiny. As my wife—as Countess of Downmere—it would be brilliant. For your own sake—for mine—"

"A thousand thanks, my good lord, a thousand thanks," said the merchant; "for a concession of which my willful child is apparently so unworthy; but I entreat of you to urge her no further. She can not be insensible to the generosity of your arguments, and *she will not*—to this I pledge myself. She has now exhausted her romance, and must be prepared to listen to reason. Once more I must request of you to leave the affair in my hands."

"Another word and I have done," said the earl, who gathered courage from the fear that the coveted wealth of the merchant might yet escape him, and who was anxious to compel the lady to something at least bordering upon concession; "I have endeavored, my dear Miss Trevanion, to place before you the mere worldly advantages of an union which would make me supremely blessed; but I would also press upon you the sincerity and ardor of my attachment, of which I am deeply grieved to be compelled to admit that you have expressed a doubt; do me more justice; and forgive me if I add that I was wholly unprepared for such mistrust and repugnance on your part, after the encouragement which I received from your estimable father, upon whose good faith I placed the firmest and most complete reliance."

"I know not, my lord," said the wearied and persecuted girl, sadly, "what assurance my father may have given you—it is not for me to comment on his actions, or to criticize his motives. He has doubtlessly acted according to his own idea of propriety and right; but I at least am guiltless of having misled you for a moment; and harassing and painful as this subject can not fail to have been to all parties, I trust that you will do me the justice to exonerate me from having willfully prolonged it."

"I can indeed most conscientiously acquit you of any attempt to do so, Miss Trevanion;" was the ironical rejoinder of the earl; "but I have nevertheless an undoubted right to complain of the careless and uncompromising manner in which you have rejected my addresses, conceiving, as I do, that they might have met with more consideration."

"This persistence, my lord," said Ida, haughtily, "is rapidly degenerating into persecution; and is wholly deficient in both dignity and generosity. I can not for a moment bring myself to believe that our very slight acquaintance can have inspired with an attachment to myself personally which could alone afford an excuse for your extraordinary pertinacity; and I have consequently endeavored to discover its true and adequate motive. On mature reflection, I have only been able to imagine one, and that one so utterly incompatible with the exalted rank to which you evidently attach no mean value, that for the sake of your own dignity, I can only trust that I do you an injustice. I have already so far overstepped the reserve of my sex as to admit to your lordship that my affections are bestowed elsewhere; and bestowed, I am proud to say, where my heart was the treasure sought, and not my wealth. What, then, my lord, do you seek in thus urging me to become your wife? I feel humbled by the reply forced upon me by my reason."

"Really, my dear madam, you are incomprehensible," said the peer, uneasily.

"Rather say, my lord, that she is unworthy

of the honor which you propose to do her," exclaimed Mr. Trevanion, as he rose angrily from his seat; "but I am myself to blame for her wrong-headedness; she has been so long her own mistress that she appears to have forgotten her duty as a daughter, and her courtesy as a woman. Trust me, this shall be remedied. And now, Miss Trevanion, hear me. You do not leave this room, or his lordship's presence, save as his affianced wife."

"Should Lord Downmere have no other engagement, sir," said Ida, firmly, as the deep blush of outraged pride spread over her cheek and brow, "my morning is also disengaged; and since such is your will, I can pass it here as patiently, although perhaps not so pleasantly, as in my own apartment."

"My lord," said the merchant, struggling to subdue his irritation; "I am mortified beyond all expression that a child of mine should expose herself as Miss Trevanion has done; mortified and pained to find that my authority is thus set at naught; but I entreat you to believe that my plighted word *shall* not be forfeited. Prouder spirits than that of the young lady before you have been bent, and she shall learn ere long that a father's will is not to be braved with impunity. She may, as she insanely affects to believe, have given her heart to a beggar, but her hand must be my gift, and shall not follow it."

"Compose yourself, my good sir, compose yourself," said the peer, with an indulgent smile; "I am aware that young ladies are apt to be romantic, and to form magnificent ideas of 'love in a cottage;' but it is equally certain that on mature consideration they bring themselves to prefer a diamond tiara to a wreath of daisies, and to estimate the respectful attachment of a rational suitor beyond the wild and ephemeral passion of a mere boyish love."

Miss Trevanion started, and the blood burnt still more painfully upon her already crimsoned cheek.

"I can not," pursued the earl; "I really have not moral courage enough to say to your lovely and fascinating daughter, that I consent to resign her to a rival, for by so doing I should resign my own hopes of happiness; and the pertinacity of which she complains must sufficiently prove to her the value which I attach to her possession. You, at least, will not blame me for clinging to the last to the brightest dream of happiness in which I have ever indulged. The 'slight acquaintance,' upon which Miss Trevanion lays such stress as regards her own feelings, has been a period so full of hope and anxiety to myself, that it appears to have absorbed the best portion of my existence; and rather than forego an anticipation which has made that existence doubly dear to me, I am content still to wait, if such be her pleasure, until she does me more justice."

"I thank you, my lord, deeply and earnestly thank you for your forbearance," said Mr. Trevanion; and in reply to so much generosity, can only assure you that your patience shall not be too severely taxed."

"I rely upon your promise," said the earl, as he rose from the sofa upon which he had been seated, and bowed low to the lady, who acknowledged his parting courtesy in silence, "and the devotion of a life shall prove to your charming daughter that I am worthy of the prize for which I have so resolutely striven."

In another moment Ida was alone.

CHAPTER XV.

A DINNER PARTY.

Ida was alone with her own thoughts, and for awhile they were full of angry bitterness. Toward the earl they were compounded of contempt and disgust. "No, no, it is not to me that he has bowed his paltry pride," she murmured to herself; "it is not for me that he has condescended to submit to insult, and to smile upon inferences which he could not have mistaken. He seeks me for my wealth; he would enrich himself, and make me the victim of his selfish cupidity. And I am without a friend—flattered and fooled by the world, there does not beat one heart upon which I can lay down my weary head, and ask for rest.

"And yet I have dreamed such dreams of happiness—indulged such hopes of peace and of affection—peace!—affection!—what has a persecuted woman to do with blessings such as those. My estimate of life has been a false one, and now I begin to appreciate the frightful truth; perhaps I am wrong to struggle against my destiny—perhaps I should do well to give myself to this titled coward, who is just brave enough to make war upon the sacred feelings of a woman's heart—I should find my reward in the world, my recompense in its smooth wisdom. I should make a brilliant marriage—be fooled and flattered still—wear the shame of a perjured spirit proudly, and find in the crowded saloons of fashion, the home which I should have forfeited forever elsewhere. It may be that such a fate might preserve me from deeper and more fatal suffering—it may be; for in this case, I could live on without a fear or a hope; the one would be annihilated by the other; giving no love, I could never be subject to the pang of feeling it thrown back upon me, and the fire-flood of my passion indurated into lava, and crushing out my existence. And what if I become the wife of Sydney? Who shall tell me what may be my fate? What may be his? Poverty and Time—those are the gaunt and fearful adversaries with which I shall have to contend; and what will be their effect on him? It is easy to talk of tempests under a summer sky, and of wrecks beside a summer sea, but beneath the lightning flash, and on the roaring billows, we can alone estimate the extent of the evil. Should I marry Sydney, and become the bane of his existence, where, then, could I turn for help or comfort? and that I should do this were he to arouse the slumbering demon within me, I have a firm and fatal conviction. I can not deceive myself; to him in whom I trust, to whom I give myself, I must either be a blessing or a curse—every

thing, or worse, far worse than nothing. A firm and faithful friend, or a bitter and unrelenting enemy. And knowing this, should I not do well and bravely to sacrifice my own happiness at once—to resist the pleadings of my own heart—and to refuse to become his wife? Could I not drown my own wretchedness and isolation in what the world calls pleasure—silence the importunities of my own rebellious spirit in the turmoil of dissipation, and console myself with the reflection that I was the only sufferer? Surely there would be heroism in this! But have I strength for such a sacrifice? Can I consent to make it, while one hope is left that Sydney's love might prove as lasting as my own? No; it is vain to strive against myself: and if I can not read the future I must be content to risk its fruits. This womanish weakness is unworthy of me; I must trust, and abide by the issue of my faith. I can not live loveless and alone, devouring my own heart, and feeling that I have been the passive tool of avarice and ambition. My path is plain before me, and rugged as it now is, it may lead to happiness at last."

It is a trite but true remark, that when sorrow or even death is in a house, still the routine of domestic duties must be pursued, and in the former case, society still maintains its claim. Thus it was on the present occasion; with one absorbing subject of interest pressing heavily upon her heart and mind, Miss Trevanion found herself compelled to obey the suggestion of her maid, by whom she was reminded that it was time to prepare herself to receive the guests who were, as she had in her excitement totally forgotten, expected that day at dinner. Every one has experienced at some moment of his or her life, the weariness of such an appeal to the patience; and this simple circumstance tended still further to reconcile our heroine to the prospect of the 'mere competence' which must, at least, have a tendency to relieve her from sacrifices so irksome during her married life.

"Now," she mused, "I do not even belong to myself; the chains of the world are round me; and though they may have hitherto appeared to be wreathed with flowers, the illusion is past, and I feel the galling of their iron links."

Alas! wreathe them as we may, none of us escape the pressure to our dying hour; the careless may wear them loosely, but even they can never throw them off. We have visions of moral freedom in the future—we delude ourselves day by day with the hope that some change of scene or circumstance may emancipate us—but is it ever realized?

Several of the guests had already arrived when Miss Trevanion descended to the drawing-room. There were three or four steady men of demure age—the personal friends, or rather associates of her father, for the self-sufficient merchant made no friends in the strict acceptance of the term; a titled dowager or two belonging to the *clique* of Lady Mary Brooklands; middle-aged women, who fully appreciate the merits of whist and East India Madeira, and who were not yet totally insensible to the hope of repairing their widowhood by a second marriage, where their rank might prove an equivalent to the wealth of some ambitious commoner.

And perhaps it was a relief to Ida that the party was thus constituted—although in the lightness of her heart she had been accustomed to regard such assemblages as a wearisome infliction—for thus there was little demand upon her own exertions; she had but to listen and to endure; and as she looked very lovely while doing so, her silence was unnoticed amid the animated chatter of the dowagers, the sententious declamation of the politicians, and the languid ejaculations of her mother.

One circumstance only tended to annoy and discompose her, and that one was the extraordinarily-significant glances which were turned on her from time to time, the little smiling nods, and patronizing smiles of the ladies, and the less demonstrative but still equally peculiar looks of the gentlemen. She appeared to herself to have suddenly become the object of some occult interest to every one about her; nor did she fail to remark that the usually expressionless face of her mother exhibited a self-gratulating complacency which it had never before worn. Lady Mary alone was calm and stately as usual, and appeared totally unconscious of any extraneous cause of excitement.

Suddenly, however, the thoughts of Ida were diverted into a fresh channel by the mention of a name which she was aware could never be uttered in the presence of her father without exciting an unpleasant emotion.

"By the by, Trevanion," said Mr. Plumbtree, a county member who was engaged with his host in some important commercial speculations; "are you aware that your uncle is in town? I met him yesterday; and I need scarcely tell you that his first subject was that unlucky farm that forms so ugly an angle into his estate, and which he is so constantly urging me to sell, although I have decidedly refused to part with it for the last ten years. It seems that Lady Trevanion has set her heart upon converting it into a dress-dairy, where she may skim her cream out of glass and porcelain, and play Marie Antoinette at Trianon on a small scale."

"I was *not* aware that Sir Jasper Trevanion was in town;" was the cold reply; "for, as we hold no communication whatever, I am necessarily ignorant of his movements."

"I wish that your difference, be it what it may, could be adjusted;" said the guest; "and I have reason to suspect that the baronet would gladly meet you half-way. What say you? Will you allow me to negotiate between you?"

"I believe that both parties are well satisfied with things as they are;" was the discouraging rejoinder.

"I must be allowed to differ from you;" persisted Mr. Plumbtree; "for, to my surprise, your stately kinsman made many inquiries concerning yourself and your family, which convinced me that he considered the feuds to have endured long enough; while, to be candid with you, the present moment seems a very propitious one for you to tender or receive the olive branch—the 'coming event' being calculated to ensure you high ground."

As Miss Trevanion raised her eyes to her father in some anxiety to learn the spirit in which he would receive the suggestion, she saw

his own fixed upon herself with an uneasy expression which startled her; nor were his next words more intelligible than his look.

"It is extremely probable;" he said, dryly; "that the baronet and his son may be more deeply interested in the event to which you allude than they anticipate. I must decline, however, until it has actually taken place, all overtures to a reconciliation, which, had Sir Jasper been enabled years ago to foresee the future, would never have been necessary. I fully appreciate the kindness of your motive, my dear sir, but we will, if you please, dismiss a subject which can not prove otherwise than uninteresting to the friends by whom we are surrounded."

"Is Lady Trevanion also in town?" eagerly inquired his wife, heedless of the desire which he had expressed that so ungracious a theme should not be thus publicly pursued.

"Yes, madam, both Lady Trevanion and her son; and a very fine and promising young man he is. We are quite proud of him in the county, I assure you, where he is, as you may believe, the object of more than one long-sighted speculation."

"How delightful for his mother;" whined out the weak hostess with a very audible sigh; "I have often regretted that I never had a son."

"*Your* regrets are uncalled for, my dear madam;" said Sir Giles Euston who sat near her; "when we look across the table—you could not have anticipated perfection in both instances."

"Besides which," followed up a jeweled matron with an encouraging smile to Ida, who became more and more perplexed as the conversation proceeded; "even Mrs. Trevanion, with her usual good sense and judgment, must perceive at once that this is no moment to encourage such a feeling. Few mothers, I should imagine, have greater reason to be both proud and gratified than herself."

"A fact of which my friend Mrs. Trevanion is fully aware, I can assure you, my dear Lady Somers;" said the stately Lady Mary with a deprecatory smile; "but I must really entreat your forbearance for Ida, who is, I can see, uneasy under this avalanche of flattery."

"It is its tone rather than its tenor, by which I am discomposed;" said the young lady smiling in her turn, but with a very different expression; "I am at a loss to understand the mysterious import of the covert congratulations of which I am evidently the object to-day; although I can not but feel deeply touched that such should be lavished on me at the very moment when they were least anticipated."

"How prettily she keeps her secret;" whispered Sir Giles to his supine neighbor, who was about to utter one of her inane and inopportune replies, when her voice was drowned beneath that of Lady Mary, who hastened to inquire with well simulated curiosity of Mr. Plumbtree, "if Lady Trevanion had come to town for the birthday."

"I do not pretend to say that such was the precise errand;" was his reply; "but I understand that it is at all events her intention. Ladies, as you must be aware, madam, who possess a Golconda in their jewel-cases are not sorry to have so brilliant an opportunity of displaying their treasures; and Sir Jasper certainly mentioned that both he and his wife had determined to attend the drawing-room."

"That will be charming!" exclaimed the hostess, thoroughly roused out of her apathy; "Do you hear, Ida? You will at last see your grand-aunt—for Ida is also to be at the Drawing-room, Sir Giles; and—"

"Mrs. Trevanion, will you be good enough to send Lady Somers some pine?"—broke in the merchant in a tone by which she was at once silenced, and which rendered her hand so unsteady that she gratefully accepted the proffered aid of the officious Sir Giles, who hastened to relieve her from the duty which thus suddenly devolved upon her; while, as if warned that she had in some way or other, for which she could not account, excited the displeasure of her husband, the cowed and cowering woman, after casting one timid glance of inquiry toward the family friend, who replied by a gracious gesture of assent, bowed silently to Lady Somers, and rose to leave the table.

Her example was immediately followed; and in a few moments the ladies of the party were assembled in the drawing-room, cosily established upon sofas and lounges, to spend over coffee and gossip the hour which must intervene before the re-appearance of their lords. This was an interval which Mrs. Trevanion habitually passed, if not quite in sleep, at least in silence; so little was expected from her that she had no motive for exertion; and accordingly, she had no sooner plunged into the depths of her cushions, leaving her daughter and Lady Mary to do the honors of the house, than she sank into total eclipse, to the great relief of the latter, who tolerated with difficulty the harmless but wearisome vanities of the woman, whom she had supplanted in all her privileges alike of hostess, wife, and mother.

"You will, no doubt, chaperon Miss Trevanion to court as usual, Lady Mary;" observed Mrs. Darlington with a sarcastic smile, as she poised the gold spoon upon the surface of her coffee-cup; "it must really be a great fatigue to you to be so persevering in your attendance! Once a year the thing is bearable enough at our age; essential in fact to our position in society; but, like all other duties, it degenerates into a bore from frequent recurrence; and *entre nous*, unless one has a place in the household, I am inclined to think that—"

"It is a heavy expense; and so it is, no doubt;" interposed Lady Somers, as she scattered the chips of a wafer which she had been steeping in her Mocha over the rich carpet; "but, fortunately for Miss Trevanion, expense is no consideration with her; and it is only women situated as I was, and as you are, the wives of younger sons, whose bills are inconveniently increased by these court-ceremonies; but even were it otherwise, our fair friend could scarcely remain absent from the birthday, situated as she is at this moment."

"May I venture to inquire why my attendance is so essential on this particular occasion, Lady Somers?" inquired the young lady; "and what peculiarity there is in my present position which appears to enfore it?"

"Upon my honor, my dear Miss Trevanion,

you do indeed bear your faculties meekly," said her interlocutor gayly; "it is not every young lady on the eve of marriage with a peer of the realm who would ask such a question."

"I do not understand you, madam," was the cold rejoinder.

"Come, come, you may trust us, my dear," persisted the lady, significantly; "we are in the secret; and I can assure you that both Mrs. Darlington and myself sincerely rejoice in your good fortune, and congratulate both Lady Mary and your father upon the successful issue of all their care; you will do them honor, my dear Miss Trevanion, and make a charming addition to the peerage. It is, indeed, quite a triumph, both for yourself and your family, and will be a sad blow to poor dear Lady Wallscourt, who, after all her scheming, has just been compelled, to her extreme mortification, to marry her three daughters to commoners, and yet they were really nice girls, very nice girls, and even tolerably good-looking; but then they had no money; and really society is now in such a factitious state that men of all stations look for fortune with their wives, especially men of rank, who are quite aware of the value of what they have to bestow."

"You labor under some strange mistake as regards myself, madam," said Ida, quietly; "as I do not anticipate becoming the recipient of the honor to which you allude."

"Now don't be obstinate, Ida;" drawled her mother, suddenly leaning forward in her chair; "Lady Somers knows that you are to marry Lord Downmere. Your father mentioned that it was all settled, before you came into the drawing-room, to-night."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Miss Trevanion, indignantly.

"Quite the contrary, my love," laughed Mrs. Darlington; "we have been assured that it is an *affaire finie*, and very well finished too, take my word for it. You see papas *will* betray secrets; it is their privilege; so do not look so terribly aggrieved, but receive our congratulations with a good grace."

"Did my father—did Mr. Trevanion, really state this to be the case?" asked the agitated girl, as her proud eye flashed, and her cheek crimsoned.

"Yes, yes; you are fairly committed;" said Lady Somers; "and will make your courtesy to her majesty as a bride-elect."

"I think that she ought to wear white and pearls; that is my opinion," droned Mrs. Trevanion; "if they wish to know it."

No answer was vouchsafed by any of the party, but every eye was riveted upon Ida, who stood with parted lips and heaving bosom, alternately looking from one to the other. She was stung to the very heart, smitten to the depths of her spirit; she could not misunderstand the ungenerous advantage which had been taken of her; she felt that she was in the toils; but her whole nature rose in rebellion against the moral wrong of which her father had been guilty; the sacredness of her affections had been violated, and a feeling of resentment arose within her which at once restored her to composure.

From that moment she listened like one who had no interest in the subject under discussion. She scorned to utter a disclaimer—what to her, with her bruised and wounded pride, was the trifling gossipry of a couple of idle women—straws floating upon the current; while the wound inflicted by her father sank down into the deep waters of her soul, and rested there.

"The last tie is dissolved which bound us;" she murmured to herself as she retired for the night; "every human being, breathing the air of heaven, is gifted with the privilege of free will where the happiness of a whole existence is at stake. Mine has been denied to me, I have been degraded into a subject of idle twaddle and sarcastic gossip. Be it so. Henceforward it must be *ruse* for *ruse*."

CHAPTER XVI.

"AN EVENT IN HIGH LIFE, ETC."

When the father and daughter met on the morrow, their meeting was cold and constrained, and neither alluded to the subject by which they were severally engrossed; Mrs. Trevanion, as was her habit after receiving company, breakfasted in her dressing-room, considering it incumbent upon her to be overcome by fatigue; the merchant buried himself in the columns of the *Times*, and Lady Mary skimmed the pages of the *Morning Post*. The meal was a dreary one; and at its close Mr. Trevanion ceremoniously presented to his daughter a folded paper which was lying beside him, with the intimation that he desired to give a ball on the evening of the birthday, and that she would find in that list the names of the guests whom he personally desired to invite, leaving the necessary additions to the discretion of Lady Mary Brooklands and herself.

"You will see, Miss Trevanion," he said, coldly; "that the one who heads the list is that of the Earl of Downmere; you will know who should, and who should not be invited to meet his lordship; and I need scarcely tell you for your guidance that you are *committed*."

"To what, sir?" inquired Ida, with a kindling cheek.

"To the world, and to your own dignity and propriety of feeling. By sunset this evening, thanks to a knot of marvel-loving and marvel-disseminating women, all London will be aware that you are pledged to the earl, and that this ball is given in honor of your betrothal. You will therefore act accordingly. Not a word, if you please; the subject has been already sufficiently discussed between us, and I beg to be spared all further verbiage upon a topic which has become distasteful to me. Will you do me the favor to send out the cards by to-morrow night?"

"Certainly," was the calm reply.

"Do not, Lady Mary, if you please, exceed three hundred;" pursued the merchant; "I need not say that, with one solitary exception, all your friends will be as ever, both welcome and acceptable. I will make the necessary arrangements with Gunter; and perhaps you will oblige me by issuing your own orders

o Taplow. I am sorry to tax your kindness o heavily, but I am selfish enough to be unvilling to forego the advantage of your taste nd experience."

"I should like at least to understand the xtent of your intentions, my dear sir," said he lady.

"Your judgment will be their best limit, nadam;" was the courteous reply, I would equest of you to bear in mind the *intention* f the festival, and to render it worthy of its otive."

I will endeavor to fulfill your wishes to the tter;" smiled the family friend, careless that r nearest relative was officially excluded om the contemplated fête; as with a stately ow, Mr. Trevanion bade her 'good morning,' id stepped into his carriage.

"Surely, my dear Ida, you are not about to andon me with this herculean task upon my nds!" exclaimed Lady Mary, as her young mpanion was about to leave the room.

"I must beg to be excused all participation your labor;" said Miss Trevanion, with a tter smile; "Simmonds shall furnish you th the visiting-book, from which I will direct n to erase the name of Mr. Sydney Elphinone, and you will then have no difficulty save ut of selection."

"Do you wish to visit upon me the annoyce caused by your father?" asked the lady, precatingly.

"By no means; but I disclaim all further ht of interference under this roof."

"Nay, nay; is not such a disclaimer either mature or childish?"

"I think not."

"Upon what then do you base it?"

"Upon the very simple fact that the exclun of the individual who would have been t most welcome to myself, renders the whole air indifferent to me."

Remember, Ida, that I might equally have dined the task on the pretext that my own new was put *hors-de-combat*."

"You might, madam; but you did not."

As a matter of course! I can have no right tdictate to Mr. Trevanion what guests he sl receive under his own roof."

Certainly not; nor have I on my part attepted to do so; but I may at least exert my unbuted privilege of resenting the insult ofred to one who is excluded."

I do really wish, my dear girl, that I could ince you to listen to reason. Much as you rent your father's opposition to your wishes," sa Lady Mary; "I can assure you that he is tuated only by a desire to insure your hiness."

"Did you always think so, madam?" asked hcompanion, coldly.

"Yes, certainly—that is, after I found—"

That your nephew in becoming the husbd of Ida Trevanion would not secure the hd of Mr. Trevanion's heiress. Oh, trust mdmadam, we do not deceive each other. Bu we need not waste words upon this subjec—my father is right; it has indeed been sufficiently discussed; let us dismiss it, and ead perform our promise. Invite your own guts—I will take care that the cards shall be ly delivered; and, if it should chance by accident that my poor mother should possess some unsuspected friend whom it might pleasure her to see at her side among the crowd by which she will be overlooked, perhaps you will do me the favor to insert that name where, in my selfishness, I might have sought to inscribe another."

Before Lady Mary could reply, Miss Trevanion had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LETTER.

IDA did not, as on former occasions, retreat to her room to give way to feelings of doubt and wretchedness. The first, after the declaration made by her father, was at an end; and from the last she steadily resolved to escape through her own agency. An emotion of indignant resentment swelled at her heart; she saw her affections and free-will set at naught, and her name compromised without hesitation or apology; and a proud consciousness of her power over her future destiny invested her with a strength to which, despite her bold seeming, she had not previously attained. She walked composedly to the hall-table, effaced the name of Mr. Elphinstone from the visiting-book, and desired a servant to carry it without delay to the breakfast-room, after which she proceeded to her own apartment to meditate upon her future line of conduct. Convinced as she was of the sincerity of Elphinstone's affection, it irked her proud nature to condescend, after her resolute refusal to quit her father's roof with him as a fugitive, to volunteer even under the present circumstances a retractation of her denial. She painfully felt that so extreme a step could be rendered endurable to her own sense of delicacy and self-respect only by the earnest pleadings of the man for whom she was about to sacrifice all her long-cherished dreams of prosperity and filial duty; and although while smarting under the first sting of wounded pride, she had resolved to emancipate herself at once by uniting her fate with that of Mr. Elphinstone, she had no sooner seated herself at her desk than the difficulty of declaring her determination rushed upon her in its full force, and dyed her cheek and brow with crimson. A thousand possibilities swept across her imagination, and almost maddened her. What if his prudence, and the representations of his calculating relatives, should have produced a change in his sentiments—what would then be her position? Would she not be an object of scorn to the world, and degraded forever in her own eyes? The thought was a bitter one; she flung down her pen: she felt as though she had not courage to brave such a contingency; and she was still wavering between love and pride, when Mademoiselle Seraphine entered the room, and with a significant smile laid a note beside her, saying, as she did so:

"I trust that madame will not be displeased, but I have promised to convey an answer to monsieur."

"From whom did you receive this?" inquired Miss Trevanion, who had instantly recognized the handwriting of her lover.

"From a gentleman who is now waiting in his boat upon the river;" was the reply of the soubrette; "I had gone down to the hermitage for some clematis for the *jardinière* of madame; of course I asked no questions—*je suis trop discrète*, although I comprehended at once that he was a messenger from milord."

"I will return an answer an hour hence, mademoiselle," said her mistress; "I presume that the gentleman, be he who he may, is not in haste."

"He said that he would wait madame's pleasure."

"Such being the case, you had better complete the task upon which you are engaged; I will summon you when my letter is written, should it be necessary to send a reply," said Ida, controling her agitation; "although it appears to me a very extraordinary method of communication, for which I can only account by supposing, that the circumstance of seeing you upon the spot must have induced the bearer of the note before me to spare himself the trouble of landing, and coming up to the house."

"*Peut-être;*" said the soubrette with a peculiar accent.

"What can you possibly mean by that very significant 'perhaps,' mademoiselle?" demanded Miss Trevanion, haughtily. "Do you mean to infer that you suspect me of being engaged in a clandestine correspondence?"

"I am sorry to have displeased madame," replied the wily French woman with well-acted humility; "but as I learned from the *maitre-d'hôtel* that monsieur had desired that all letters addressed to madame should be delivered only to himself, and that two had already been received which had not been given to me to carry to madame, I thought that perhaps milord—"

"Enough, enough, mademoiselle," said her mistress, with difficulty repressing her indignation at this new outrage. "Be good enough to form no conjectures which may, and in all probability must, turn out to be erroneous. Do as I have directed, and when I again require your presence I will summon you."

As the soubrette disappeared, Ida tore open the letter.

"What am I to understand?" wrote Mr. Elphinstone; "why have you so suddenly and so cruelly discarded me? Oh, Ida, beloved of my soul, you little know the heart which you are torturing. Not one word in reply to my letters—no token of your continued affection to sustain me during the bitter interval of suspense and trial to which you have yourself condemned me. How have I deserved this? Is not your love the very principle of my existence? and will you not, by assuring me of its continuance, enable me to bear our painful separation? Oh, did you only know—could you only suspect—all that I endure, surely you would not sacrifice me to the vain prejudices of the world which you have been taught to worship, but which can never render even to you the homage of a true and loyal heart like that which you are so coldly casting from you. Once more I ask—can you, and will you resign it for my sake? Have you sufficient faith in my honor and in my affection to trust your destiny in my hands? Forgive me for thus urging you, but I am maddened by doubts and fears, which not even the consciousness of your pure and truthful nature suffices to dispel. Banished from your presence—deprived of the solace of feasting my eyes upon the characters traced by your hand, life itself has become odious to me. It will cost me a severe effort to approach your father's house like a criminal dreading detection; to skulk about his premises, and to bribe one of his menials—but I have resolved to do even this, much as it revolts my sense of right, in order to assure myself that this appeal at least will reach you. Do not refuse me a reply—let me know my fate, whatever you have decreed. It is for you to decide whether we are to be separated forever, with that bitter gulf, the world, between us; or if, despising the vain gauds of that same hollow world, you will make a home of peace and love in my affection.

SYDNEY."

There was no hesitation now in the demeanor of Miss Trevanion; with a firm and rapid hand she traced line after line, until she had revealed to her expectant lover every circumstance which had occurred since their last meeting, and assured him of the full and perfect confidence with which she should unite her destiny to his. She told him, too, her projects for the future, and bade him trust to her firmness for their accomplishment. "Fear not that I shall hesitate or quail before the difficulties which may present themselves," she said, in conclusion; "the bad faith and treachery of those by whom I am surrounded exonerate me in my own eyes. I shall go to you poor alike in wealth and friends, but the riches of your love will more than compensate for all other privations. But remember, Sydney, how solemnly you have sworn that the love, which when once I shall have become your wife, will absorb my whole being, shall never fail me—remember how solemnly I have on my part assured *you* that misery and ruin beyond you wildest fears would, and must be, the result of your falsehood; and if you feel the faith in the stability of your affection which I am willing to place in it, wait undoubtingly until the moment I shall have appointed for our final meeting, and I will become yours forever."

"Deliver this letter to the person who awaits it, mademoiselle," she said, as the Frenchwoman appeared in obedience to her summons. "I have taken care that you shall not be subjected to the same trouble for the future; and am sorry to have detained the messenger so long on this occasion."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE JEWEL CASKET.

ALTHOUGH Mr. Trevanion had, as we have shown, coldly discouraged all allusion to his estranged relatives when the subject of a re-

onciliation was mooted by the warm-hearted Mr. Plumbtree, yet the knowledge that his uncle was not only in town, but that he had acknowledged himself interested in the welfare of those of whom he had during so many years affected to have forgotten the existence, flattered his self-love, and occupied his thoughts. He was well aware that had he been worsted in his struggle with the world, neither Sir Jasper, nor his haughty wife, would have deigned to have made a single inquiry into his fate; and it was consequently with a feeling of natural and pardonable exultation that he dwelt upon the social advantages by which he was surrounded, and remembered that he owed them all to his own indomitable energy and perseverance.

"Ay," he murmured to himself, with a proud smile; "he has learned, at last, that the boy whom he thrust forth, and to whom he would fain have denied even the name which was his birthright, no longer needs the support that he so ruthlessly withheld: he has heard too, as it would seem, that I have a daughter, whose hand is sought by some of the proudest of the land; and, who knows? he may perhaps covet it for his son—for the boy who stands between me and the fond hopes which I once indulged; but he has still to learn that I have a new triumph in store, and it is now his turn to feel the pang of disappointment; or it may be that long ere this, the gossip of the town has taught him that the child of the neglected Hubert Trevanion is about to become a peeress! Well may he seek for his *parvenue* wife the honor of such an alliance; but let him not imagine that I have either forgotten or forgiven the wrong which I experienced at her hands. It rankles yet, and it shall be avenged. It is well that they are here; just so would I that it should be. As the betrothed bride of an earl, Ida will excite even more than her usual meed of admiration at court, and it is there that they will meet for the first time. Accident has favored me in this, at least; and the obscure country dame will be taught to feel her insignificance beside the fashion and favor of my high-bred daughter."

Carried away by his soaring fancies, Mr. Trevanion lost sight for a time of the difficulties which yet presented themselves to his darling project in the resolute attitude assumed by the young lady herself; satisfied that by giving a premature publicity to Lord Downinere's addresses, he should compel his daughter to obedience, and cause her to sacrifice her affections to her regard for the opinion of the world, he almost succeeded in divesting himself of all anxiety upon the subject. He had carefully intercepted the letters of Elphinstone, and he trusted that the mere suspicion of his neglect would excite her indignation, and mold her to his own will. Of any further interference on the part of Lady Mary Brooklands he had no fear, as he had not been for so many years domesticated with that very self-seeking individual without appreciating at their just value the qualities of her heart and mind. That she would have encouraged by every means in her power a marriage between her needy nephew and his heiress, he well knew; but he was also quite aware that the threat which he had held out of discarding Ida forever in the event of disobedience, had worked a decided change in her ladyship's sentiments and views. Thus, then, he believed himself secure; and, disregarding the undisguised repugnance of Ida, he insisted that her preparations for the birthday presentation should be of the most costly and expensive kind.

Hitherto, guided by her own judicious and unerring taste, Miss Trevanion had on such occasions studiously avoided all affectation of display; nor had her father sought to change her resolution, although his pride would not permit him to acquiesce in her reasons for a simplicity of attire, which he considered misplaced; on this occasion, however, he forbade all opposition; and, heedless of her entreaties, he sternly commanded that his will should be obeyed.

Sick at heart, and burdened by a painful consciousness of the bitter disappointment which she was about to inflict upon his pride, Ida was dragged by her officious chaperone from one emporium of vanity to another, and daily compelled to listen for hours to discussions in which, although she was herself their object, she could not even affect an interest; and thus the time wore wearily on until the day drew near which was to be the turning-point of her whole after-existence.

The house was full of upholsterers and florists preparing for the fête, and scarcely an apartment remained uninvaded; even in her own room the wretched girl could with difficulty succeed in securing herself from intrusion; and yet what fearful need she had of solitude! As she gazed wildly about her, her breath came quick and short, and the hot blood throbbed like a lava-tide in her aching temples. Scattered over the chairs and sofas lay the rich satins and tissues which seemed to mock at her misery, and to deepen the sinfulness of the act to which she had pledged herself. At times she clinched her hands fiercely together, as though she would have clutched and rent them; and at others the large tears coursed slow and cold down her pallid cheeks, and a faintness as of death appeared to paralyze her spirit, as she sat with her gaze riveted upon the ground, buried in her own miserable thoughts. Yet still she did not waver; her heart was firm even while she acknowledged to herself that the pang was a more bitter one than she had feared; "My mother—my poor mother!" was the voiceless cry of that smitten heart; "who will she have to love her when I am gone?" Could she have detected one look of affection, one symptom of sympathy on the stern countenance of her father, as pale and sad she met him day by day when the family assembled at their hurried meals, she felt that she could have flung herself on her knees before him, and once more urge him not to drive her to an act of desperation unworthy of herself; but Mr. Trevanion continued calm and cold, and vouchsafed no comment on her altered appearance.

The conversation at table turned wholly on the arrangements for the ball, and was inter-

spersed with the querulous complaints of her mother, whose comfort had been invaded, and whose suggestions had been treated with disregard. Like all weak people, Mrs. Trevanion visited her annoyance upon those whom she could blame without fear of reprisal; and thus, not daring to reproach either her husband or Lady Mary, she poured forth the diluted vials of her wrath upon her daughter, to whom she found it expedient to attribute her privations and mortification. Ida, who had every thing her own way, might have contrived to leave her morning-room undisturbed, but Ida had been spoiled by overindulgence, and thought only of her own convenience. Ida had no consideration for her, and was so engrossed by her anticipated pleasures that she quite overlooked the fact that her mother had some right to consideration and respect; but perhaps she was wrong to expect it under the circumstances, when the head of Ida was half-turned by the prospect before her.

Those only who have been subjected to such an ordeal as this, when their hearts were bursting with a hidden grief, can appreciate the feelings with which her victim listened to her senseless upbraidings, and sought to appease her anger; how truly could she have assured her that her petty sorrows, irksome as they might be to bear, were but as atoms beside the one great misery by which she was herself borne down; but her lips were sealed, and when she could have cried aloud for mercy, even from the very depths of her spirit, she bowed her head, and suffered in silence.

At length the eventful day arrived, and great was the exultation of Mademoiselle Seraphine when, on presenting herself to dress her young lady for court, she placed upon the toilet a casket which had just arrived as an offering from the Earle of Downmere, and which contained a magnificent *parure* of opals and pearls.

"*Mais c'est vraiment superbe!*" she exclaimed, holding the costly gems against the light, "*Madame sera ravissante! En voilà pour au moins mille livres—et d'un goût!—d'un goût!*"

Ida shuddered, and turned away. "Arrange my hair as simply as circumstances will permit," she said, languidly; "I shall be weighed down by finery, which your good taste must subdue as far as may be possible. That tinsel trumpery upon my dress annoys me; remove it, mademoiselle, and replace it by something less obtrusive."

"*Mais, madame—*"

"You will oblige me by obeying my directions," interposed Miss Trevanion, in a tone of decision which her attendant well knew that it was vain to dispute.

"Madame must then choose between white roses and pomegranate blossoms," was the sullen reply; "it will be impossible to loop this silver blonde with any other color."

"You are right," said Ida with a faint smile, "the white roses are precisely suited to the occasion."

"But madame will of course permit me to arrange this *guirlande* in her hair," persisted the *femme-de-chambre*, as she pointed to a diadem contained in the jewel-case of the earl, "to match the ornaments upon her robe?"

"I shall not wear them," was the indifferent reply, as Miss Trevanion closed the casket and thrust it from her; "my mother has been kind enough to offer me the loan of her diamonds, and I could not pay her so poor a compliment as to appear in any others."

"*A la bonne heure!*" ejaculated the Frenchwoman, whose personal vanity was involved in the appearance of her mistress; and without further opposition, the toilet of the young lady was completed.

And very lovely were the face and figure reflected in the cheval glass, when the task of the accomplished Mademoiselle Seraphine was brought to a close. It is true that the cheek of Ida was very pale, and her whole appearance languid and subdued, but this circumstance rather tended to enhance than to diminish the peculiar style of her beauty. With her dark hair parted smoothly across her brow, circtured by a bandeau of brilliants, from which the white plumes fell back like a shower of mist; the girdle of her costly robe fastened by a single diamond of great size and price, and her snowy train looped by hedge-roses, she was indeed the very perfection of queen-like loveliness; and for a moment even her voluble attendant gazed upon her in silent admiration.

"*Sont-elles belles, ces Anglaises?*" was her mental ejaculation, as she handed to her mistress her gloves and bouquet on the announcement of the carriage; when Miss Trevanion proceeded to the apartment of her mother, as was her usual custom, to give and receive a parting kiss.

"Well, Ida," exclaimed Mrs. Trevanion with unusual animation, as she saw her approach; "You are come at last to show me Lord Downmere's present. How do the opals suit your dress? But, bless me, child, you have not put them on! And you have ruined both your skirt and train by removing the silver ribbons. What can you mean by wasting so much money? And why did you not wear your opals?"

"Because, mother," replied the young lady with a sad smile, "I felt happier in these jewels which belong to you."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Trevanion, querulously, "I wanted to see what his lordship had sent to you, and you seem to take a pleasure in disappointing me."

"So far from it," was the rejoinder of Ida, as she pressed her lips upon the brow of her mother, "that you have only to desire Seraphine to bring them to you, when you can inspect them at your leisure. Indeed, you will do me a favor if you will allow me to leave them in your custody."

"Well, then, ring the bell, and give your orders, only let me see them at once," was the impatient reply, "and now go, for you must be keeping Lady Mary waiting."

With a weary sigh, Miss Trevanion obeyed. No kind wish, no exulting assurance from her mother's lips went with her; no comment had been elicited by her heavy eye and pallid cheek; no return of her endearment had been offered; and as she descended the staircase which was already garlanded with flowers, and starred with minute lampions in preparation for the festival of the night, her heart swelled almost to bursting, and it was only by a violent effor

that she drove back the tears which fain would have forced a passage.

"Not one memory of affection to bear away with me;" she murmured to herself; "not one! But perhaps it is better so; I shall not break one loving heart; I shall not betray one trusting spirit. A few glittering baubles will suffice to supply my place—I shall be soon discarded and forgotten!"

And the radiant being who felt and reflected thus, was decked in diamonds and wreathed with roses!

In the hall, Miss Trevanion encountered her chaperone, stately in purple velvet and antique point. As her beautiful charge approached her, Lady Mary gave one rapid glance over her person, by which she instantly detected the failure of all her laborious arrangements, but she vouchsafed no remark upon the subject; and ere long the well-appointed equipage with its occupants whirled through the gates upon its courtly errand.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BIRTHDAY.

Mr. Trevanion had calculated correctly. The intelligence of his daughter's betrothal to Lord Downmere had circulated throughout all the circles likely to take an interest in the event; and great, consequently, was the curiosity excited by her appearance. As is usual in cases of the kind there were many who pitied her, or affected to do so, for her folly in obviously sacrificing her happiness to rank; while there were not wanting others who laughed at the short-sightedness of the old earl, and prophesied for him a future little flattering to either party.

"A wretched *mésalliance*, to say the least of it;" sneered a dowager duchess with three unmarried daughters; "the girl was well enough as an acquaintance, although it can not be denied that Lady Mary Brooklands has overacted her part by thrusting her into the society where one has met her; but for a man of Lord Downmere's station to *marry* her is really too bad. This leveling system is hateful, and I quite expect that if it is not soon put a stop to, we shall have our sons looking for wives among our dairy-maids."

"My dear duchess;" said a gaunt and titled spinster, with the blood of the Bruce in her swollen veins; "I am glad to hear you so hotly denounce these frightful innovations. I have always discountenanced them, and I always shall."

"But you will at least admit, Lady Margaret," interposed a young guardsman, upon whose arm she leant; "that the bride elect is very beautiful."

"I will admit nothing of the kind, Captain Flavering; said his companion, tartly; "she is as pale as a corpse."

"And her diamonds!" exclaimed the duchess in an accent of affected disgust; "can you imagine such presumption! She plays the peeress a little prematurely but I suppose they are intended, like the sign before a way-side inn, to give notice of her quality."

"Do not quarrel with her diamonds;" laughed Sir Marmaduke Pennefather, who was supposed to be paying his court to one of the three rather mature Ladies Oglander, and who was, consequently, a privileged person; "let her air them while she can, for before long, if I am not greatly mistaken, they will help to cancel one of the long standing and inconvenient 'obligations' of her noble spouse."

"Oh, is it so?" said her grace, evidently relieved by the inference. "I was not aware that the poor old earl was so deeply involved, I see—I see; well, perhaps he might have done worse under the circumstances. Time will show."

"I wonder," said Lady Margaret Bruce, "if her Majesty has heard of the intended marriage, and if so, whether she will condescend to congratulate her. I sincerely hope not, for such a demonstration on the part of royalty would be a dangerous sanction to these unequal, and I must say, unnatural marriages."

"Her father is well connected, you must remember;" again broke in Sir Marmaduke; "the Trevanions are of a good old family, and Mr. Trevanion's mother was the daughter of an Irish earl."

"The man himself is in trade," said the duchess, disdainfully, as she drew her train closer over her arm; "and I shall always be of opinion that such people have no business *here*."

"Your grace must remember that a very high authority declared us to be 'a nation of shopkeepers,'" gayly remarked the baronet.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the Scotch spinster, shrugging her thin shoulders; "does her father really keep a shop?"

Sir Marmaduke laughed, and brushed away a grain of snuff from his embroidered waistcoat, as he replied: "*Il y a boutique et boutique*, my dear madam, and I really must beg that I may not be quoted as your authority for so uncomfortable a blunder. I know nothing of Mr. Trevanion save by report, and I confess that no rumor has yet reached me of the shop."

"All this is very ridiculous," said the duchess, impatiently; "and I do not know why we should waste so many words upon so insignificant a subject; all that I regret in the business is the fact that as Lord Downmere is an old acquaintance of the duke's, and that their estates lie in the same county, I shall be in some sort compelled to be civil to this *parvenue* peeress, which will, I fear, be a very up-hill and ungracious task."

While this conversation, of which she was the unconscious subject, was progressing in the great saloon, Miss Trevanion had passed into the royal presence, and made her courtesy to the sovereign, by whom her reverence was acknowledged by a silent but gracious smile, and where her extraordinary beauty and graceful self-possession had compelled the admiration even of those to whom she was an object of covert envy or of assumed contempt.

As she re-appeared in the other drawing-room, leaning on the arm of Lady Mary Brooklands, the first person by whom she was approached was Mr. Plumbtree, at whose side stood a tall, and stern, but noble-looking man,

somewhat advanced in years, who bore, as she instantly remarked, a strong likeness to her father. There was the same cold and keen expression in the eye, the same rigidity about the lips, and above all, the same lowering expression of the brow; and her heart beat quicker as a suspicion crossed her mind that she now looked for the first time upon the long-estranged relative of whom she had heard so much.

"My dear young friend," said Mr. Plumbtree, still holding her hand after the first greetings were over, "this is a pleasant moment for me, a very pleasant moment, as I have now the opportunity of making you known to your uncle—or great-uncle, I should rather say—Sir Jasper Trevanion, who is anxious, like the rest of us, to offer to you our greetings and congratulations. I may transfer this little hand to him, may I not?"

"As freely as I gladly yield it;" smiled Ida, with a bright blush of genuine pleasure, as she placed her slender fingers upon the palm which was open to receive them; "I feel honored and happy that Sir Jasper should desire my acquaintance."

"Who could do otherwise;" was the cordial rejoinder of the baronet; "who could be otherwise than proud of so fair and beautiful a kinswoman? and I trust, moreover, Miss Trevanion, that you may prove in deed as well as look, the dove which is to bear the olive-branch between me and your worthy father. You can not be ignorant that circumstances, which it would avail little to recapitulate, have rendered us for years strangers to each other; there may have been, and doubtlessly there was, blame on both sides; he was young, impetuous, and reckless, while I was uncompromising and exacting; but long years have passed over us since we last met; I am an old man now, and anxious to be at peace with all the world, doubly desirous, therefore, to live in amity and friendship with those of my own name and blood. Surely, then, Hubert Trevanion will not be more obdurate than myself—but I can not apprehend that such can be the case with so charming a mediator as the one before me to speak peace between us."

"Believe me, Sir Jasper"—commenced his niece, but she was interrupted in her intended rejoinder by the voice of Mr. Plumbtree, who had been engaged in a conversation with her companion, and who at that moment exclaimed impetuously; "You will excuse me, madam, but I am reluctant to believe such a thing possible—so nearly related—the last members of a fine old family, who should hang together like ivy-tendrils, and mutually support the proud edifice which it has taken centuries to rear—no, no; I have a better opinion of the good feeling and judgment of my friend Trevanion; and, by the by, madam, allow me the honor of presenting you to Sir Jasper Trevanion, the uncle of your host."

The baronet bowed coldly, and his salutation was as coldly returned; when a group of ladies near them having vacated their seats, the little party took possession of them, Sir Jasper still retaining his place beside his niece, and pursuing a conversation which was only interrupted at intervals by the greetings exchanged between Miss Trevanion and her numerous acquaintance.

"I have but one regret at the present moment;" said the gentleman, courteously; "and that is that I am deprived of the gratification of making you known to Lady Trevanion, who was prevented by indisposition from paying her respects to her Majesty to-day; my son, however, is here, and I trust I shall be fortunate enough to present him to his fair cousin, whose favor he is most anxious to propitiate, and whose friendship he would be proud to acquire; not, believe me, my dear Miss Trevanion, because the busy tongue of rumor has informed him that she will be ere long enrolled among the noblest ladies of the land, but because he has, like myself, for years deplored the feud in our family which has deprived him of the society and regard of so charming a relative."

"I am delighted beyond measure, Sir Jasper," replied Ida, with a glowing cheek. "that the rumor to which you allude had no influence over his wish for a reconciliation, which I should most warmly welcome, as I assure you, and I rejoice that you have afforded to me the opportunity of so doing, that the report in question—for you refer, no doubt, to my supposed engagement to Lord Downmere—has no foundation whatever in truth. The earl is a mere acquaintance, of whom I have hitherto seen but little, and who it is extremely probable that, after to-day, I shall never see again."

"You astonish me, Miss Trevanion, as I had been positively assured in several quarters that your father gave an entertainment this evening in honor of your betrothal."

"There will, indeed, be a ball at our house to-night;" replied Ida with a quivering lip, and her eyes sank and her breast heaved; "but excuse me, Sir Jasper—the subject is a painful one."

"Not another word, my fair neice, not another word;" hastily interposed the baronet; "I sincerely grieve that I should have distressed you by any allusion to the subject, nor should I have ventured to do so, had I not heard the marriage publicly mentioned as a thing absolutely and avowedly arranged. But now you will perhaps permit me to seek my son, who would scarcely pardon me were I to deprive him of so favorable an opportunity of becoming known to you. May I ask you to do me the favor to retain your seat while I thread the labyrinth of plumes and trains? I will endeavor not to detain you long."

Miss Trevanion bowed her assent in silence, for happy as she felt in the hope that the meeting with her relatives might lead to a renewal of friendly intercourse between the long estranged members of the family, she experienced a sensation of relief at the discontinuance of a conversation which agitated and oppressed her.

As the stately baronet rose and moved away, Lady Mary Brooklands, whose attention had been so systematically engaged by the pertinacious Mr. Plumbtree, that she had failed to catch the purport of the dialogue which was going on beside her, and who was consequently unaware of the important disclaimer which

her fair charge had just uttered, turned toward her with a supercilious smile, and said ironically: "You see, Ida, the magic of a coronet. Who may you not hope to have at your feet, when the unbending master of Trevanion Hall, can not resist its spell."

"You are mistaken, madam," said Mr. Plumbtree, emphatically; "and you do Sir Jasper wrong. He is influenced by no consideration of the kind, I can most positively assure you. My friend, the baronet is a greater personage in his own county, than any mere titled individual can ever be in this huge metropolis; and whatever may have been the faults or errors of his earlier life, there does not at the present moment exist on earth a kinder or a warmer-hearted man."

"Are you acquainted with Lady Trevanion?" demanded Ida.

"As intimately as plain Mr. Plumbtree can be," said the country gentleman good-humoredly; "and more so, in all probability, than I should have been, had I not fortunately written M.P. after my name. In short, for I may as well confess to you at once what with your discrimination you will be at no loss to discover when you see husband and wife together, my friend Sir Jasper is not a happy man at his own fireside. Luckily his son is a fine fellow who does justice to his worth; but a cold hearth, as I trust you will never know by experience, my dear young lady, does not make a cheerful home."

"And this said home-chill has caused an outward expansion of the gentleman's sympathies. Is not that what you would infer?" asked Lady Mary in the same accent as she had previously spoken.

"I infer nothing, madam;" said Mr. Plumbtree, perfectly unmoved by the offensive manner of her supercilious ladyship; "I simply state what is the truth, that my friend, probably feeling that as he had committed a mistake himself, it was quite possible that others might have been equally misled, and that although his own was irremediable, a remedy might be found for that which was not so, is sincerely desirous to repair the evil in so far as it depends on him to do it; and that it is with perfect good faith he now seeks a reconciliation with his nephew. It is probable enough that had he been a happier man, his affections might have centered in his home, and made him less dependent upon the regard and good will of those beyond it; but remember, madam, that disappointment too often tends to sour and embitter its victim; and that he who seeks to exercise his better feelings beyond the pale within which they have been chilled and blighted, deserves some credit for not degenerating into an egotist or a tyrant."

"Here comes my uncle," said Ida, glad of a pretext to terminate the dialogue.

"Ay, and his son with him, I am happy to say," replied his kind-hearted advocate.

"It is time that we prepared to depart" exclaimed Lady Mary, rising; "our carriage must be up, and if we are not on the spot when it is cried, we shall be detained for another hour."

"One moment, madam;" said Ida, firmly; "Sir Jasper has been kind enough to seek my cousin in order to present him, and I can not be guilty of such an impropriety as to render his trouble unavailing."

"As you please, Miss Trevanion;" was the ungracious reply; "but you must have the goodness to remember that if, by volunteering to form a score of new acquaintance without my sanction, you incur the displeasure of your father, you do it deliberately."

"I have no apprehension of the kind, madam;" said the young lady, indignantly: "and shall certainly not leave the room until I have been introduced to my cousin."

The noble matron tossed her plumed and turbaned head with the air of one deeply aggrieved, and resumed her seat in silence, as the baronet, followed by his son, succeeded in approaching the party. Ida half rose as they drew near, and extended her hand with graceful cordiality to her young kinsman, who bent low as he received it; while even Lady Mary, angry as she was, could not restrain a feeling of admiration at his superb beauty. Seldom, indeed had a more faultless form or figure met her aristocratic and fastidious eye. Of more than average height, nobly proportioned, and gifted with an ease and grace of manner rarely equaled, Sir Jasper's heir had scarcely a rival even in that courtly circle. In face he resembled his father, but his brow was more lofty, and his eye more open and cloudless; while the smile which played about his lip was at once frank and winning. There was a charm, too, in his low and manly voice which accorded well with the peculiar character of his whole appearance; and as Ida met his bright and earnest gaze, her heart swelled with exultation in the firm conviction that her father must gladly and proudly acknowledge his relationship to one so richly gifted by nature as her peerless cousin.

That he had long been the object of Mr. Trevanion's especial aversion, she well knew, but as yet they had never met, nor did she for a moment permit herself to doubt that when their meeting should take place, all feeling of animosity would end at once.

She did not pause to consider that the noble young man before her stood between her father and the baronetcy to which he had for years aspired.

"I presume, Miss Trevanion," said Lady Mary, at the expiration of a few moments, "that we may now endeavor to leave the palace. The company are rapidly dispersing, and we have already remained too long. We are becoming conspicuous, which is what every high-bred young lady should be careful to avoid."

"I am at your orders, madam," replied Ida, as she passed her arm under the offered arm of her cousin, while her chaperone, still only half-appeased, affected not to remark the courteous gesture of the baronet, and possessed herself of that of Mr. Plumbtree; "I am really grieved that I should have detained you so long."

The patience of the noble matron, was, however, destined to be still further tested, as on arriving in the stone hall, they discovered that their carriage was not yet up, and she was consequently compelled to while

away the time in conversation with a score of other titled and fashionable *détenues*, who were in the same dilemma as herself; while Ida, to whom this meeting with her relations offered a resource from her own painful thoughts, devoted her whole attention to her gratified companions, on whom her grace and beauty had produced a strong and lasting impression.

That his son was the idol of Sir Jasper's heart, she soon discovered, and a sigh escaped her as she remarked the perfect confidence and affection which existed between them. Had she been so loved, so trusted, how different a fate might hers have been! Scarcely could she realize the description which had been given to her of the stern, unbending, domestic tyrant of Trevanion Hall, in the urbane and courtly old gentleman, whose eyes rested upon the face of his child with a depth of love that could not be mistaken, and as they stood together, amid that brilliant and busy crowd, she forgot the past in bright and hopeful visions of the future—that future which was even then yawning dark and threatening before her. It was a radiant dream, from which she was only awakened by the hoarse and strained voice of the callman, who announced the carriage, but she had no sooner parted from her newly-found relatives, and passed the palace gates, than the vision faded, and she was once more flung back upon the sad reality of her position.

By the desire of Lady Mary they were driven home with great rapidity, and on their arrival, her ladyship merely removing her train, proceeded to inspect the apartments which had been decorated for the fête. In the principal saloon, which had been converted into a ball-room, she encountered Mr. Trevanion, with whom she at once retired to the deep bay of the centre window.

"Were they there?" was the first question of the host.

"Yes and no," replied his companion; "the gentleman, father and son were present, but the lady was absent from indisposition—at least, such was the pretext for her non-appearance."

"And were they presented to Ida, madam."

"They were, and the meeting appeared to afford equal gratification to all parties."

"What is the boy like, may I ask?"

"Magnificently handsome. I have seldom seen a finer young man, and had you not, my good sir, conducted matters so ably, I should have advised you to discourage all overtures to a reconciliation, unless you desire to render the family relationship closer than it is at present."

"I require no such inducement to decline it, madam," was the cold rejoinder of the merchant; "but did Sir Jasper hint at any thing of the kind."

"He did more than hint, Mr. Trevanion, he plainly and unhesitatingly expressed his desire to bury the past in oblivion, and to extend the olive-branch, as he practically expressed it, whenever you were prepared to accept it."

"Doubtless; but it is likely to wither by the way. In former years it answered his purpose to expel me from his house—from the home of my ancestors—when I was young and friendless, and required his aid; now that I need it no longer, but am in a position to pay back a hundred-fold the indignities to which I was then subjected, it equally meets his views to court my friendship. He will find, however, that I am a true Trevanion, and made of sterner stuff than he yet seems to comprehend. We have lived more than half a life, strangers to each other, and I, at least, can well afford to make the estrangement permanent."

"That declaration on your part," said Lady Mary; "reminds me of Mr. Plumbtree—who, *par parenthèse*, fastened himself upon us like a burr—admitted that Sir Jasper was paying the penalty of an ill-judged marriage, and that the discomfort of a cheerless home had rendered him anxious to terminate the feud between you."

Mr. Trevanion smiled an ambiguous, joyless smile, and remained for a moment silent; after which he asked: "Were you satisfied with Ida's appearance?"

"Perfectly."

"And her engagement!"

"Was the theme of every tongue."

"Did she wear the jewels sent to her by Lord Downmere?"

"She did not."

"Upon what pretext?"

"I asked no questions, as I was not supposed to be aware of their arrival, and she made no remark upon the subject."

"Rebellious still," said the merchant, harshly; "but it will avail her nothing. I have her in the toils."

Lady Mary smiled significantly in her turn, but she made no reply.

"I thank you, madam," said her companion, after a pause; "you have, by your frankness, and friendly sympathy in my interests, rendered me a service for which I shall never cease to be grateful. All things are, I trust and believe, progressing successfully as regards my views for my daughter; while I am at ease on the subject of Sir Jasper. My triumph there is complete, for I can grasp the whole tendency and spirit of his sudden change of feeling. Hen-pecked by his wife, and checkmated by his nephew, he will do well to return to his county before he makes his discomfiture a theme of gossipry for the clubs, and has his insignificance forced upon him by the former victim of his brutality. Once more, my dear Lady Mary, I offer you my best thanks."

CHAPTER XX.

AN ELOPEMENT.

SELDOM had upholsterers and decorators done their spiriting more effectually than in the villa of Mr. Trevanion; and it was with a feeling of irrepressible exultation that Lady Mary, at the close of her conference with the master of the house, traversed the noble apartments which were already prepared for the reception of the expected guests. The vast hall of en-

trance was lined with orange and lemon-trees, interspersed with minute lamps which, when lighted, gleamed like fire-flies among their rich foliage; while behind and above them rose a thick tangle of vines and other parasitical plants, whose pendant branches were drawn aside at intervals, and formed into a frame-work for the large mirrors which reflected on every side the fairy scene around them. In the center of the tesselated floor, a fountain of perfumed water threw a sparkling column of liquid light high in the air, which fell back like a shower of silver stars into its porphyry basin, with a soft and soothing sound; and half-a-dozen fine marble statues, partially vailed by flowering shrubs, gleamed out in their pure and classic beauty beneath the overhanging chandeliers, like the guardian spirits of the place. In the ball-room every niche and recess was filled with the most rare and fragrant exoties, whose parti-colored blossoms looked like living gems as they glowed beneath the effulgence of the myriad wax-lights which were scattered among them; and the walls were paneled with plate-glass draperied by pale green silk. The conservatory, which opened from this apartment was richly carpeted, and supplied with divans and couches of crimson velvet; while on pedestals of scagliola and Egyptian marble stood vases of gold fish, and the gilt cages of innumerable foreign birds of bright plumage and graceful form, over which the shaded lamps threw a soft moon-lighted gleam.

The whole scene was an enchantment. The magic power of wealth, and the wonder-weaving finger of taste were visible on every side; the eye ached with brightness; and it was almost a relief to pass into the dim and spacious library, with its carved bookeases of dark oak, its precious specimens of the old masters, its cabinets of gems, and its magnificent bronzes. The morning-room of Mrs. Trevanion, from which she had been so reluctantly expelled, and in which she received her guests, was, however, the triumph of the *artiste;* draperied throughout with amber satin, the angles were occupied by pyramids of white lilies, with which the chandelier was also wreathed; but no other ornament was suffered to intrude itself, and the effect was at once simple and striking.

It was with an aching heart that, before she commenced her evening toilet, Miss Trevanion, in compliance with her father's expressed desire, traversed these treasure-laden rooms. She would fain have delayed her entrance there, until the brilliant crowd by which they would in a few hours be filled could distract her attention from the strangeness of their aspect; she would fain have remembered them in after years in their accustomed and familiar seeming; but this happiness was denied to her, and she passed on, amid strange workmen, and hurrying servants, with a languid step and a joyless spirit. Coarse voices sounded in her ears, ungainly forms crossed her path, coatless men were busy on every side, removing ladders, steps, and stools, while others were engaged in lighting lamps, and re-arranging groups of flowers. She gave one long, sad look around her as she stood in her mother's favorite room—that room in which she had first wept, and then dozed away so many hours of her cheerless life. Should she ever again see it as it was? Should she ever again look upon it as it had been when she sat upon her low stool beside her mother's knee, and learned to lisp out her first prayer? As she asked herself the question, a flood of fond and childish memories burst upon her; in her eyes, the spot which had so long been sacred appeared desecrated, and the gulf, which was soon to separate her from all that she had once loved with the whole fervor of her girlish affection, seemed to have been widened and deepened by this last mockery of her anguish.

After awhile she turned and left the apartment; nor was it until she had heard the wheels of more than one carriage grate over the gravel beneath her window that she was prepared to quit her dressing-room. As she paused for an instant before the glass, she was startled at her own appearance; she had been weeping unconsciously, and her eyes were swollen and heavy, and her face ghastly pale. "And is it indeed thus that I am to leave my home, perhaps forever?" she murmured sadly; "I would, have gone forth rich in a father's blessing, in a mother's love—I would have received their parting kiss in the silence and sacredness of home; but even that luxury is denied to me. The very roof that was familiar to my infancy, and dear to my youth, even that seems to mock at my misery, and to welcome in my stead the idle votaries of pleasure, many of whom pass beneath it only to fill its echoes with the false words of flattery, and others perchance to scoff. Oh, I am very, very wretched!"

And once more the large unbidden tears fell cold and slow, and she cast herself into a seat, with her face buried in her hands. How long she remained thus motionless, and weighed down by the bitter grief to which she had involuntarily yielded, she knew not, when a burst of music caused her to start suddenly from her chair.

"One more effort," she exclaimed wildly; "and I shall have done with this false, hollow world forever."

As she spoke her eye fell upon the caskets which were strewn over her toilet, and which, in accordance with her instructions, Mademoiselle Seraphine had placed there before she dismissed her. With a stern and unnatural composure she opened each in turn, to assure herself that every gem was in its place, and then she added to the heap every ring which she had hitherto worn save one which contained her father's hair, and every ornament of daily use save a small locket containing a miniature of her mother, attached to a slight chain of gold, which she clasped about her neck and concealed beneath the trimming of her dress.

"I can not part with these," she whispered hoarsely; "not with these, for none could value them as I have done."

She swallowed a draught of water, and leaned for a moment from the window to calm her throbbing brow; and then slowly but firmly, she descended the flower-wreathed stair-case, and prepared to join the guests.

In the hall she encountered Lady Mary Brooklands, who was about to send a servant to summon her, and who exclaimed in angry amazement: "Are you mad, Ida? Can you really intend to present yourself in such a state as that? Have you no respect for your father's taste and wishes that you make your appearance like a school-girl, in a dress unornamented even by a few paltry flowers? You can not be serious!"

"Do I look like one who is inclined to jest, madam?" was the bitter rejoinder; "or do you consider that I have cause for mirth, when I see my happiness disregarded, and myself valued only as a puppet to afford sport for others? If you can indeed do so, I envy you alike your philosophy and your strength of mind."

"This is no moment, Miss Trevanion, for so uncalled-for a burst of temper, nor have I time either to analyze or to resent it; while you have already absented yourself too long from your father's guests. Your extraordinary conduct has excited remarks and comments which you would have done well to avoid, but which your new and strange caprice of simplicity can not fail to increase. However, I have done, since I perceive that my influence over your actions has ceased."

"Lady Mary," said Ida, with sudden agitation, as she extended her hand to her companion; "let no angry feeling come between us to-night. I believe that we should both regret it."

"Be it so," replied the lady, coldly, as she led the way to the reception-room.

Ida nerved herself for the trial which awaited her, but her courage had nearly failed when she observed Lord Downmere in close and confidential discourse with her mother, whose smiles and diamonds appeared to have as completely metamorphosed her as the hands of hirelings had done her house. Mrs. Trevanion was indeed radiant with triumphant vanity. The congratulations which had been poured in upon her on the brilliant prospects of her daughter, the compliments which had been lavished upon the splendor of her fête, the movement about her, the lights, the music, the glitter of jewels, the rustling of silks and velvets, and the high-sounding titles which echoed in her ears, had thrown her into a state of excitement which gave a glow to her usually pale cheek, and lent an unnatural sparkle to her eye.

Striking was the contrast presented by the daughter to whom she owed that brief and passing enjoyment; and even the earl, who stood in a stately attitude beside his hostess, his jeweled star flashing in the light, started as she approached. The appearance of Miss Trevanion was rather indeed that of a victim prepared for sacrifice than the heroine of a festival. The rich masses of her dark and lustrous hair rendered the brow beneath them of a death-like pallor, and were unrelieved by a single ornament, while her dress of snowy muslin was equally unadorned; her firmly-set lips were white and rigid, and she moved rather like an automaton than a being gifted with sense and life. As she reached her mother's side, she smiled, and many who were watching her closely, never forgot that smile.

Her recognition of the earl was cold and even haughty, and he was evidently disconcerted by so public a demonstration of her indifference; but with considerable self-possession he endeavored to render it less conspicuous by addressing to her a murmured compliment, coupled with a reproach that she had not honored him by wearing the jewels which he had been permitted by her father to offer to her acceptance. Then the statue woke into life, and the modern Pygmalion shrank before the effect of his own presumption. The eyes of Ida flamed, and the hot blood rushed over her brow and bosom.

"Have you yet to learn, my lord?" she asked; "that no slave willingly assumes his fetters? What has been forced upon me I have borne; do not compel me to any other declaration. Is not this enough?" and she glanced around her hurriedly as she spoke; "do not try me beyond my strength, or it must fail."

"Madam"—stammered the earl. Ida waved her hand with an impatient gesture, and moved away, leaving her bewildered auditors breathless with consternation.

Gayly sped the moments with the reckless votaries of pleasure who were assembled in honor of Miss Trevanion's betrothal, while the wretched girl herself flitted from one apartment to another like a wandering spirit; a cold and constrained smile upon her lips, and anguish in her heart; she heard not the witching strains of Strauss, she scarcely saw the whirling, figures, that enveloped her in light clouds of gauze or gleaming volumes of satin as she made her way among them; to those who sought her hand she pleaded fatigue and indisposition; and while by some the plea, supported by her pale cheeks and drooping eyelids, was readily admitted, there were not wanting many who attributed the singularity of her manner and the simplicity of her attire, to an affectation of importance at which they sneered, as premature and unbecoming in a mere merchant's daughter.

Very different, however, was the effect which they produced upon Mr. Trevanion when his eye first fell upon her. For a moment he doubted the evidence of his senses; but no, there could be no mistake; the noble head, adorned only by its redundant masses of rich dark hair; the exquisite form plainly draped in simple muslin, were indeed those of his daughter, upon whose attire his vanity had lavished ungrudgingly sums that would have sufficed to clothe her like an empress; and, worse than all, evidently shrinking from the observation and homage which on such an occasion she should have courted. The brow of the merchant lowered with mortification and disappointment as he made his way toward her, and there was a concentrated bitterness in the tone with which he said in a subdued voice when he reached her side: "This is the crowning insult, Miss Trevanion, and one which I am never likely to forget. Do you owe nothing to the father who has made you the first and highest object of his ambition? Do you hope that I am to be disgraced with impunity by my own child in the eyes of half London? Are you insane? or can you really be unaware that

you require but a few blades of straw and half a dozen withered posies added to your costume, to be a fitting representative of Ophelia?"

"Father," faltered Ida; "I have done you no wrong: I could not add deceit to my other errors. Have you dealt fairly with me? All about me is brilliant falsehood, but I at least will take no part in it. You can not ask me to trample upon my own heart."

"Beware, Miss Trevanion;" was the threatening rejoinder, as the merchant turned angrily away; "it may now be too late to change your dress, but I advise you to change your countenance, if you would wish me to remember when we next meet that I am still your father."

"When we next meet;" murmured Ida, to herself, as he left her side. "How and where shall we indeed meet again!"

Escaping from the heat and hurry of the ball-room, she passed into the dim and deserted library, and threw herself into a seat. The glad sounds of revelry, and silvery voices of music came mingled upon her ear; the odors of a thousand flowers floated upon the air; and still she sat there, motionless as if hewn in stone.

After a time, moreover, the distant tumult contrasted with the deep silence immediately about her produced a bewildering effect upon her over-strained nerves, and suddenly the vast and somber apartment rang with a peal of wild unnatural laughter; she pressed her hands upon her brow until it ached beneath their tension; and then hurriedly starting to her feet, she exclaimed in a voice which sounded strange and unfamiliar even to her own ear.

"My father is right; this is my bridal fete, and I should do it honor. I wrong Sydney—and wrong myself—by this ill-timed and ill-omened sadness. I will be gay. There will be many a heart besides my own in the crowd whose mirth will be rendered only the more audible from the hollowness within."

Touched by deep passion as by the wand of a magician, Miss Trevanion stood for one moment trembling with fierce and overwhelming excitement; her cheek burned, and her eye flashed with fever; never had she looked so imperial in her proud beauty. Frenzied alike by what she had already undergone, and by what she still contemplated, her pulses throbbed, and her bosom heaved tumultuously. At that moment she could have braved the tortures of the inquisition, for she was reckless.

As if fearing to trust herself with further thought, she left the library; and when ere long she again entered the great saloon, leaning upon the arm of a casual acquaintance whom she had encountered on her way; the change in her appearance was very striking. Every shade of despondency, every symptom of languor had disappeared; and so brilliant was her whole expression that a murmur of astonished admiration met her on every side. Her low graceful laughter, her perfect self-possession, and her eager, animated look excited the astonishment of all around her; and there were not wanting many in that brilliant throng who envied her for the matchless beauty which made her independent of the adventitious aids of ornament, and who were compelled to acknowledge their own attractions eclipsed and overborne by the unassisted loveliness of the woman whose pale cheek and subdued deportment had been the theme of malicious comment and ungenerous criticism only an hour previously.

"The quasi-countess has wearied of her sentimental fancy," said a *passée* beauty to her partner, as Ida, radiant with false excitement, took her place in the dance.

"She is right," was the reply; "for she is gloriously lovely now. She scarcely looks like the same person who appeared so languid and listless only an hour since."

"Terribly like temper," retorted the lady, arranging a bouquet upon her dress; "his lordship will find matrimony no sinecure, I fear."

And meanwhile the dance went on, and the grace and eleganee of the heroine of the fête were the universal theme of admiration. Lord Downmere, by no means satisfied in his own mind that matters were progressing so satisfactorily as his host had represented, received the compliments which were addressed to him with a constraint that he vainly endeavored to overcome; and Mr. Trevanion on his side, felt perplexed by an inconsistency of conduct on the part of his daughter of which he had never previously thought her capable. Could his warning have indeed operated thus powerfully upon her? He scarcely ventured to indulge the hope; but it was at all events gratifying to his pride to find how far, even in her present simple attire, she eclipsed the brightest and noblest beauties about her. His brow grew smooth, and his manner bland, as he moved among his guests, drinking in with satisfied vanity the murmurs of pleasure and delight which met his ear on all sides. Nor was Lady Mary less enchanted than himself as she witnessed the effect produced upon her own five hundred friends, with whom she had, as a matter of course, peopled the brilliant saloons of her host, by the splendor of the entertainment.

"No, no; believe me, when I assure you, my dear marchioness," she exclaimed, with ready tact, to a rouged and ringleted dowager who had indulged in a bitter sarcasm on the appearance of the young hostess; "that even your perspicuity is at fault in this instance as regards my little friend. It is from no feeling of covert presumption that she has eschewed the advantages of dress on this occasion, but from a widely different impulse. As Countess of Downmere, she will ere long avail herself, as you will see, of all the splendor of her rank, but to-night she is aware that she is still only Ida Trevanion, and she has acted accordingly."

Did the family friend believe, as she smilingly gave this explanation, that she had discovered the real solution of the enigma? Far from it; but she felt that her own credit was at stake, and she had too much worldly wisdom to confess herself mystified.

It was far otherwise, however, with Mrs. Trevanion, who was, and did not scruple to confess herself, both angry and astonished at the apparent capriee of her daughter. Like all weak people she attached an undue weight to the opinion and customs of fashionable so-

ciety, and her mortification was consequently intense when she discovered how absolutely both had been set at defiance by Ida.

"Who would believe, my lord," she said pettishly to the earl, who, on this occasion, considered it expedient to attach himself to his future mother-in-law; "that she was the same person who looked so queen-like at the drawing-room this morning? It is really too bad."

"Miss Trevanion knows the power of her charms, madam," said the antiquated lover, with an uneasy smile; "and you see that her triumph is complete."

"I wish," pursued the lady, who had an unfortunate talent for saying awkward things at the wrong moment; "I do so wish, my lord, she had danced with you instead of Captain Villiers; I am sure that it ought to have been so."

Her noble companion winced, and glanced involuntarily at his gouty foot, which, imprisoned in a shoe that had already more than once reminded him of his infirmity, gave to the absurd lamentation of his hostess all the point of an epigram; and, as he did so, he murmured a reply which was unintelligible.

On sped the hours garlanded with flowers, loud with revelry, and winged by pleasure. The day dawned; the birds twittered among the branches, the lark burst into song as it darted toward heaven with its morning thanksgiving; the gray light streaked the river-ripple; and honest labor once more girded itself to battle with the toils of the coming day; and as the world of the artizan and the mechanic woke into life, the rooms of Mr. Trevanion began to thin; and the last languid efforts of the weary musicians were overpowered by the rolling of carriages, the loud voices of servants, and the turmoil of the departing guests; but even these ceased at last, and Mr. Trevanion stood for a moment alone, in the midst of expiring tapers, drooping garlands, and disordered draperies.

"Tell Miss Trevanion," he said, suddenly, to a servant who was hurrying past him, "that I wish to see her in the library before she retires."

The man hastened to obey his commands, but they were not destined to be fulfilled; in vain did he appeal to her mother, to Lady Mary, and to Mademoiselle Seraphine; not one of them had seen Miss Trevanion for the last hour; in vain did he traverse the conservatory, and the saloons; wander out into the grounds, and urge others of the domestics to assist him in the search; the result was disappointment; and he was at length compelled to return to his impatient master with the unlooked-for tidings that Miss Trevanion was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARRIED LOVERS.

On the southern banks of the Thames, not many miles from London, may be seen from the river, a pretty and retired village, backed by a well wooded hill, at whose summit, as the boat glides on, glimpses may be caught among the dense foliage, of a noble mansion, at one extremity of the park—for such is the purpose to which the height has been applied—and at the other that of an observatory which overtops the forest timber. Thence the land descends gently to the river, the low-lying grass fields being dotted over their whole surface with browsing cattle; while only a short distance from the shore, stands a picturesque little church, half embowered in ivy, and surrounded by its quiet burial-ground. This modest edifice, upon which an artist-eye can not fail to linger with delight, is also an object of interest to the antiquary from the historical tradition which is attached to it; and which, from its regal associations, contrasts strangely and startlingly with the simple and unpretending appearance of the building. At the distance of a hundred yards from the church, commences the village street, which stretches along the bank of the stream, in a long line of fishermen's cottages, where their home-keeping wives drive a small trade in the cheaper produce of their husband's nets, and where many a window arrests the steps of the school-going urchin, by its rich stores of sugar-stick, gingerbread and marbles. Further inland, however, partially, and in some instances, totally hidden from the passer-by upon the river, are to be found in the neighborhood of which we write, some of these small but pretty residences which are peculiar to 'merrie England;' those sunny pleasant homes where elegance and comfort compensate for space and splendor, and where the refined and gently-nurtured, who are debarred the luxuries of wealth, may, nevertheless, nurse their graceful fancies, undisturbed by these squalid and depressing associations which genteel poverty has to endure in other lands.

It was a lovely evening in autumn; and the glass doors of a small but exquisitely furnished drawing-room, facing the river, were flung back to admit the various odors of the blossoms with which the flower-pots dotted over the lawn were plentifully filled. The sun was westering, and the sky was rich with fleecy clouds that had caught a roseate hue from the glow of crimson by which he was environed, and which was also reflected upon the calm ripple of the noble stream. From the wooded height, the song of the nightingale had already commenced, while yet more distant, might be heard the lowing of cattle from their pastures, mingled with the far-off hum which rose from the peopled river. The scene from that open window was one of constantly recurring interest; at one moment the tall spars of a stately ship, her sails furled, and her crew idly clustering together at the prow, might be seen, gliding along like a spirit, the tiny steamer by which the huge fabric was impelled looking like a mere dark speck upon the water, totally unconnected with the mighty mass by which it was apparently pursued; at another, the dark volume of smoke emitted by the funnel of some arrowy steamship, rose into the air like a pillar of metal, then wreathed itself into a thousand fantastic shapes, and finally became scattered into a thin gray mist, and lost in the surrounding atmosphere. Flag and pennant, the national insignia of every

nation upon earth, and those less conspicuous but equally honorable banners borne at the mast-head of the lordly merchant ships, whose owners are the sovereigns of European commerce, each passed by in its turn, freighted with the wealth of every land, and destined to plow the waves of every sea.

Within the apartment, and half shaded by the muslin drapery which had been drawn back to permit her eye to wander unimpeded over the scene which we have endeavored to describe, half-sitting and half-reclining upon a sofa, a chance passer-by might have discovered a lady of surpassing beauty, and at her feet a fair-haired and handsome man, who was gazing up to her with a look of passionate and almost reverential fondness.

The little group consisted of Mrs. Elphinstone and her husband. One happy month had already flitted by since she had given her hand to the man for whom she had abandoned home, and wealth, and parents; and if she sometimes heaved a sigh at the remembrance of the past, it arose from no feeling of regret at the step which she had taken, but was induced only by the resolute estrangement of her father. Safe in their own happiness, Sydney Elphinstone and his bride had made merry over the marvelous comments of the public prints, which, with that total want of respect for the sacredness of private life that occasionally characterizes them, had detailed, more or less faithfully, according to their means of information, the particulars of her elopement. It was, as they well knew, a mere nine days' wonder, which would soon be superseded in the public mind by some other marvel; but the relentless silence of those to whom she had been for long years an object of affection, weighed heavily upon her spirit.

"My poor mother," she murmured to herself; "dare not, even if she would, assure me that I am not forgotten and lamented; but my father—can it be that he does indeed find it so easy to abandon me? And Lady Mary—she is, at least, a free agent, and might well have remembered how assiduously she once strove to nurse the passion which she subsequently affected to disavow—and yet all—all have failed me."

"You are sad, dearest;" said the young husband after a silence of several minutes; "speak to me, my love, and assure me that you do not already regret the sacrifice that you have made for my sake."

"Regret, Sydney;" whispered Ida as she bent forward with a smile, and buried one of her small white hands in the clustering masses of his fair hair: "Do I look like one who regrets the past? Have I cause to do so? Fie on you for the question! But even were it otherwise—even were I less entirely happy than I am,—know me better. I never act without reflection, dearest; and having acted, *I never repent.*"

Elphinstone laughed gayly. "That is a bold assertion, my sweet wife;" he said, as he made captive the slender fingers that were toying with his curls; "and one that will render me less anxious when I detect a shadow upon your brow; for I confess that there have been moments when I could not conceal from myself that I had asked, and you had granted, too much."

"So soon!" murmured Ida, beneath her breath.

"But what could I do?" pursued her light-hearted companion, unconscious of her interruption; "I loved you to adoration—I could not live without you—and so, like all men under similar circumstances I suppose, I consulted only my own selfishness, and dragged you down from your 'high estate' to share my poverty."

"Do *you* ever repent, Sydney?" asked his wife with a forced smile.

"I may have done so once or twice in the course of my life;" was the cheerful joinder; "but henceforth I shall have nothing to repent, for you will be my guiding star; and led by such a light I can scarcely fail to walk in the right path."

"Dear Sydney"—murmured his wife, as the cloud passed from her spirit; "you need no other monitor than your own noble nature."

"After all, dear one;" pursued the young husband; "you must confess that this 'love in a cottage' is very charming; and that a garland of jasmin is lighter to wear than a gilded coronet."

"And the song of that unseen nightingale, Sydney—is it not far sweeter than the warbling of the most gifted *prima donna* who ever threw an audience into raptures? Hark! *There* was a glorious gush of melody; how the air seems to throb beneath its weight."

"I would rather hear your voice than that of the finest nightingale that ever flew."

"Vandal!"

And once more there was silence.

The sun had set, and the moon which had nearly reached its full, was slowly sailing up the heavens; the breeze had fallen, and a long line of light lay upon the water, while countless stars flickered and quivered in the deep blue of the cloudless sky.

It was a glorious evening, redolent of harmony and peace; and very full of intense and absorbing happiness were the two married lovers, who sat with their hands locked in each other gazing almost unconsciously on the scene before them. They had entered their earthly Eden, into which as yet no serpent had glided to blight the flowers upon their path with its venom. Deep and earnest was the affection which filled the breast of each, but far opposed was the nature of that affection; with Sydney, it was full and perfect, without a doubt or a misgiving; he had won the idol of his heart, and he was proud at once of her, and of his own triumph. Content to dwell among the blessedness of the present, he cared not to look beyond; and when occasionally his thoughts would stray into the future, they were filled with bold and manly determination to wrestle with the world, and to win fame and affluence for the wife who was henceforth to share his fortunes. He never doubted her, he never doubted himself; he possessed, as he had said, youth, talent, and energy, and secure of these he felt strong enough to struggle and to conquer. The radiant being whom he had made his own, must not be deceived in him; ere long he would commence the battle of life with a stout heart and an unflinching resolution: and

thus his dreams were all bright and glowing, without one cloud to overshadow them. It was, however, far different with Ida; the very excess of her happiness awoke a feeling of terror in her bosom; she thought not of Sydney toiling to secure for her an affluence of which he would have been careless for himself; she thought only of Sydney estranged by time, and by closer contact with that world in which he would soon be called to play a more active part; of Sydney, young, gay, and flattered, who might learn to feel that he had sacrificed the brightest portion of his life to a fancy of which he might one day weary; and as these painful misgivings forced themselves upon her, the tears which she would not suffer to fall, flooded her heart, and swelled it almost to bursting. The very quality of her love differed essentially from his; there was not the same calm even flow of tenderness, of almost womanly trust and clinging, which was engendered by his frank and open nature; she could not, as he did, live in the present, and yield herself up unresistingly to its charm; deeper and more passionate were the feelings which were hidden within her breast, and by which her whole being was imbued. There were indeed moments when, terrified by the impetuosity of her emotions, she resolutely combated their violence, but the languor which supervened was not repose; and she shrank appalled by the visions of her own imagination as she pictured to herself the possibility that a change might come over her destiny, and the effect which that change might produce upon herself.

On the evening we have described, however, the calm and soothing aspect of all around and about her, the cloudless sky, the rippling river, the silent stars, the mysterious whispering of the leaves, the clear soft moonlight, and, more than all, the fair and placid brow of her young husband, had hushed her spirit into profound and gentle peace; and as he sat at her feet with the silvery light gleaming upon his noble countenance, she gazed upon him with a still rapture that laid every other feeling to rest. Like him she was for a time lost in the present; and the very silence around her was eloquent of happiness.

And other days as bright and as beautiful succeeded that soft autumnal night: days throughout which Sydney Elphinstone lived on his unbroken existence of devotion and delight, and in which Ida was also supremely blessed, although a thousand vapors drifted across the haven of her enjoyment which it required all the sunlight of his love to scatter and disperse; but the young husband never dreamed that any cloud had darkened the calm and glorious brow of her he worshiped; neither tone nor look betrayed the inner workings of the troubled spirit which marred its own brightness, and blighted its own peace.

The favorite walk of Ida was a bowery lane, which, gently ascending the hill, formed one of the private roads to the extensive park that occupied its height; where, the owner being absent, Elphinstone had without difficulty obtained permission for his wife and himself to wander at will, a privilege of which they largely availed themselves. The road terminated in a gothic lodge of unusual size, and considerable architectural beauty, which had at one period been inhabited by a relative of the noble family to whom the estate belonged, and which was, during the residence of the Elphinstones in the neighborhood tenanted by a venerable couple, ancient retainers of the lords of the soil, whose old age was made happy by a residence upon the spot endeared to them by long habit and cheerful memories. The worthy dame whose quaint attire and old-world courtesy were a constant source of interest and amusement to Ida, was on her side delighted with the graceful and elegant young couple for whom she was so frequently summoned to open the jealously-guarded gate; while the reckless generosity of Sydney had made an equally favorable impression upon her infirm and somewhat morose husband.

It was on a fair fresh morning, a week or ten days subsequent to the period at which we have introduced the newly-married pair to our readers, that they strolled forth, and after a moment of irresolution, finally took once more the way to the gothic lodge. The woods were beginning to betray symptoms of the changing season. A golden gleam had settled upon the beech-trees, which glittered in the sunshine like flakes of gold; the weeping willows, those spendthrifts of the shrubbery, were already scattering their leaves to every idle breeze that wandered near them; while the elms, as though they knew that the time for summer tints had gone by, had assumed a russet hue, as they swayed their branches soberly in the wind. Many of the trees were, however, still gay in their vivid greenery, the short crisp turf was as fresh and bright as ever; and the birds as full of song. Gayly the married lovers pursued their way, Sydney at times laughing delightedly as the breeze caught the long ringlets which fell low upon the cheeks of Ida, and spread them forth beyond the edge of her small bonnet like silken banners; startled occasionally as a rabbit or a hare, which their light footsteps had disturbed, darted past them, or a pheasant rose with a loud whirring sound, and escaped into the depth of the woods; they at length reached the lodge, where they were smilingly welcomed by the venerable gate-keeper.

"I said that you would come to-day, my lady," exclaimed the old woman, exultingly; "I told my Jonathan that you would be here this blessed morning; and sure enough here you are; but keep to the open turf, for the wood-paths are damp after last night's rain; and such shoes as yours, ma'am, won't keep out the wet, I take it."

"You are right, good Mrs. Dorcas," said Elphinstone; "my wife—" how he loved the sound of those words, and how proud he looked as he uttered them—"my wife's shoes are not indeed quite adapted for miry paths; but as she is only just learning to walk, we can scarcely expect her to be very profound on such subjects."

"Ay, ay," replied the old woman with a significant nod: "I understand all about it, I believe, sir. Well, well; we can't put old heads upon young shoulders, as the saying goes; and if she is only half as good as she is handsome—and I for one don't doubt it—"

"You are right, Mrs. Doreas, you are quite right," said Sydney, seizing her hand, and shaking it heartily; "*quite* as good as she is handsome, and that ought to satisfy any man."

"To be sure it ought, sir; and at all events it satisfies you; there can be no mistake about that; and your lady may own the same on her side; for as my old man and I often say, that you are the handsomest couple we ever set *our* eyes on, and we've seen a many of the quality too, in our time."

"Better and better!" laughed Elphinstone; "why, Mistress Doreas, you are a perfect courtier, and ought not to be buried alive here."

"Well, it has been dull enough all this summer, I do confess, sir;" said the garrulous old gate-keeper; "but just now I am in luck, and may hope for a better time."

"Ha, indeed; then I suppose your lord is coming back to England?"

"Oh, dear no, sir; my lord and my lady intend to winter in Rome, and even if they were to change their minds, they'd stay in London I take it; or go down to their other place westward, for they never fancy this in the cold weather, being so near the river. No, but I have let all the best rooms in the lodge for the next six months, so that we shan't be so lonesome-like as we were last year."

"A strange season, I should say," observed Sydney, "for a family to select so secluded a residence."

"Why, it ain't altogether a family," said the old woman, gravely. "It's only a widow-lady and her daughter: a grand lady, too, I rather think, sir, to tell you the truth, but I fancy they are not over rich, for all that."

"Few people are, my good friend;" remarked Ida with a smile, as she prepared to walk on, fearful of intruding upon the secrets of a stranger.

"True, ma'am, true," acquiesced the pertinacious old woman; "but some's richer than others; and I've a notion that this lady that's coming to lodge with me is poorer than she has been."

"In that case, Mistress Doreas, you had better take care of yourself," said Sydney, archly.

"Oh, I've no fear for myself, sir," replied the gate-keeper, eagerly, "no fear for myself; for the lady behaved like a lady as she is, and offered to pay me three months in advance."

"But surely," objected Ida, interested in spite of herself by the animation of her humble acquaintance, "you can scarcely have such accommodations as would be required by so superior a person as you describe, in your present residence."

"I don't wonder that you should think so, ma'am," said Mrs. Doreas; "because, of course, you can't be aware that a maiden aunt of my lord's lodged and died here, and the rooms have never been touched since, except to be dusted. My lord would have it so; and handsome enough they are, I can assure you, ma'am, for any lady in the land."

"Well, at all events I congratulate you, my good Mrs. Doreas," said Elphinstone, as he drew the arm of his wife within his own; "and now we will continue our rambles. But, by the by, when do you expect these new inmates of yours?"

"Oh, they have already been here these three days, sir," was the reply, "or I would have asked your lady to look at Lady Margaret's rooms. They are out somewhere in the park; they are very little in the house this fine weather."

"They are right," was the gay rejoinder; "and now we will go into the park in our turn. We are not likely to interfere with each other, as in all probability we shall not even meet."

"Likely enough, sir; but if you should, there will be no harm done."

"I trust not, my worthy dame; so we will wish you good morning for the present."

"Good morning, sir, and a pleasant walk to you," was the reply of the old woman as she turned the key in the gate, and re-entered the lodge, while Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone resumed their walk.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RENCONTER.

For awhile the two pedestrians followed the advice of Mrs. Doreas, and kept in the open ground; but after a time they began to wish for the calm seclusion of the woods, and plunged into their welcome shade. Fond and happy hearts make society and fellowship with all around them; the sunshine within gives warmth and gladness to every external object; and thus the moments flew by with lightning speed, until Ida, who was not yet sufficiently inured to this species of exercise to set fatigue at defiance, began to betray evident symptoms of over-exertion.

"We have walked too far and too fast for you, my love," said Sydney, as he felt her weight grow heavy on his arm; "and we must make our way back in the open park where you may rest for a time without danger of damp, which you can not unfortunately do under this dense foliage; and see, most opportunely, here is a path cleared through the trees which evidently leads to the Observatory. What say you? Can you make the effort?"

Ida willingly assented, and in a few moments they discovered by the bright gleam of light which appeared at some distance before them that they should ere long be in the open grounds once more. Cheered by the prospect of repose, Ida moved more rapidly forward, and they soon stood at the edge of the belt through which they had ascended the height. The prospect before them was enchanting, and weary as she was, Mrs. Elphinstone remained for a few instants looking far out over the busy river and the opposite shore ere she had taken possession of the grassy knoll upon which her anxious husband had hastily thrown the shawl which she had cast off during their ramble. She had scarcely seated herself, however, ere she became aware that the scene had fascinated other eyes beside her own, for beneath the shadow of the tower where she was protected from the glare of the sun, sat a young girl, so assiduously engaged upon a

sketch which she was making, that she was evidently unconscious of the vicinity of the strangers.

"Look, Sydney," whispered his wife; "you were a false prophet, for most assuredly we have stumbled upon the young lady of the lodge."

Elphinstone's eyes followed the direction of her finger, for hitherto he had been so absorbed in his care for her, that he had not once glanced around him, and he immediately acquiesced in the probability of her inference.

"Judging from her figure at this distance," he whispered in reply; "she must indeed be very young, scarcely, I should say, escaped from childhood, with all its glorious associations of back-boards and milk and water. Who *can* they be?"

"Nay, love;" said Ida, with the uneasy feeling which the subject of age never failed to produce upon her, and who was morbidly anxious to conceal it; "you must, at least, acknowledge, whoever they may be, that the figure before us is extremely graceful—remark the pliant bend of her neck, and the firm but easy attitude of her small head. She is really a very picturesque object as she sits there enveloped in those profuse folds of white drapery, with her long golden ringlets heaving in the wind."

"I will acknowledge any thing you please, dearest," said Sydney, as he wound his arm affectionately about her waist; "if you will only lean on me, and endeavor to overcome the fatigue to which I have subjected you through my selfish want of thought, and really now you mention it, the fair damsel before us here, does make a very pretty object in the landscape. It is a pity that she can not put herself into her sketch."

"How strange that she should be alone at such a distance from the lodge," pursued Mrs. Elphinstone.

"You forget," said her husband "that this is charmed ground, upon which only the privileged can enter; and that she doubtlessly imagined herself as free from our intrusion, as we believed ourselves secure from meeting her."

And still the subject of their conversation pursued her task without once suffering herself to be diverted from her occupation, while at intervals, a few snatches of song burst from her lips, in a clear, wild, thrilling voice of exquisite volume and sweetness.

"Another nightingale, Ida," smiled Sydney; "upon my word, the neighborhood improves; who would have thought of encountering such a little prodigy as this, in a country village?"

"Hush," murmured his wife; "she is not alone, for I see another figure advancing toward her from behind the Observatory."

As Mrs. Elphinstone spoke, a lady habited in mourning, moved forward into the sunshine for a moment, and then closing a book which she held in her hand, slowly approached the young artist.

"Let us go," said Ida, springing to her feet, "let us go at once, Sydney, for we can not fail to be observed ere long, and I would not for the world that we should be suspected of the indelicacy of listening to their conversation."

"But can you indeed venture on further exertion so soon, my beloved?" asked her husband, anxiously; "you have scarcely had time to overcome your previous fatigue."

"Fear nothing for me," smiled Ida; "I really feel quite strong again, and I know not why, but I shall be glad to escape unseen by these strangers."

"Unfortunately, that is impossible," said Sydney; "unless we return through the wood, which would lengthen our walk very considerably, and you are unequal to any gratuitous exertion of that kind. Pass them we must, and therefore, if you are really desirous to reach home without delay, let us lose no more time."

With a reluctance for which she could not account to herself, and which she was consequently unwilling to confess, Mrs. Elphinstone took the arm of her husband, and prepared to retrace her steps to the village.

Had she entertained a hope of being enabled to sustain the fatigue of the more circuitous woodland path, she would assuredly have found courage to make the attempt, but she felt her utter inability to accomplish such an undertaking, and she shrank from the possibility of failure, should she persist in a caprice which could not but appear childish and undignified to Sydney.

Slowly, therefore, they advanced toward the two strangers, who were so thoroughly engrossed in discussing the merits of the drawing upon which the younger had been engaged, that the muffled sound of the intrusive footsteps upon the grass were unheard, nor was it until Elphinstone, in order to announce their approach, addressed a few words to his companion, that they became aware of this invasion of their solitude, when the effect which it produced was electrical.

The young lady started like a frightened fawn, and suffered her sketch-book to fall to the ground, while the elder lady hastily drew down her vail.

The first impulse of Sydney was to drop the arm of his wife, to raise his hat with a murmured apology, and to restore the sketch-book to its fair owner, after which he turned away, and, holding the hand of Ida, was about to pursue his homeward path, when he was arrested by the exclamation:

"I can not be deceived—that must be Mr. Elphinstone."

"It is indeed Mr. Elphinstone," was his astonished reply, as he once more advanced toward the tower accompanied by Ida; "and the voice of the person by whom I am recognized is perfectly familiar to me, although I am unable so identify it."

"My dear boy," said the lady, throwing back her vail, and revealing a careworn but still handsome face; "this is indeed an unexpected meeting;" and she extended her hand cordially as she spoke.

"My dear Lady Malcolm," exclaimed Sydney in his turn, "what an unlooked-for pleasure! What happy chance has brought you to this *ultima Thule?*"

Lady Malcolm pointed in silence to her mourning dress, and then, for the first time, the eye of Elphinstone fell on her widow's cap.

"Forgive me," he said in a tone of deep feeling, "I did not know—I was not aware—"

"Yes, Sydney," replied the lady after a pause, "he is gone, and the world would have been to me a desert, had I not still possessed my child. Come hither, Edith," she pursued, beckoning the timid girl to her side, "give your hand to Mr. Elphinstone, whose mother was, as you have often heard me say, my best and dearest friend."

"Can it be possible?" asked Sydney, as he took the offered hand, and retained it within his own, "can this really be my little Edith? my little golden-haired pet and plaything? Time does indeed work wonders—and very charming ones at times," he added, glancing toward her mother.

"But—this lady—" said Lady Malcolm with a courteous bow to Ida, who had hitherto remained a mute spectator of the scene before her.

"That lady," said Sydney with a proud and beaming smile, "is my wife, my dear Lady Malcolm, for whom I would ask a portion of the regard with which you honored my poor mother."

"Your wife!" exclaimed the widow, in repressible amazement, "are you serious, Sydney?"

"Perfectly so," replied the young husband with sudden gravity, "you may well wonder at my happiness, Lady Malcolm, for it is indeed far beyond my deserts; but, nevertheless, this lady is indeed my wife."

"Yours is in truth an enviable destiny, Sydney," said his friend, subduing with ready art the feeling of surprise which had for a moment betrayed her into a want of caution peculiarly ill-timed, "but you were ever a creature of the sunshine. Remember, that not a word of this had reached me; and you are still so young that you needed the all-sufficient excuse of such a face as that before me to reconcile me to the fact of your marriage. Pardon me, Mrs. Elphinstone," she continued with a winning smile, "I have for so many years been accustomed to look upon your husband in the light of a son, that I was weak enough for an instant to feel aggrieved that he had taken such a step without honoring me with his confidence."

Ida replied only by a cold and haughty inclination of the head. She was stung to the very heart.

"Had I only been aware that you were in England, my kind friend," exclaimed Sydney, "how many painful moments would have been spared to Ida; but the tale which I have to tell is too long to be commenced here, and now; and my wife is already exhausted by her walk."

"Let us then return to the lodge together," said Lady Malcolm, "for you will be surprised, Sydney, to hear that the two stray birds you have discovered on the wing, have made their humble nest for a time on the confines of a great man's park. Such is, however, the case; but I must not forget that my sorrows and struggles can afford but sorry entertainment to Mr. Elphinstone, and I will, therefore, defer all further allusion to them until we are alone together; and in the interval, endeavor to make her husband's friend her own. May I not hope to do so, my dear madam? Such a face as yours gives promise of a heart in which I should be proud indeed to occupy a place. I am no longer young, but I can still feel with those who are so."

The voice and manner of Lady Malcolm, were so resistless, that Ida turned toward her with a smile, and ere long she found herself conversing unrestrainedly, and with a sensation of positive pleasure, with the stranger from whom she had only an hour before so unaccountably shrunk. She even ceased to remember her first ill-omened expression of surprise on discovering that she was the wife of Sydney; or rather she brought herself to interpret it according to the explanation which Lady Malcolm volunteered.

Elphinstone was, meanwhile, radiant with delight, and was astonished to discover that, although in the society of his idolized wife, he had never for a moment experienced the want of other companionship, his happiness was sensibly enhanced by this unexpected meeting with an old and valued friend.

The shy and beautiful Edith, also interested him greatly. It seemed to him so marvelous, that the laughing child in whose sports he had shared, should, in the four brief years which had elapsed since they last met, have grown into a graceful and lovely girl, full of the blushing beauty of her sixteen summers; but, above all, he felt exalted in his own esteem as he remembered, that it was his proud privilege to introduce to one whom his mother had loved as a sister, so radiant a being as Ida in the character of his wife.

"And when she knows all," he resumed, "when she learns all that she has sacrificed for my sake, how will she honor her for her noble self-abnegation: how perfect a faith will she feel in her deep and pure affection for the man, to secure whose happiness she has abandoned all besides."

On the arrival of the party at the lodge, the astonishment of Mrs. Dorcas exceeded all bounds, and it was with an unsteady hand that she applied the key, which was to give egress to Elphinstone and his bride; she became more tranquil, however, as the parting salutations fell upon her ear.

"Farewell, then, Lady Malcolm, until to-morrow; good-by, Edith; remember that you have promised that I shall see the sketch, and that we shall between us introduce Ida into the foreground."

"Good morning, my dear boy;—good morning, Mrs. Elphinstone. We shall meet again to-morrow."

The gate closed upon Sydney and his bride; but Lady Malcolm paused for a moment ere she entered the lodge, and watched them as they slowly made their way along the bowery road.

"Married!" she mentally ejaculated; "married at twenty years of age; poor boy!—and to a woman evidently older than himself. Who was she, I wonder. She is beautiful—very beautiful—high-bred, and highly educated—but what brings them here? This may indeed be a refuge for the struggling and the sorrowful, but it is no fit resting-place for the

prosperous and the happy. There is a mystery which I must strive to fathom for both their sakes. And so the hope of long years has failed! I loved *his* mother so tenderly that I could not but believe that he, in his turn, must love *my* child when he again met her—beautiful and gifted as she now is. However, I will think no more of this, but endeavor to convince myself that the more brilliant destiny which is offered to her may equally insure her happiness; and, meanwhile, for the sake of the friend who was so dear to me, I will strive to feel the affection of a mother for the woman who now bears her name."

At this point of her reverie, Lady Malcolm was interrupted by the sweetest sound to her ear of any which could be heard on earth—the voice of her child caroling forth a simple song with all the gushing careless freedom of a wild-bird; and with a sigh and a smile strongly blended together she retired into the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

EXPLANATIONS.

"And now, pray tell me, Sydney," said his wife, as they slowly proceeded homeward, "who is this Lady Malcolm?"

"In the first place, dearest, as you must have gathered from our conversation, she was the most intimate and best loved friend of my mother, by whom she was at once esteemed for her many noble qualities, and admired for her extraordinary attainments. She is in truth an excellent and large-hearted woman, of strong purposes and feelings, and singularly accomplished; one of the last persons in the world, I should have thought, to bury herself alive as she is about to do here, under any circumstances, even the melancholy one which must have induced the sacrifice."

"But she must have been a widow for some time," remarked Ida; "for you saw that, with the exception of a black ribbon about her waist, Miss Malcolm wore no mourning."

"True," said Sydney; "and that fact renders her present absolute seclusion still more unaccountable. However, in reply to your inquiry, I must further tell you, that Lady Malcolm was the only daughter and heiress of Mr. Mark Conyngham, a man of very considerable fortune and large landed property."

"It can not then be that straitened means have decided her to take so singular a step," interposed Mrs. Elphinstone.

"Certainly not, I should imagine; or if so, something very peculiar must have occurred. Be this as it may, however, Miss Conyngham, the beauty and the heiress, bestowed her hand upon the colonel of a dragoon regiment which chanced to be quartered in the county-town adjacent to her father's estate; who, in process of time, became Sir Archibald Malcolm; a man of high family connections and considerale military reputation. It was what is called a 'love match' on both sides; but I have heard my poor mother say that the gallant colonel won new laurels by this fresh conquest in the county, where there had been many pretenders to the hand of his fair and well-dowried bride, who could not conceal their discomfiture at her being carried off by a stranger, even although that stranger was the brilliant and gallant Colonel Malcolm"

"And were they happy?" demanded Ida, earnestly.

"So I have heard; in fact, they had every reason to anticipate happiness, they were so well-matched in every respect—both wealthy, both highly endowed by nature, and both young and full of hope."

"You are right," said Ida, with an ill-suppressed sigh; "in that case, indeed, they might well anticipate happiness, for in that instance, there could be nothing to reproach on the one hand, nor to regret on the other, in after years."

"And I would pledge myself that neither regret nor reproach ever came between them," replied Sydney, emphatically; "why should it? Had they not chosen each other from the whole world, even as we have done, my best beloved? No, no; from all that I have heard, Sir Archibald and Lady Malcolm were just such a model couple as we shall be; realizing the sweetest words ever written by one of the sweetest poets who ever wrote; and I will be bound that more than once he has said and sung to her what I will say and sing to you;" and as he bent down and looked into the eyes of his wife, Elphinstone breathed out in a subdued but exquisitely melodious voice:

"Thou wilt still be adored as this moment thou art,
Let thy loveliness fade as it will;
While around the dear ruin each wish of my heart
Shall entwine itself verdantly still"

"Are you already looking forward to that period, Sydney, and preparing yourself to meet it with philosophy?" asked Ida, with a shade of impatient bitterness

"What a question!" exclaimed Elphinstone, gayly; "am I looking for a gouty shoe, and a bowl of water-gruel? No, no; my philosophy is of quite another description, and consists of enjoying the present to the fullest extent of which it is susceptible, and of looking into the future only to foretaste all the happiness that I have reason to expect from it. So now that we have settled that important point, which you must have mooted in the mere insolence of a beauty that will remain for a century to come unchanged and unchangeable in my eyes, let us return to our text.

"Lady Malcolm accompanied her husband abroad, and did not return to England until she had become a mother. Edith was at the period of their arrival a mere infant, and I, a boy of four years of age, became her first playfellow; after a time we both grew a few inches, she found the use of her feet, and we drew carts and made cowslip necklaces together, until I was banished to school, and thence to college, and entirely lost sight of my little companion, who was, in the mean while

undergoing the same process with some slight variations. You may, therefore, understand my astonishment to-day on discovering in the lovely girl who had excited so much interest in us both, the fairy thing that I only remembered as a wee toddling, laughter-loving child."

"Yes, time works strange changes," said Ida, gravely; "and she is certainly very beautiful."

"And what a voice!" pursued Sydney; "those recreant rooks ought to have been ashamed to caw in her hearing; and did you remark the sketch, dearest? As an artist, you must have considered it masterly for so young a girl."

"It was very creditable, indeed," said Mrs. Elphinstone, who began to weary of the praise bestowed by her husband upon another, but who was too right-minded to utter one word of depreciation. "Miss Maleolm will make a charming wife for the man who is fortunate enough to win her."

"A wife!" echoed Sydney, with a laugh; "what! that shy child! My dear Ida, what an absurd idea!"

"I do not see its absurdity, I confess," persisted his companion; "if I do not err in my calculation, Miss Maleolm must be sixteen years of age."

"Well, I suppose she is," was the calm rejoinder; "but it really sounds so strangely to hear you call her Miss Maleolm, though I suppose it will be proper to do so myself in future, in order to show all fitting honor to the 'little Deethy' of old times, who, as you say, has now reached the ripe and respect-compelling age of sixteen."

"After all," murmured Ida; "I must confess that, charming and accomplished as these strangers are, I would much rather that our solitude had continued uninvaded."

"*I*, at least, have never felt it to be solitude," said Sydney, fondly; "*my* world is always amply peopled when you are by my side; but, nevertheless, a thousand pleasant memories have rendered their presence welcome to me; green, fresh memories, which bring back the happy years of my boyhood, and make me feel as though I had still a mother and a home."

Mrs. Elphinstone was silent; and for a time her husband remained buried in thought; while at intervals a smile played about his lips, and at others a deep shade of sadness settled upon his brow. Suddenly, however, he started from his reverie.

"But why should I look into the past," he said; "when I have only cause to exult over the present."

"Yet, a mother—a home—" faltered the self-tormenting Ida, who was jealous even of his back-glancing thoughts.

"True, they are both very dear to me," was his reply; "but have I not a loved and lovely wife to replace the first, and the wide world before me in which to renew the last? Where the heart lingers, there is our true home; it is only separation from the beloved one which makes man an exile and a wanderer."

"And would it not be prudent to make that home ere long, dear Sydney?" asked his wife, once more appeased. "We must not forget that we are poor; the Midsummer-day's dream in which we have hitherto indulged can not last forever; and we should do well to prepare for the inevitable awakening."

"My *dear* girl!" exclaimed Elphinstone, deprecatingly; "who is looking gloomily into the future now? I am actually inclined to scold you. Are you already weary of our miniature paradise in this quiet little nook? I shall, indeed, begin to fear that you have truly discovered it to be a solitude."

"Then you will do me an injustice, Sydney; my only dread is, that you may yourself soon learn to feel it one. It is necessary, even amid such happiness as our own that, like the mother of Aladdin in the Eastern story, we should rub up the old lamps of our fancies, at times, in order to exchange them for new ones. *Toujours perdrix*, however savory the diet may at first prove, runs a sad risk of becoming wearisome at last, particularly to one so young as you are."

"That is scarcely fair, Ida, either to yourself or me."

"And wherefore? The fact may be unpalatable, but can you deny its truth?"

"Gastronomically, no; but morally, yes—certainly, in so far as I am personally involved in the question."

"Well, then," persisted Mrs. Elphinstone; "we will, for the sake of argument, suppose that you really could be content to dream away your life with no companion but your wife, and no pursuit but that of making the days succeed each other in a species of listless enjoyment—"

"Ida, I can not understand you."

"And yet, love, I speak plainly; even could you, I repeat, be satisfied with such an existence as that which I have attempted to describe, I must not suffer you to forget that I came to you almost penniless, and—"

"Ida," interposed her husband vehemently; "that you became mine under any circumstances was an amount of happiness of which I feel myself to have been unworthy; too well do I comprehend the extent of the sacrifice to which your affection prompted you; but only give me time, and you shall see how jealously and perseveringly I will struggle to repay the debt. Surely, however, you are premature in seeking thus early to commence our combat with the world. We are so happy here, shut out from all the cark and care by which we shall be surrounded when we have once made the plunge."

Elphinstone was another proof, had any such been needed, that men have infinitely less practical philosophy than women. The sudden necessity for exertion, after years of ease and self-indulgence, shakes a man to the very center of his soul; he has to break through all his old and cherished habits, to immolate his fastidious refinement at the shrine of mammon, and to jostle his way to the feet of the idol among the coarser worshipers in whom the crowd excites emulation rather than disgust; his sensitive nature revolts at the trial before him, and he becomes helpless under the failure of his moral courage; while a woman, however delicately nurtured and constitutionally timid,

no sooner becomes aware that the struggle must be made than she is aroused into strength and action; she may weep and repine under slight sorrows, but she contends resolutely with a great trial.

Man looks gloomily upon the storm-cloud, but woman gazes out into space to discover the rainbow beyond it. Man is cowed by the positive, woman sustained by the possible. He cowers beneath the actual infliction, while she, even though it be amid tears and travail, persists in struggling for its remedy.

The sudden energy displayed by Mrs. Elphinstone had, however, as we are compelled to confess, been elicited by a mixed motive of which she herself was scarcely conscious. It is true that the reflections to which she had given utterance during that homeward walk had frequently arisen in her mind in her happiest hours, but it is equally certain that not even on the previous day had she entertained the most remote intention of forcing them so abruptly on her husband; one short hour had, however, sufficed to create a revolution in her whole being; the apparition of Lady Malcolm and her daughter; the expressed admiration of Mr. Elphinstone for the graceful girl who had been the playmate of his childhood, the unguarded expression used by the elder lady, and her evident influence over the feelings of Sydney, all conspired to render his wife anxious to avoid any further intercourse with the intruders.

A new interest had been awakened in the heart over which she sought to reign supreme; mutual confidences must be exchanged upon subjects with which she was wholly unconnected; her privacy was invaded; the sensation of blissful security in which she had indulged was gone; the besetting sin of her nature was once more aroused; and the fatal jealousy to which she yielded herself up a passive victim, was busy with its prey Ida was very wretched, but she did not ask for rest, she only pined for change.

And who among us can ever foresee what the next change may bring?

CHAPTER XXIV.

A VISIT.

On the following morning while Mr. Elphinstone was occupied, according to his usual custom, in selecting a bouquet for his bride on her appearance in the breakfast-room, Ida lingered over her simple but elegant toilet. The expression of her features was calm but sad, and it was evident that her thought were far from the scene and objects by which she was surrounded.

She had dismissed her maid, and sat opposite the large mirror, wrapped in a loose dress of pale blue cachemere, over which her magnificent hair fell in luxuriant profusion almost to the floor. Her head rested upon her hand, and her eyes were fixed upon the ground.

"Yes—I see, I feel, that my trial is now about to commence," she murmured to herself; "and yet, of what have I a right to complain? I was not forced to the brink of the precipice upon which I stand; I chose my own path, and must endure the consequences of my own rashness. There will be no pity for me, none, should I become the victim of my vain and selfish imprudence; and it is better so, for I do not seek for pity, and could not brook it. And yet I love him so deeply—I *do* love him so entirely and so intensely, that surely I deserve to be loved in my turn with more than mere evanescent passion. For the moment I am his world, for months I have been the one dream of his existence; but is not life one perpetual series of change and chance?"

How many women have been worshiped with equal devotion for a brief period; then slighted, and ultimately forgotten! There are a hundred deaths comprised in those two fearful words. And he is so young, so very young! Who shall say that the fancy of his youth will continue to be the passion of his manhood? Who shall say that the poverty and the stern contact of the world may not do their hideous work, and wrench from me the heart whose every struggle for freedom will cost me tears of blood? And he is so beautiful in his boyish strength and grace; must not others look upon him with the same tenderness and admiration that I have done? Others younger, and before many years shall have gone by, fairer and brighter than myself. Oh, Sydney, should this ever come to pass—"

Her bosom heaved convulsively, and her lips trembled, as for an instant she dwelt upon the image evoked by her jealous fears; but she was suddenly awakened to the realities of her present existence by the full rich voice of her husband which came to her through the open casement, as he accompanied his graceful task by singing beneath her window—

> "Oh! there 's nothing half so sweet in life
> As Love's young dream."

She raised her head, a smile stole over her features, and concealing herself behind the window-draperies, she watched him as he wandered from flower-bed to flower-bed, selecting with a fastidiousness which sent a glow even to her heart, the fairest and richest blossoms that they could boast.

After indulging for a time in this contemplation, she hastily rang for her woman, betraying an unusual interest in the arrangement of her dress, gazed long and anxiously into the mirror, and finally joined her husband radiant with beauty and happiness.

"At last!" exclaimed Sydney, springing impetuously to meet her; "but, laggard as you have been, my best beloved, I have not the heart to chide you; the time has been well bestowed, for never did I see you look more lovely. What will Edith say to-day, when she whispered to me yesterday that you were the most beautiful creature she had ever seen! What will Lady Malcolm think of my presumption if she could scarcely credit it when she saw you warm and weary with a fatiguing walk, and could scarcely, even then, believe that you were really mine?"

And as he spoke Elphinstone wound his arm tenderly about the waist of his wife. The question was, however, an unhappy one,

as we have seen, Ida had at once attributed the incredulity of Lady Malcolm to a far different cause; and a shadow passed across her face which even the constrained smile upon her lips could not conceal, and she asked with an attempt at playfulness—

"And why should you attach any importance to the effect which I may, or may not produce upon your friend and her daughter?"

"Why!" echoed Sydney. "Can you ask me why, when you know the exultation that I feel when I know you to be admired and appreciated by all who approach you, and remember that you are mine, that I have won you to my heart, and may hold you there forever?"

"Foolish boy!" murmured his wife, tenderly; "but I suppose that I must not quarrel with such a feeling, although it is one in which I can not sympathize."

"Ida, my love, what mean you?"

"Simply, dear Sydney, that my love for *you* is so utterly independent of all extraneous excitement, nay, I will even say, so self-engrossed, that I would rather that no one should look upon you with the same eyes that I do."

Elphinstone answered with a peal of his own joyous laughter.

"Believe me when I assure you that I do not jest," said Ida, gravely.

"And believe me, Mrs. Elphinstone, when I assure you that you need be under no apprehension of the kind," replied her husband, as he wreathed a white camellia in the braids of her hair; "depend upon it that your sun is scarcely a star to any other eye than your own. There, now you are perfection; and you will leave that flower where I have placed it; will you not, dearest?"

"Certainly, if you wish it, Sydney; but remember that your friends proposed to pay us an early visit, and that we have not yet breakfasted."

"Ah, true; so we will only indulge in one more stroll through the flowers, and then abandon them for a time. I do so hope that you will like Lady Malcolm, Ida."

"You know that I am slow in attaching myself, Sydney."

"You are right;" said her husband, bending down to look into her face; "I know it well; hours and hours of torture did I suffer, before you allowed me to believe that you cared more for me than for the most indifferent of your acquaintance."

"And do you blame me, Sydney?"

"Blame you! I can not accomplish impossibilities. I should not know how to blame you if I desired to do so."

"In that case at least you would have done wrong;" said Ida, with a faint smile; "I saw and felt—" she paused.

"What?" asked Sydney, eagerly.

"Nay, do not urge me;" was her reply; "suffice it that you learned the truth at last. And now let us return to the house."

"Charming!" exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone, as she possessed herself of the bouquet which lay beside her plate, and presented her cheek to receive the kiss of her husband; "I really begin to imagine, Sydney, that the flowers reproduce themselves every night, in order to be gathered and blended so gracefully every morning. Why, this is a fit offering for an eastern queen."

"It is far better bestowed;" said her gratified husband, as he seated himself near her; "for now it adorns my wife; and I repeat, Ida, that I never saw you look so radiantly beautiful."

"Flatterer!" said Mrs. Elphinstone; "you will almost make me vain; but in truth, dear Sydney, I would not exchange these glorious blossoms, which you have so skillfully arranged, for the most costly gems that you could offer me."

The sun was shining brilliantly, and all nature was redolent of beauty and brightness. Ida was perfectly, supremely happy; she had even forgotten for the time the gnawing doubts and bitter anticipations in which she was so prone to indulge.

With her eyes fondly and tenderly fixed on the glowing and manly face of her young bridegroom, whose luxuriant curls were raised at intervals from his brow by the breeze that came through the open glass doors by which they had entered from the garden—while his large luminous eyes danced in the light of the heart's happiness, her whole being was flooded with a quiet and absorbing joy—when suddenly steps were heard on the graveled sweep that led up to the house, and Lady Malcolm and her daughter emerged from behind the belt of flowering shrubs, which had hitherto concealed their approach.

"So soon!" murmured Ida, roused from her happy reverie.

"Welcome! a thousand times welcome!" exclaimed Sydney, as he bounded across the veranda to receive the coming guests; and as his wife rose slowly from her seat, she saw him grasp in his extended hands those of the mother and daughter with a warmth which to her appeared exaggerated and uncalled for.

No trace of this feeling was however perceptible as she greeted with calm and high-bred grace the friends of her husband; and the heart of Elphinstone beat high as he detected the gaze of unequivocal admiration which Lady Malcolm fastened upon the lovely woman who stood before her.

"We are sad intruders, I fear, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone:" she said, courteously; "and visit you at a most untimely hour, but my affection for your husband would not permit me to use any thing like ceremony toward his wife, whose regard and friendship I am sincerely eager to secure. You will therefore pardon, will you not? and accept this breach of conventionality as a proof of the feeling which I am anxious to establish between us."

"I can but feel flattered, madam—"

"Nay, nay; do me the credit to believe that I am a mere egotist, unwilling to forego, even for an hour, the enjoyment of your society; and yet not quite so, as I coveted it even more for little Edith than for myself; and I feel quite sure that the selfishness of a mother will readily find its excuse in *your* eyes."

"You do Ida no more than justice, my dear Lady Malcolm, when you believe that you will be welcome to her at all hours;" said Sydney; "indeed she was reproaching me for my idleness this morning, fearful lest we should not

have terminated our breakfast before your arrival."

"In that case I will not further apologize, and I fully appreciate her kindness; and now, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, you must allow me to congratulate you on the little paradise that you have discovered here—I have rarely seen so lovely a spot."

"Is it not a pretty nest?" asked Elphinstone; "and yet, would you believe it? although we have only resided here for a few weeks, that naughty girl is urging me to exchange it for the dirt and din of London."

"Doubtlessly, Mrs. Elphinstone has some good and sufficient reason for so doing;" was the reply.

"You are right, madam, quite right;" said Ida, calmly; "we are poor, and consequently not privileged to pass our lives in a dream, however pleasant it might be to do so."

The brow of Sydney flushed, and he looked mortified and ill at ease. There was a momentary silence, which Ida was too proud to break, but which was soon terminated by the good taste and feeling of Lady Malcolm, who, taking the hand of the young hostess, said in a tone of deep affection—

"I admired you at the moment we first met, Mrs. Elphinstone, as every one must do who looks upon you, but I have now forgotten my admiration in my respect. You possess one of woman's noblest attributes—moral courage, and you are indeed worthy to be the wife of my friend's son. And do you know;" she continued in a lighter strain; "you have relieved my mind of a certain sort of dread. I have a horror of fine ladies who can not afford to divest themselves of 'the purple and fine linen' of the world—I value the picture; I care little for the gilding of the frame. Thus you see that, after after the avowal which you have so frankly and gracefully made, I shall be relieved of a thousand apprehensions, and be enabled to meet you upon equal terms; for despite the wonder which I read in the eyes of that dear boy, I can truly plead poverty, as well as yourself, and after a youth and womanhood of luxury am compelled to look the stern realities of my destiny steadily in the face."

"My dear Lady Malcolm, you astonish me!" exclaimed Elphinstone.

"I can believe it;" was the calm reply; "and yet such indeed is the case. However, as I before remarked, I do not feel privileged to inflict the details of my trials and disappointments upon Mrs. Elphinstone."

"You have at least excited alike my surprise and my curiosity;" persisted Sydney.

"They shall be gratified;" said Lady Malcolm; "when they will not entail weariness on your wife."

"I beg, madam"—commenced Ida—

"Look yonder, beneath that weeping ash;" interposed Sydney; "there is a rustic seat where we may be sheltered from both sun and wind. Shall we adjourn thither, and leave Ida to improve her acquaintance with Miss Malcolm?"

"With *Miss Malcolm!*" echoed the mother, with a smile. "Can you really have forgotten, Sydney, that your little play-fellow was christened Edith!"

"No, indeed, my dear friend, but —"

"Nay, nay, this is folly;" persisted Lady Malcolm; "Edith is still a child, and as such I should wish her to be considered. Youth passes only with too much rapidity; we need not seek to hasten its departure. Am I not right, Mrs. Elphinstone?"

Ida shrank involuntarily; but fortunately, her visitor unconscious of the new pang which she had inflicted, turned, without pausing, toward Elphinstone, and said sadly:

"Well, as I shall rejoice to have terminated my self-imposed task, and once more to forget my sorrows in the society of your amiable wife, I will, with her permission, avail myself of your suggestion; and the rather as Edith will be so great a gainer by my absence."

CHAPTER XXV.

FRESH MISGIVINGS.

SYDNEY rose and offered his arm to his mother's friend; and when they had quitted the apartment, Ida found herself alone with the fair girl who had already become to her an object of distrust.

Edith, after raising one timid glance to the face of Mrs. Elphinstone, whose eyes were riveted on the retreating figure of her husband, fixed her own upon the floor, as if wholly engrossed by the arabesques of the carpet, and thus Ida, as she wakened to her duties as a hostess, was enabled to gaze her fill for an instant upon the pure and fresh young creature before her.

It was true, as Lady Malcolm had said, that with her eyes thus vailed by their long lashes, Edith did indeed look like a mere girl; but Mrs. Elphinstone soon became aware that when those glorious eyes were raised, and beamed with intellect and emotion, the girl was suddenly transformed into the woman, and that her beauty was of no common order.

"How shall I preserve you from *ennui*, Miss Malcolm, during the absence of your mother, and—"

She paused, for Edith who had hitherto remained motionless, suddenly lifted her head with a smile of grateful pleasure so bright and ingenuous, that she felt unable to complete the sentence she had framed, or to utter the name of her husband.

"And"—she pursued; "may I hope that I shall succeed?"

"How kind you are, madam; how very kind;" faltered the blushing Edith; "in your society I should think it impossible to feel *ennui*. It is I, on the contrary—"

"I must echo the words of Lady Malcolm, and forbid all verbal ceremonies:" said Ida forcing a smile; "you are so admirable an artist that perhaps my portfolio may afford you some amusement, or—" she continued, anxious to assure herself of the extent of her companion's acquirements, and consequently of her own imaginary peril; "you are probably also a musician, in which case I will request of you to favor me by trying my piano, which is, I believe, a tolerably good one."

Edith rose unaffectedly, and approached the instrument.

"If it be really your wish, madam;" she said, modestly; "I am ready to obey you; but if you *would* do me the kindness to permit me in the first instance to be a listener, I should indeed feel grateful to you."

Mrs. Elphinstone complied with ready grace, and executed one of the most complicated of Thalberg's compositions with a brilliancy and taste which caused the cheeks of Edith to glow and her eyes to sparkle with delight and animation.

"What a glorious finger!" she exclaimed involuntarily, as Ida resigned her seat. "Ah, madam, you can never feel alone with such a talent as yours, and such an instrument to give it voice."

"You are an enthusiast, I see;" said her companion; "but now I claim your promise to afford me the gratification of becoming a listener in my turn."

"I *do* love music, I confess;" was the earnest rejoinder of Miss Malcolm, as in obedience to the bidding of her hostess she swept the keys with a mastery and purity of expression wonderful in one so young; and then glided into those exquisite 'Songs without Words' of Mendelssohn, which are the very triumph of instrumental melody.

Ida listened entranced, less by the talent displayed by this young girl than by the passionate feeling which marked her performance. Her very soul appeared to be poured forth as she played: self was forgotten for the moment; and she evidently existed only in the wondrous harmony which she awakened.

As the sounds ceased, there was silence, for Mrs. Elphinstone, herself deeply susceptible to the charm of music, was too much excited to indulge in the common venality of praise, while Edith restored to self-consciousness, was too timid to move or speak.

"Pardon me;" said Ida at length, struggling against the conflicting feelings by which she had been momentarily overcome: "but I have really been taken by surprise. You must have been a musician, Miss Malcolm, to comprehend all the powers and resources of the science so thoroughly at your age."

"I am wholly indebted to my mother for whatever efficiency I may have acquired;" replied Edith, simply; "she has spared no pains to perfect me in her favorite accomplishment; but I can never hope to rival her, although she had the marvelous self-denial to endure my discordant attempts when I was a mere urchin of four years old, and has persevered in her wearisome task ever since."

"It must long have ceased to weary her;" said Mrs. Elphinstone; "but it is not so much your execution which surprises me, as the expression with which you render passages that I should have conceived could only have been comprehended in their actual depth and significance by a wrung heart and a bruised spirit."

The eyes of Miss Malcolm fell, and a cloud of sorrow passed across her fair young brow.

"Perhaps you are right, Mrs. Elphinstone;" she faltered; "perhaps I never should indeed have understood the true language of music if I never had known suffering."

"You! Miss Malcolm, you!" exclaimed Ida; "at your age—in your sheltered position, constantly under the watchful eye of a mother—what suffering can you have known?"

"You forget, dear madam," replied the fair girl as large tears fell upon her cheeks; "that even the fond and untiring eye of a mother can not always ward off grief, and that I am already fatherless."

"Forgive me—forgive me—" said Ida, distressed at the effect of her remark; "but that was not the sorrow, that was not the struggle, to which I alluded."

"I have known no other," said Edith ingenuously.

Mrs. Elphinstone sighed. She had never known a youth like this. Her struggles and sorrows had commenced even from her girlhood. Luxury and indulgences had been powerless against the influence of passions early awakened and prematurely developed; and it was consequently with a sad curiosity that she contemplated the calm and holy expression of Edith.

Not a storm had passed over that tranquil spirit whose pages angels might have perused—not a germ of evil could be detected in that calm and placid heart which filial love suffered to fill and satisfy.

Unlike Ida herself, who had been reared in the hot-bed of fashion and ambition, forced into unhealthy mental growth, and weakened by those fatal influences by which the votaries of the world are predestined to become its victims, Edith Malcolm had been permitted to live out her childhood and her youth amid the joys and sorrows proper to her years: no idle and ill-timed flatteries, no vain prophecies of future triumphs, had polluted her young ears, and profaned her guileless heart; she had never been taught to regard love as a speculation, and marriage as an investment; her leisure had never been amused by the perusal of puerile romances, or her energies exercised in the attempt to become a heroine.

Mrs. Elphinstone had, as we have shown, been isolated from all companions of her own age, educated for display, and taught that the one great duty of her existence was self-aggrandizement.

Childhood is much more morally impressible than the generality of persons are willing to believe. Because a child rebels against the authority of a parent or a preceptor in the mere wantonness of an undisciplined will, it is often supposed that neither example nor precept has produced its intended effect; this, however, is a vital error; the bending of the twig is not more certain to decide the inclination of the tree than are early impressions to influence and pre-determine the after character.

In infancy and youth the human clay is plastic, and may consequently be molded at will; but when once it has become indurated by time, it is vain to attempt the removal of the false lines of the image; its beauties and defects will endure through life, modified indeed by circumstances, but still visible and distinct.

Strange, and almost incredible did it therefore appear to Ida that the daughter of Lady

Malcolm should have attained the age at which she had herself already listened more than once to the voice of passion, discarded suitors, and regarded herself as fully competent to decide her own destiny, without one dream of the heart-struggles which must inevitably await her; but there was something so earnest yet so calm in the tone in which Edith had said, in reply to her own observation "I have known no other," that she could not refuse to place faith in the assurance.

"So much the worse—so much the worse" —murmured the demon within her; when the stream gushes forth, it will burst its bounds; when her heart tide swells forth, it will swell and boil into a lava-flood; the passionate outgushing of her spirit to which I have just listened was never due to the inspiration of a mother's teaching. A touch, a tone, will suffice to awaken her from her dream of calm —and then—"

"And you, dear madam, you, beautiful, gifted, and beloved as you are, surely you can not have known the sorrows which you deprecate for me;" murmured a low sweet voice beside her, and Ida started as she felt the hand of Miss Malcolm laid softly on her arm; "and yet the sad train of thought into which you have fallen would almost lead me to fear—"

"You are right—quite right;" said Mrs. Elphinstone in an accent which she in vain attempted to render firm: "I *have* known many and bitter sorrows, but that is nothing—nothing—the past has been endured and may be forgotten—it is the future which makes the heart swell, and the brain giddy."

Edith drew back alarmed.

"Poor child!" said Ida, who remarked the gesture; "do *you* then never look into the future? never shrink from its probable consequences?"

"Never, madam, I am so happy in the present."

"But that very happiness tends to heighten the terrors of the future. It is soothing to look back upon the sufferings from which we have escaped—but to look back on happiness which we have lost would be too horrible! The burden of Atlas would be but a feather weight beside such a crushing, such an overwhelming agony."

Edith sank almost breathless into a chair; she could not utter a syllable.

"Forgive me," said Mrs. Elphinstone suddenly, with one of her most winning smiles, "I have done wrong to give way to such gloomy ideas, above all, when I may say with you that I am so happy in the present. I suppose that it is the jealousy of that very happiness which makes me fear to lose it. And yet it is very weak, is it not? We must not let my husband suspect that I indulge in such nervous folly.—And now for the portfolio, Miss Malcolm," she continued with forced gayety; "you will recognize some of the scenes of my sketches, for Mr. Elphinstone was anxious that on our departure from the neighborhood we should carry away with us some memorials of our sojourn; and, terrible to avow! a wife's first duty is obedience. See! here is the cottage, with Sydney, still more terrible to admit, smoking his cigar under the veranda. And here—here is the park lodge, your present home, with the glorious old beeches in the background; does it not make a pretty picture?"

With all the light-heartedness of her age, Edith had already conquered her agitation, and, as she recognized the subjects of the several sketches, she uttered repeated exclamations of delight.

"Is not Mr. Elphinstone enchanted with these lovely drawings?" she asked, artlessly; and then, without awaiting a reply, she continued: "How very, very happy you must make him; and how thankful mamma will be to know how kind, and amiable, and gifted a wife he has, for she loves him, Mrs. Elphinstone, as if he were her own son; and you can not conceive how anxious she has been to discover if you were as good as you are beautiful."

As Edith uttered these words, and ere Mrs. Elphinstone had time to reply, Lady Malcolm and her husband entered from the garden. There was a slight shade of sadness on the fine features of the widow, and even Sydney himself had for the moment lost his joyous smile. The animation of her daughter, however, soon sufficed to restore Lady Malcolm to cheerfulness; while the anxious look of his wife cleared away at once the mists which obscured the spirit of the bridegroom.

"I have a thousand thanks to offer you for your indulgence, Mrs. Elphinstone," said her visitor;" and, if I can judge by the countenance of Edith, she owes me quite as many for the delightful hour which my absence has enabled her to pass with you."

"Indeed I do, dear mamma," exclaimed the young girl, enthusiastically; "for while I have had Mrs. Elphinstone all to myself, the time has flown with such rapidity, that you seem scarcely to have been away ten minutes."

"Miss Malcolm has been delighting me, madam, by her exquisite performance on the piano," said Ida, courteously; "she is, indeed, an accomplished musician."

"I am truly gratified by your opinion," said Lady Malcolm; "and the rather as I understand from Sydney that your own proficiency in music is something marvelous. Indeed," she added with a smile which was full of warmth and affection, "if I am to believe even the half of what he has told me, I can not have one wish ungratified for the son of my dearest friend."

Ida blushed deeply.

"Sydney," she replied, "is naturally anxious to justify his choice in your eyes, but you must accept his testimony with considerable reservation."

Elphinstone retorted by passing his hand caressingly over the dark and glossy braids that lay upon her forehead.

"Ha! you have been looking at Ida's drawings," he said, as his eye fell upon the contents of the portfolio which were scattered over the table; "are they not well executed? And this sketch of the cottage is perfect. Did you recognize it, Edith? That is my property, and so jealous am I of my rights,

that I ventured to have it framed for my dressing-room."

"It is indeed beautiful, and most faithful," said Miss Malcolm; "and the spot from which it was taken must have been most judiciously chosen."

"Oh, Ida's eye never deceives her," said Sydney, proudly; "but in order that you may do it full justice, will you come as far as the spot where she was seated?"

"Willingly," was the reply of Edith, as she rose with the drawing in her hand; "the pleasure will be twofold, as I shall by so doing be enabled not only to appreciate at its full value the sketch of Mrs. Elphinstone, but also to have a nearer view of your lovely garden, which is indeed a wilderness of sweets. Will you permit me this indulgence, my dear madam?" she asked with an appealing look toward her hostess.

The assent of Ida was instantly but somewhat coldly given, and in the next moment Sydney and his beautiful companion disappeared.

"How happy you have made that amiable young man, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," said the elder lady, as soon as they were alone; "it is impossible to express the delight with which I listened to his animated description of your many excellences. Upon me, who have latterly been familiar only with the shady side of existence, his glowing and beautiful joy produced the effect of sudden sunshine. Indeed, our meeting, his marriage, and all by which I am so suddenly surrounded, appears like a bright dream. Grateful am I, nevertheless, to feel that it is real and tangible; I loved his mother so deeply."

"Sydney also adores her memory," said Ida; "by his description she must have been beautiful."

"She was, and I need not tell you that her beauty is reflected in her son; but she was more than beautiful, and those who knew her best forgot the charms of her person in the perfection of her heart and mind. Poor Elinor! she deserved a better fate."

"Was she not happy, then?" asked her companion.

"Far from it, my young friend; hers was the mere fleeting happiness of a few brief months. Dazzled by her beauty and fascinated by her many admirable qualities, which made her the idol of her circle, Mr. Elphinstone, at that period a man of considerable wealth, as well as eminently handsome, won her affections, and for a time appeared worthy of his good fortune, but unhappily his tastes and habits were ill-calculated for domestic life. He soon wearied of the monotony of home, and sought for excitement in a world which was but too ready to welcome him back into its vortex. But Elinor never complained; she idolized her husband, and she bore her trials with the fortitude and resignation of an angel. To her he was ever the first and only love of her young heart, and the father of her child."

"And did she long endure such an existence?" inquired Ida, whose cheeks had assumed the hue of Parian marble.

"For years," replied Lady Malcolm, who, in her own emotion overlooked that of her listener; "ay, even when to neglect was added ruin, she was true to herself, and to the faith which she had plighted to one of the most ungrateful and ungenerous of men."

"And yet," murmured Ida, in an unsteady voice; "you think that he *did* love her once."

"Of that fact there can be no doubt," pursued the speaker; "he loved her madly, but there was no principle, no stability in his love. Essentially selfish, he gradually learned to look upon her as an obstacle in his path of pleasure and dissipation, and he thrust her from it as he would have done any other impediment which might have presented itself."

"Strange!" said Ida, moodily; "that Sydney should never have told me one word of this."

"By no means," observed Lady Malcolm; "for even Sydney himself has but a vague idea of the extent of his mother's sufferings. No, Elinor would rather have endured a thousand deaths than have breathed into the ear of her boy one word of blame connected with her erring husband. Almost a stranger in his own house, it was only at rare intervals that Mr. Elphinstone saw his son, and, fortunately, just as the boy had attained an age when the true position of his mother must have necessarily become evident to him, his wretched father died, and thus, the tears which he mingled with those of his surviving parent, were free from the bitterness which must otherwise have rendered his grief tenfold more poignant. To this moment, therefore, Sydney is able to name his father without a blush, and to regret him without a misgiving, and this is the pious work of his angel mother, whose heart was soothed to the last by the respect which her son bore to the memory of his dead father."

"And yet he slighted her—"

"And ruined her—" added Lady Malcolm.

"Oh, that was nothing, nothing," exclaimed Ida, her eyes flashing with passionate emotion; "when once he had torn down the idol from the shrine at which he had once worshiped, it mattered little that he should send away the jewels in which it had been decked; the trampled fragments of a broken heart could ill have brooked the tinseled mockeries which are suited only to a happy one."

"But you forget that she was a mother."

"I should have forgotten all save my own wrongs," replied Mrs. Elphinstone, in the same excited tone in which she had just spoken; "all—even my child."

"My dear young friend," said Lady Malcolm, with a sad smile, as she pressed the hand of her companion in her own; "you know not the depth and fervor of a mother's love, and see how she has been rewarded for her self-abnegation. See how all her hopes for her idolized boy have been fulfilled. Could she look up from the grave, fondly and proudly as she loved him, she could not wish Sydney other than he is."

At this moment, a peal of clear, ringing, graceful laughter sounded from the garden, and Ida, who had hitherto been so absorbed

in the recital of Lady Malcolm, that she had ceased to dwell upon the prolonged absence of her husband, sudddenly raised her head, and gazed earnestly through the open window.

Sydney was in hot pursuit of a late butterfly, and bare-headed, with his chestnut curls dancing in the wind, and his cheeks flushed with eagerness, was bounding over the flower beds with all the elasticity of an antelope, in his attempt to capture the parti-colored fugitive.

As her glance rested on him, the lips of his wife parted with a proud and happy smile, but in the next moment, an expression of pain passed over her head, and she hastily averted her eyes.

"Those young hearts are lighter than ours at this moment, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," observed Lady Malcolm, as she wiped away a lingering tear; "I am grieved to see that I have infected you with my own melancholy; we will talk no more upon this unhappy subject. It might indeed have been more judicious had I not touched on it at all, but my enduring affection for my poor Elinor renders me selfish; it is such a relief to me to be enabled to dwell upon her memory, and to remember that the death of the pure in heart is less an agony than an ovation; that the chime of each succeeding hour is a call of harmony, a summons of peace and love; that life ebbs away like the sunset billows of a summer evening—like the gradual closing of the perfumed chalice of a flower—or the severe and solemn folding together of the spirit wings, which are so soon to expand into their full and perfect proportions on another and a brighter shore, where they will never again be furled."

"I thank you for the confidence which you have reposed in me, Lady Malcolm," said Ida, as she threw herself back in her seat, and strewed the carpet around it with the scattered leaves of the blossoms which Sydney had so carefully arranged for her, only a few hours previously. "It is, at times, desirable to dwell upon the experiences of others; the past reads a wholesome lesson to the present, and I confess that I, for one, despise the cowardice which shrinks from the effort of looking steadily forward, even upon a forbidding prospect, or backward, upon the struggle of human endurance."

"Happily," said her companion; "trials like those of my dear lost friend are rare indeed. Hers was a life which always appeared to me to convey a great and touching moral, but it was not the less, on that account, an existence of wretchedness."

"Wretchedness, indeed!" echoed Ida, as she swept her hands across her brows; "to be decked by the fingers of love, only for the sacrifice;" and as the hand was withdrawn, the camellia which had hitherto been nestled amid the folds of her hair was crushed within it.

"I have been wrong, very wrong," said Lady Malcolm; "I have quite unstrung your nerves. Only look, you have actually destroyed the magnificent bouquet which I admired so much on my arrival."

"Oh, pray do not grieve over it," said Ida, with a bitter smile; "it *was* beautiful, yes, very beautiful; I am obliged to admit that fact, but it has pleased and amused me for a time, and consequently has done all that I had a right to demand from it—and it is beautiful even in its ruins, is it not? though it can never again be restored to its first glorious splendor. That, however, matters little, as its charm must sooner or later have decayed with its freshness; so that you see, my dear madam, its destruction was a mere question of time."

"Oh, Ida, such a butterfly we have captured!" exclaimed Sydney, as he sprang into the room; "only look at the brilliancy of its coloring."

But Ida's eyes were not upon the insect, they were riveted upon a bouquet in the hand of Miss Malcolm, the counterpart of that which lay scattered at her feet.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BOUQUET.

How little can men appreciate the trifles out of which a woman's love is ingenious in creating auguries of good or evil. It was a mere common-place courtesy on the part of Mr. Elphinstone to offer to Miss Malcolm some of the flowers of which she expressed her admiration; and it is probable that had he done so with less attention to their arrangement, even Ida herself might have been careless of the fact; but, unfortunately, Sydney had not yet forgotten the delight evinced by his wife at the graceful grouping of the bouquet which he had combined for her that morning; and, accordingly, as he prepared a second for Edith, he said gayly:

"You have an artist's eye as well as Mrs. Elphinstone, and I dare not, therefore, do otherwise than exert my best skill in order to render my offering acceptable."

"A thousand thanks!" was the artless reply; "nothing could be more perfect than that which you arranged for Mrs. Elphinstone, so do not attempt any variation, but let me have it, flower by flower, and even leaf by leaf, a fac-simile of hers."

"Now for an effort of memory," laughed the light-hearted young man; "your imperious mandate shall be obeyed, and we will then compare the two, in order to judge of my success."

The flowers were, therefore, gathered, and grouped with the same fastidious care as he had evinced on the previous occasion, when they were a heart-offering to his idolized wife; and they had scarcely been transferred to Edith, and received their due meed of admiring approval, than the quick eye of Sydney detected the butterfly which subsequently became the object of his pursuit.

Little, indeed, did he imagine the pang that he had inflicted on her whom he would gladly have shielded from every shade of suffering. To him Ida was the type alike of physical and moral perfection; and he could as soon have doubted the beauty of her person as the strength and purity of her mind. Wholly engrossed by her image, he was utterly in

different to the attractions of all the rest of the sex, beyond the natural gratification of looking on a lovely face, as he would have looked on a fine landscape, or a gorgeous sunset; and that she should entertain one doubt of his affection, one mistrust of his devotion, was an idea which had never for an instant crossed his mind.

Unlike Ida herself, their disparity of age was a fact to which his thoughts never reverted; unlike her, he never looked into the future; with the natural buoyancy and confidence of a young fresh spirit, he lived in the engrossing happiness of the present; and if, by chance, he glanced forward beyond the passing hour, it was with a sanguine conviction that his after-life must be as bright as it had hitherto proved.

There was always a golden thread woven into every web of the heart-loom of Sydney Elphinstone, for his was not a nature to dwell upon the dark side of existence; with all his good and endearing qualities he possessed much of his father's reckless temperament; and, as yet, no sorrow had come to chill, no cloud to overcast it. Even the immediate question of his coming struggle with the world in which he must so soon force his way by his own energy and talent, he put from him, as we have shown, as a vague future far and dim in the distance, instead of a stern reality with which he would ere long be called upon to grapple.

He was resolved to accomplish great things: he admitted to himself that he must do so for Ida's sake, and he believed that he was ready for the combat, while in fact he had neglected to gird on his weapon. Any relenting on the part of Mr. Trevanion, he neither anticipated nor desired; he felt proud to think that he should need no extraneous aid in surrounding the idol of his love with the luxuries to which she had been accustomed from her girlhood; but, meanwhile, he satisfied himself with resolutions, and remained inactive.

How many Sydney Elphinstones there are in the world!

After one long searching look, first at the unlucky flowers, and next at the fair owner, Ida turned toward Lady Malcolm, and said with a sarcastic smile:

"Your daughter is, I presume, an entomologist, my dear madam, and consequently will be gratified by this addition to her cabinet."

"I—oh, no," exclaimed Edith, shuddering, "I could never endure to impale insects on pins, and poison them with camphor. What would this poor butterfly be, sacrificed to science—for I believe that is the admitted, or rather I should say, presumed apology for destroying so much that is bright and beautiful—what would it be beside what it was, as it nestled in the heart of the flower, or floated on the sunshiny air, instinct with life and enjoyment?

"No, no; give me birds upon the wing, bees among the blossoms, fish sporting in the clear waters—any thing and every thing that is fulfilling the purposes and profiting by the privileges for which it was created; but I should as soon dream of living among mummies when I could secure the society of my sentient fellow-creatures, as I should of contenting myself with the classified skeletons of moths and beetles when I could see in them all their beauty and variety, unmutilated and unharmed."

"Why, Edith," said Lady Malcolm, with a fond glance at her daughter, whose cheeks were flushed with animation, "you have suddenly become quite eloquent."

"And I have not done yet, mamma," was the reply, "for when Mr. Elphinstone's butterfly has been properly applauded, and that he has once more restored it to liberty, as I trust he will do, I am going to claim Mrs. Elphinstone's admiration for my beautiful bouquet. It is not gorgeous, my dear madam!"

"Extremely so."

"But do you not remark any thing peculiar in its arrangement?"

"I think it very gracefully arranged."

"Does it resemble any other you have ever seen?"

"There is a family likeness in all bouquets, Miss Malcolm."

"Oh, but, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, this was intended by Mr. Elphinstone to be precisely like your own; and do you not think that he has succeeded perfectly?"

"It is more essential that you should think so, Miss Malcolm."

"Well, then, in that case, the success is complete, for I do not believe that we could, were they once out of our sight, recognize our own property."

"I scarcely agree with you," said Ida, with an ambiguous smile, as she pointed to the flowery ruin at her feet; "yours has as yet all the charm of novelty, and is, consequently, faultless; mine, on the contrary, had ceased to please my eye, so I amused myself, as you perceive, by destroying what little value it had left."

Edith made no reply; there was something in the tone of Mrs. Elphinstone's voice which reminded her of a portion of their interview of the morning, and it was consequently a relief to her when she was summoned to the veranda by Sydney to see him give liberty to his painted captive. She was still watching the languid flight of the benumbed insect, when Lady Malcolm rose to take her leave.

"Farewell, Mrs. Elphinstone," she said affectionately, as she extended her hand: "I see, with great compunction, that I have thoroughly saddened you; but only promise soon to visit the Lodge and I will strive to be a more cheerful companion. You are too susceptible, my dear young friend, and must struggle against a depth of feeling which can not fail, should you encourage it, to cast many a shadow over your path. Dwell rather on the happiness of the present than on the sorrows of the past. You are now commencing life in earnest, and must not exhaust your sensibilities on ideal or irremediable evils. Doubtlessly we have all suffered more or less, but let us now at least be happy.

"Look upon me as a mother, and on Edith as a sister, if you will indeed permit me to make such a request; I already feel that I shall love you, and I am anxious, in my turn, to gain your affection."

"I thank you, Lady Malcolm, for your good opinion, and I am grateful for your kindness,"

said Ida, with constraint, "nor shall it be my fault if I do not profit by your advice; unfortunately, however, we can not always control our feelings, nor can we compel happiness at will."

"You are right, no doubt, but we can at least accept it when it is placed within our reach; so clear that fair brow, and forget the sorrows of others in your own brighter fortune."

Ida forced a smile as she echoed the parting compliments of her guest, and together they passed into the garden, where Sydney and his young companion were still engaged in watching the crippled insect which had evidently suffered from its temporary imprisonment.

"I will escort you to the entrance of the lane, my dear Lady Malcolm, while Ida puts on her bonnet for our morning ramble," said Sydney, as he offered an arm to each of the departing guests, "I give you five minutes, love," he added, as he turned and nodded gayly to his wife, and then the party was lost to sight behind the leafy screen of the flower-shrubs.

Ida stood for an instant motionless, and then she turned back into the house and cast herself into a seat; she was exhausted by her efforts at self-control. She felt dispirited and almost reckless.

"He could not even suffer her to depart without him—" she murmured; "fool that I was to exult over those worthless flowers because *he* gathered them! Did he not do the same for her? I might have foreseen this—I might have known that it must have come to this! But so soon—so very soon—shall I be able to endure the existence which I foresee must henceforth be mine? But may I not deceive myself? He is so frank, so guileless—surely love can not die out like an exhausted taper, while it is yet so young—and she, too, she is still a mere child—no, no, the time is not, can not yet be come—Sydney is the slave of beauty, and my beauty is unfaded. I have sacrificed all for him, and the sacrifice is as yet unrequited—Lady Malcolm is right, I must strive to be happy while I may, and when the struggle proves fruitless, then indeed—ay, then! but the future shall be left to work out its own purposes. I am no puling girl to tremble at the task which is allotted to me, it shall be done, done even to the death."

For a moment Mrs. Elphinstone remained motionless, her head buried in her hand, and her eyes closed; but suddenly she rose, walked steadily to the mirror, examined herself earnestly, smoothed the disordered bands of her hair, took a book from the table, and then returned calmly to her chair. It is probable that she neither knew the nature of the volume of which she thus quietly possessed herself, nor the page at which she had opened it, although for a time she appeared absorbed in its contents; for, after the lapse of a few moments, she relinquished her occupation, and carefully collecting the scattered leaves and blossoms with which the floor was strewn, walked with them into the veranda, and flung them, handful by handful, to the wind, until they had totally disappeared, after which she resumed her book and her seat, and awaited with a calm brow and a steady pulse, the return of her husband.

The five minutes had grown into ten; she glanced once toward the French timepiece on the console: Sydney had been gone more than half an hour, and still the proud brow remained unruffled, and the clear eye unclouded. Suddenly his quick step was heard upon the gravel-walk, his elastic bound from the yielding turf, and her husband stood before her.

"What, not ready yet, my love?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"I beg your pardon, my dear Sydney," said Ida, with one of her sweetest smiles; "this terrible book has so engrossed me, and—" she added, glancing at the clock, but still retaining the sunniness of her expression, "you have returned so soon."

"Soon!" echoed Elphinstone, looking in the same direction. "Why, I have a thousand apologies to make to you; I had no idea that I had been away so long."

"Oh, not a word of excuse, dear Sydney, not a word, I entreat you," was the ready rejoinder, "in the society of those we love, time passes like a dream."

"Few are so well aware of that fact as myself," said Elphinstone, "and, above all, when we are *talking* of those we love; and we have not spared you, Ida, on our way to the lodge."

"Ha! you walked to the lodge?"

"I did indeed, though I had no such intention when I left home, but it was so delightful to me to hear Lady Malcolm and Edith describe the impression which you had made upon them, that I quite forgot how the minutes were going by."

"I am much indebted to them."

"Not a whit. They are sensible women, and estimate you at your proper value. So, what with the memories of the past, and the impressions of the present, I thoroughly enjoyed my walk."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"Do you know," exclaimed Sydney, throwing himself down upon the ottoman on which the foot of his wife rested, "I esteem myself the happiest man on the whole earth. I can scarcely understand, even to this moment, how I ever won the love of such a woman as yourself; and now there comes to me an accession of happiness in the society of my mother's dearest friend, and her gentle unsophisticated daughter."

"Poor Sydney!" said his wife, as she passed her slender fingers carelessly over his clustering curls.

"*Poor* Sydney! The adjective is misplaced," was the fond retort, as he drew the small hand to his lips; "I am rich, rich beyond my wildest dreams. Are *you* not my own? Do *you* not love me?"

"Tenderly."

"I know it—I have had proof of it—and I can feel that you can sympathize in my new-found gratification. My poor mother always coveted for me the regard of Lady Malcolm, for whom she herself felt the affection of a sister."

"I am delighted that you should have secured it."

"And you, Ida, you also; she admires you beyond measure."

"I am honored by her good opinion."

"And that sweet, artless girl—is she not charming?"

"Very charming—and very beautiful."

"Yes," said Sydney, somewhat less impetuously than he had yet spoken; "she certainly is beautiful in a certain style."

"Oh, my love," exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone, deprecatingly; "let us have no reservations, no criticisms, as regards Miss Malcolm's beauty. There can be but one opinion; Greuze could not have desired a more perfect subject for one of his exquisite pictures."

"Well—perhaps—but, after all, that fair beauty is somewhat *fade;* it is but the mere twilight of actual loveliness."

"We sometimes weary of glare," said Mrs. Elphinstone, still in the same low, endearing tone.

"Of glare, yes—but that implies something meretricious and heartless; I was not desecrating beauty by such associations."

"And then, Miss Malcolm is so accomplished—so fascinating."

"So she is; she is full of natural talent, and has thoroughly profited by her opportunities. You say that she is an admirable musician, and she is certainly a wonderful artist for her age."

"And we have only seen her twice!—she may yet astonish us by her proficiency in other accomplishments."

"I hope not, for I confess that I should have no sympathy with a female Crichton; and would rather look upon her as a good, amiable little girl, remarkable only for her extraordinary talents for drawing and music."

"So be it, my dear Sydney; and therefore, until our acquaintance becomes more intimate, Miss Edith Malcolm shall be to us only one of the most beautiful and the most talented girls we have ever met, or are likely to meet."

"An arrangement with which she has every reason to be well satisfied, I think," said Elphinstone, gayly; "but one which is nevertheless no more than is her due. And now, what of our walk, Ida?"

"It is too late, dear."

"Too late? Why I have but exceeded my time by twenty minutes."

"But those twenty minutes have rendered it impossible for me to accompany you. I have letters to write, and the post leaves early."

"Can you not postpone them until to-morrow?"

"I regret to say that they must be dispatched to-day."

"How confoundedly provoking!" exclaimed Sydney, rising to his feet; "and what am I to do with myself while you are engaged in writing?"

"Can you not walk to the Lodge, and assist Miss Malcolm with the foreground of her sketch, as you proposed to do?"

"By Jove! not a bad idea; but then, we can not dispense with you, Ida, for you were to be the prominent figure."

"Oh," said Mrs. Elphinstone, forcing a laugh; "you have an excellent memory, and do not need my presence. You will not find it more difficult to sketch a figure with which you are familiar than to combine a bouquet after a given model"

"But I can not bear to be parted from you so long."

"A mere sentimental sophism, my dear Sydney; half an hour soon passes away when we are in the society of those we love."

"Then why strive to make my morning wearisome to me?"

"Sydney!"

"Nay, Ida dear, do not look displeased; but after having hurried back as I did in the hope of a long ramble with you before dinner, I confess that I am terribly disappointed."

"And did you then hurry back so much, my poor Sydney?" said his wife, with another glance at the timepiece; "I had no idea of it."

"It is nevertheless the fact," replied her husband, somewhat impatiently; "for, as we went, Lady Malcolm lingered talking over old times, and I was anxious not to make you wait."

"Nor did you, as you must have seen, my love. A book is always so pleasant a companion when one is alone; and then, when I discontinued reading for a moment, it was so delightful to feel that you were happily engaged with friends who could thoroughly appreciate you, that, believe me, you have nothing to regret. I am not a child, Sydney, I know that I can not expect to engross either your time or your affections; and therefore I can not begin too early to accustom myself to a privation to which I must submit, sooner or later."

"My dear Ida, you freeze me."

"I have neither the wish nor the intention to do so. Am I not arguing rationally?"

"The heart does not reason, and consequently I have no reply to make."

"Well, then, we will be unreasonable, and you shall be rewarded for your kind intentions. In five minutes I will return equipped for our walk, and the unlucky letters shall be postponed till to-morrow."

"There's a good girl; I have *such* a view to show you."

"But you must also promise me a dry path," said Ida, as she coquettishly extended toward him her small and symmetrical foot, delicately confined in a boot of black silk.

"I will promise you any thing, and every thing."

And the bride and bridegroom started for their stroll.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A NEW HOME.

A FORTNIGHT after the occurrences detailed in our last chapter, Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone were installed in a small but sheltered and detached cottage near Brompton, face to face with the realities of their worldly position.

The velvet and satin draperies to which Ida had been accustomed from her infancy, were exchanged for modest chintz; showy luxuries for unobtrusive comforts, and a train of powdered and liveried domestics for three female servants. Even with one of these, her own personal attendant, she had been anxious to dispense, but the proposal had proved so unpalatable to her husband, that she had for-

borne to urge the point; although, ignorant as she was of the actual value of money, she could not help suspecting that the three hundred a year, which while under her father's roof had barely sufficed for the expenses of her toilet, must be very inadequate for the support of five individuals, two of whom were unaccustomed to practice economy in any shape.

Sydney, however, assured her so confidently, that when he had once established himself in chambers, he should not be long before he obtained a brief, that she willingly lent herself to the illusion; and declared that she had nothing to regret save the prospect of his absence.

"And even at that I will not repine," she said; "I should indeed be selfish, did I permit myself to do so, while you are toiling to secure my comfort. Have I not my music, my painting, and my books to occupy me? and, more than all, shall I not be occupied for hours in listening for your tread and anticipating your return? How wise it was of your excellent mother, my dear Sydney, to educate you for a profession, and thus render you independent of the world; and how little did I suspect, who regarded you as a mere idle young man of fashion, that you were indeed 'one learned in law.'"

"Ida," exclaimed her delighted husband; "you are an admirable creature to content yourself with such a home as this. Could you only guess the misgiving with which I brought you here! I will not say that I apprehended reproaches, or even remonstrances; I never for a moment did you so much injustice; but had you looked sad or disappointed, it would have made me wretched."

"Sad! disappointed!" echoed Mrs. Elphinstone, as she looked round the simple apartment with a glance of exultation; "I declare to you, Sydney, that for weeks past I have not felt so happy or so light of heart."

And she told the truth, for she was *alone* with her husband: Lady Malcolm and her daughter being still resident at the Lodge. Mr. Elphinstone expected shortly to be called to the bar; his connections were powerful, his person attractive, and his address eminently prepossessing; he was, therefore, in every respect calculated to shine in the profession to which he was about to devote himself; and not one dread of failure oppressed his spirit. He had been welcomed back with enthusiasm at his club, and warmly congratulated on his good fortune in securing the hand of the beautiful Miss Trevanion.

"Never mind, Syd., though the old fellow should sulk for a time," had one of his intimate friends said confidentially: "he must come round at last, for he has no other child, and he hates his family with a good honest hatred that will prove substantial enough to last his life; so you need have no fears for the future. I only wish that I had as fair a chance of coming in for a princely fortune."

"Let him keep his money," was the proud reply; "I ask nothing of him. My career is plain before me, and I am ready to hew out my own path to affluence. What has been done, may be done again."

"Ha! what, you have come back to us once more, truant," was his greeting from a fashionable countess, in whose morning-room he lounged away a spare half hour before his return to Brompton, as she placed two of her jeweled fingers in his hand; "but do you know that you have been a very naughty boy! And now I see you distinctly, do you know that you have a very married look! How is Mrs. Elphinstone? By the by, I shall want you at my concert on Tuesday next. No disclaimers! You can surely be spared for an hour or two by this time. We must have no monopolies, and, besides, at your age it would really be too absurd were you to degenerate into a mere married man. You must keep up your connections; you must, indeed, for remember that if you neglect the world, the world will soon return the compliment."

"My world is home," said Sydney, courageously.

"Ha, yes; no doubt; very proper; you have not long been a husband, but that kind of thing can't last. Is Mrs. Elphinstone as handsome as ever?"

"Even more so—in my eyes."

"That is very nice. I am glad of it—sincerely glad of it. I hope that she will wear well, although your dark beauties seldom do; but in her case I hope it will be otherwise; it would be unpleasant for you, and mortifying for her, should she fall off while you are in the very prime of life."

"I see no prospect of such a catastrophe;" said Sydney, with an uneasy smile.

"Nevertheless, it is certain," persisted the lady, as she swept back a ringlet of a very doubtful shade of auburn; "that fair women retain their youth and freshness much longer than brunettes."

Elphinstone bit his lips to control his indignation.

"Poor Lord Downmere!" resumed the countess, suddenly breaking into a laugh; "what a ridiculous figure you caused him to make at that memorable fête at Richmond, where you enacted the *rôle* of Lochinvar, and ran off with his bride. I shall never forget it. It was decidedly the best thing of the season; not to mention that the poor man was a martyr to the gout for the whole period of your honeymoon. He will never forgive you, Mr. Elphinstone, never, never. Do you know I am quite delighted that you happened to call when I was alone, for you were always a favorite of mine, and I quite enjoy our little confidential conversation. Of course Mr. Trevanion has forgiven you, and all has ended like a French Vaudeville. By the by, will you come to my box to-morrow night, and see Dejazet? She is inimitable this season; a perfect evergreen."

At this moment the groom of the chambers announced some other guests, and Elphinstone bowed himself out. As he slowly made his way through the square, however his face had lost its usual sunny expression; he had winced more than once under the sting of the Countess's ill-judged remarks, and the smart still remained.

That his idolized Ida should be made the theme of affected condolence—she whose grace

and beauty had thrown a host of titled triflers into the shade—was a mortification which he could ill brook. The world had always treated him so gently that he was unprepared for comments like those to which he had been compelled to listen. What right had others to speculate upon contingencies on which he himself had never bestowed a thought!

Poor Sydney! He had yet to learn that no individual who ventures to disregard the conventionalities of society ever escapes its censure or its ridicule, and that it is far easier to resent than to despise them.

"Why, Elphinstone, can that be you?" exclaimed a familiar voice, as he turned into Grosvenor Place, and an exquisitely gloved hand was passed through his arm; "tired of 'love's delights' and the 'turtle-nest' in the country, hey? I'm rejoiced to know it. We've missed you sadly, you adventurous Benedict. What an *escapade!* On my honor it was too bad stealing a march upon your friends in that way, and leaving pretty Mary Maitland to wear the willow."

"Nonsense, Lord Charles, Lady Mary was no more to me than a very agreeable acquaintance."

"Be that as it may, my dear fellow, I tell you that she has worn the willow, and worn it very gracefully too. That idiot Banfield of the Blues having, I suppose, heard that it is easy to catch a heart on the rebound, was imbecile enough to offer himself before you had evaporated a fortnight, and was dismissed for his pains. Suspicious, hey?"

"Of what?" asked Sydney, pettishly.

"Of what? why of your influence over the affections of your 'very agreeable acquaintance.' Young ladies of seventeen do not usually dismiss the heir-presumptive to a peerage quite so cavalierly, unless they have either a hope or a regret to indulge."

"You are really not justified in making so free a use of a lady's name;" said Elphinstone with indignation; "I must beg—"

"Pho, pho;" laughed his companion; "I may surely canvass the capriees of my own cousin, without your looking pistols and broad-swords at me. Why, my dear fellow, you could do no more if I had been whispering pretty things to your wife. There! there! keep your temper—first you want to quarrel with me because I talk of a possibility, and now you are chaffing like a caged panther because I hint at an impossibility."

"Understand, Lord Charles—"

"Yes, yes; I know. No one admired Miss Trevanion more than I did, and no one is more disposed to admire Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone—'soberly,' as Lady Betty says; but you are well aware that I am the most harmless fellow in the world; besides I quite comprehend that your position is a peculiar one, a very peculiar one; a fact which I shall be careful never to lose sight of. Still the disparity is not so very great, and will appear even less for the next eight or ten years, after which you may, without exercising any very great amount of philosophy, say with the French king, '*Après moi, le deluge.*'"

"Lord Charles Glenhurst, I wish you good morning;" said Sydney, suddenly stopping, and resolutely shaking off the arm of his companion.

"There again!" exclaimed his obtuse lordship; "what a tetchy fellow you are. But I am determined not to quarrel with you. Come, I am on my way to the club."

"And I have business in the opposite direction," was the curt rejoinder.

"Well, good-morning then, since you will have it so. We shall soon meet again; and meanwhile, do me the favor to offer my best respects to Mrs. Elphinstone."

"Poor Syd!" was the mental apostrophe of the young nobleman as he pursued his walk; "judging from the change in his temper, I suspect that he has caught a tartar. He would have done better to marry little Mary."

"Driveling idiot!" was the muttered comment of Elphinstone; "*he* to talk of whispering pretty nothings to Ida!—He who is not worthy to pronounce her name!—and that is a man who calls himself my friend—my friend!—what a bitter mockery of the term. And then I, fool that I was! suffered him to see that he had ruffled me. A pleasant morning I have passed, truly."

Sydney was enlarging his experience of mankind. Often, in the intoxication of his happiness and triumph, had he felt himself to be the object of universal envy; he had yet to learn that for one subtle perfume which is burnt upon the altar of the world by its votaries, for a fellow-man, a thousand fetid odors are cast into the flame to poison the surrounding atmosphere.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRIENDS.

The Elphinstones had not taken possession of their suburban retreat above a month before it became quite the fashion with a "certain set," to make a pilgrimage to the cottage which was now their home.

A few were prompted by good-will, or at least by kindness of heart; but the principal number were led there by idleness and curiosity, which they excused to themselves during their drive by sundry pithy apothegms, such as, "Well, willful woman must have her way," "As the tree falls, it lies," etc., relieved by expressions of wonder as to how the pampered heiress would contrive to exist with her penniless husband; on the ridiculous nature of her position, tied for life to a mere boy; and on rather lax speculations as to the probable result of so unnatural a match.

"But, my dear marchioness," said a rouged and ringleted dowager to her equally faded companion, as they rolled in a well-padded chariot toward Brompton; "if she should really repent and leave him, it is easy to judge that she will not inflict upon herself the tedium of the Arches Court; and she is handsome enough to avoid that infliction whenever she pleases; would it not be disagreeable to be involved in an affair of the kind?"

"Why should it?" asked her companion, without unclosing her eyes, as she lay back behind the rose-colored blind of the carriage-window; "we are not the keepers of her conscience; and, meanwhile, until the catastrophe

takes place, we must not forget that she will be quite an acquisition. The men will be all curiosity—I need say nothing of the women; and what with her beauty and her musical talents, she will amply reward the risk; besides, poor thing! she will feel grateful, no doubt, that she is not overlooked in her poverty."

"You are right, quite right," was the equally careless rejoinder; "and Sydney Elphinstone, although he has made such a fool of himself, may also prove a very accommodating resource; and will be glad enough, I dare say, to accept an ivory for the opera, or a stray concert ticket, which he can no longer afford to purchase, when his escort may be desirable; so that, after all, we are perhaps acting judiciously in lending our countenance to this very absurd couple."

"For my part," said the Marchioness of Crichdale; "I confess that I shall be curious to see the haughty beauty who dismissed my cousin, Sir Mark Merivale, with a smile and a courtesy, doing the honors of a cottage in the purlieus of London; it must be quite a comedy."

"*Comédie larmoyante*, I should think," sneered Lady Martha Swaincote, as the equipage drew up at the door of a leaf-embowered and verandaed dwelling, overgrown by honeysuckle and creeping roses. "Bless me! why surely we have made a mistake, and have intruded on the back-scene of an opera ballet."

But no; their tagged and powdered footman was duly informed by the neat waiting-woman who answered the gate-bell that this was, indeed, the residence of Mrs. Elphinstone, and moreover that her mistress was at home.

After a rapid glance over the exterior of the cottage, and a hope, expressed considerably above a whisper, that they should not suffer from damp feet, as they measured with their eyes the length of the gravel-walk over which they were compelled to advance in order to reach the house, the two great ladies at length made up their minds to alight; and, preceded by the female servant, and followed by their own parti-colored attendant, they overcame the difficulty, and found themselves in the small entrance-hall, whence a door, carefully sheltered by a *battant* of crimson baize, gave ingress to the drawing-room.

As they were announced, Mrs. Elphinstone rose quietly from the *dormeuse* in which she had been reclining, engaged upon a new work which Sydney had brought from town on the previous day, and advanced a step or two to meet them.

Nothing could be more simple, and, at the same time, more elegant, than her morning costume; for, free for a time from all doubt and all mistrust, Ida took a secret pride in adorning herself, and thus eliciting the admiration of her husband.

Nor had she neglected to extend the fascination of good taste and refinement to all about her. Even Sydney himself could scarcely recognize his home after she had become its inmate.

A few pounds, judiciously expended, had done wonders. Snowy draperies tempering the bright colors of the chintz hangings; graceful toys scattered over the tables, *jardinières* filled with exotics, whose perfume filled the apartment, gave a summer aspect to the small but pretty room, which rendered the absence of more costly ornaments overlooked, or at least disregarded.

"My dear Mrs. Elphinstone," said the marchioness, as she extended her hand, and then languidly threw herself upon a sofa; "you have not forgotten me, I trust; and see, I have brought Lady Martha Swaincote, who was as anxious as myself to renew her acquaintance with you; what an age it is since we have met! Never, you know, since the eventful evening when you concluded one of the most charming fêtes of the season by a *coup de théâtre*— But we will not revert to a subject which may be painful to you."

"By no means," said Ida, with a calm smile; "why should it be so, when I am one of the happiest women upon earth?"

"In that case I have committed no indiscretion," replied her noble friend; "and am delighted to be able to congratulate you; for really marriage is such a lottery at the best, that when persons really run a risk as you did, it is quite comforting to know that they have no reason to repent."

"I am not aware that I ran any risk, madam;" retorted Ida, haughtily; "I knew Mr. Elphinstone to be a man of honor."

"Of course, my dear, of course;" interposed Lady Martha with affected gravity; "our friend was not intending to infer any doubt of your husband's honor, but of his stability. He was so very young, that she dreaded lest he should have mistaken a mere transitory fancy for a solid attachment."

"Just so;" acquiesced the marchioness, raising her glass to her eye, and glancing leisurely about her; "Lady Martha has expressed my true meaning; and I really was apprehensive that things might not turn out well; for, setting aside the extreme youth of Mr. Elphinstone, you must be aware that you could both of you have done much better. That, however, is of course your own affair."

"I am rejoiced that your ladyship concedes so much," said her hostess with the air of an empress.

"I am, I assure you, quite delighted;" pursued the lady; "and really you have a very pretty little house; is it not, Lady Martha? I am actually glad to have seen it, for the marquis has a widowed aunt who was silly enough to make an imprudent marriage, and who being now compelled to live upon a very limited jointure, is looking out for a residence suited to her means. I will mention this cottage to her, as she may perhaps find a similar one in the neighborhood, and she would be a charming companion for Mrs. Elphinstone."

"Are we not to have the pleasure of seeing your husband?" inquired Lady Martha, who, less self-engrossed than her friend, had remarked the indignation of their hostess.

"Mr. Elphinstone is in town;" replied Ida; "he has just been called to the bar, and is consequently compelled to pass the greater portion of the day at his chambers."

"Called to the bar!" exclaimed the mar-

chioness; "are you really serious? why, what a dreary life you must lead! It must be quite a relief to you to receive your friends; and you must also be in a constant state of anxiety; London is such a horrid place for young men, and those odious clubs render them so terribly independent of their homes."

"Mr. Elphinstone has not, I am happy to say, evinced any disposition to avail himself of his independence;" was the quiet reply.

"He would be very ungrateful had he done so;" remarked Lady Martha, in a conciliating tone; "with such a home, and such a wife, he need scarcely seek for enjoyment elsewhere."

"Still," said the marchioness, sententiously; "I can not understand his volunteering the drudgery of a profession. We all know that he was poor, but you Mrs. Elphinstone, are an only child, and your father is very wealthy."

"Quite true, madam."

"So you see, my dear—you will excuse the liberty which I am taking, and remember that I am older than you, and have had more experience of the world—I consider that you have been ill-advised to indulge him in so silly a caprice—for of course he must look to you for advice; at *his* age and with *his* habits, he can know nothing of business; and had you induced him to abandon this extraordinary idea, you might have had him constantly under your own eye, which would have been very desirable.

"I tell you this advisedly, and I have some right to do so, for although the marquis was ten years my senior when I became his wife, I can assure you that I had many a heartache. It is quite ridiculous to suppose that because a man is married he undergoes a moral apotheosis; oh, no; the French proverb is a true one: 'the cowl does not make the monk;' and, until we can reform human nature, men will be men."

With this sublime climax her ladyship slowly rose, selected a magnificent magnolia from the bouquet on the center table, which she transferred to her girdle, shook out the folds of her violet-colored satin, and prepared to depart.

"I shall see you soon and often, I hope, Mrs. Elphinstone;" she said; "I retain a delightful memory of your musical talents. In short, you must always be an acquisition; and, as you know, the marquis is one of your most devoted admirers."

"Your ladyship's kindness is very flattering;" said Ida, with dignity; "but I regret I can not avail myself of it, as we have no carriage. I am, however, much gratified that you have honored me with a visit, since you were so good as to feel an interest in my happiness, as you must have convinced yourself that I am perfectly satisfied with my destiny, that I have no ambition beyond that which my marriage has fulfilled, and that I can, without a misgiving, trust Mr. Elphinstone even at his club."

"Ha, my dear;" sighed her ladyship, as she swept out of the room; "no doubt you feel all you say: we women are such confiding creatures, and you are still certainly very beautiful."

Lady Martha followed her friend; and as the door closed behind them, Ida buried her face in the soft-pillows, and fell into a painful train of thought. The iron hand had, indeed, been gloved in velvet, but the grasp was not the less deadly.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOME.

ELPHINSTONE had, as stated by his wife, been called to the Bar; his chambers were, if not sumptuously, at least comfortably and sufficiently furnished; he had provided himself with a confidential clerk; laid in a magnificent stock of stationery; fitted up his bookcase with the most valuable works of reference to be obtained for money; secured a gown and wig of unexceptionable cut and quality, in which, as Ida laughingly declared, he looked like a quasi lord-chancellor; made up his mind to study for at least six hours in the day; and, in short, required nothing beyond the opportunity of putting his legal talents to the test.

Nothing, therefore, remained to be done; save, indeed, that he considered it necessary to curtail the hours of study, in order to secure clients; but he had so many friends, that he entertained little doubt of his success in that respect. Day by day, too, he had reason to believe that all apprehension on the subject would be superfluous; but somehow or other it constantly happened that the very individuals who assured him of their support, as a matter of course, should they be accidently involved in litigation, were sure to be intimate with Sir Frederick Thesiger, or Sir Fitzroy Kelly, and, consequently, felt themselves compelled to place the business in the hands of an old professional friend, while they could not, equally as a matter of course, take the liberty of suggesting to men of such eminence the choice of junior counsel.

For a time Elphinstone listened and believed; and even amid his disappointment and mortification, endeavored by hard study to render himself worthy of the confidence which would, as he fondly hoped, ere long be placed in him.

But as month after month went by, and winter succeeded to autumn; as, after a Christmas of isolation from all his former friends, he saw himself passing the threshold of a new year, and still found himself without a brief, the excitement of hope wore off; and, abandoning his chambers to the care of his clerk, who contrived by the aid of the morning paper and a new novel to get through the tedious hours of his monotonous existence, he sauntered down to his club, and even as time wore on, accidentally joined a water-party to Hampton Court or Richmond.

A feeling of false shame prevented him, however, from communicating to his wife these lapses from professional duty; he could not bear to damp her sanguine anticipations; and since the tide of fashionable visitors had ebbed, she lived so retired a life, that she was

never likely to hear of his movements from any other lips than his own.

The spring was a glorious one; the London season had just commenced; and one engagement grew out of another so naturally, that Sydney soon ceased to reflect upon the whirl of dissipation in which he had involved himself. Careful never to overstay the hour at which he was aware that his wife would be anticipating his return, he looked upon the deception which he was practicing as a pious fraud.

Ida was happy in the belief that in the absence of active and practical improvement, he was spending his time in a course of study which could not fail ultimately to secure his professional success; while he, on his part, ill-constituted, as we have shown him to be, for either mental or moral exertion, easily convinced himself that he had already done all that was requisite, until the moment should arrive when his powers would be called into action.

And it was wonderful how well the world seconded his opinion; and how many sweet smiles and hearty plaudits contributed to convince him that he was walking in the broad path of social duty.

Mr. Elphinstone waltzed so well, and acted charades so beautifully:—Sydney was such an excellent oarsman, and got up a pic-nic so admirably—he was married, to be sure, but then, he had married a woman older than himself, and was consequently more to be pitied than blamed, for it was so easy to understand how matches of that description were arranged; so that, after all, it was perfectly natural that he should resume his position in society, and that his wife should reconcile herself to what, under the circumstances, was inevitable.

The world, however, in its short-sighted egotism, argued too rapidly. With all the heedlessness of his age, Elphinstone was, indeed, led into a career of folly and selfish indulgence, but he nevertheless fondly loved his wife; and it was not without much remorseful feeling that he occasionally reflected on his abuse of her confidence.

While he was engaged in archery or boating, billiards or dancing, the woman who had intrusted to him alike her happiness and her existence, was spending her hours in solitude and *ennui*, anxiously awaiting his return to a home far more humble than that of which she should have been the mistress: but, alas! Pleasure is a syren whose voice is seldom unheeded by the young—good intentions, as we all know, are the ill-impressed mosaics which serve to floor a region that must be illimitable, if we consider the amount of paving which it absorbs—and thus, day after day, Sydney yielded to the spell; and evening after evening he repented of his weakness only to sin again.

He was not happy; on that point he never deceived himself; for while he fluttered and flirted through the throng of fashion, he saw and felt that Ida, his own loved and loving wife, was fairer and dearer than any with whom he came in contact; and when he contrasted the lax and frivolous discourse to which he listened at his club with her pure and fascinating conversation, he despised himself for a weakness to which on the morrow he nevertheless again yielded without an effort.

Not even the flushing cheek and averted eye of Lady Mary Maitland when they occasionally met, disturbed his equanimity; with all his faults, and they were rather the follies of youth than actual defects of character, Sydney Elphinstone was no coxcomb; and he consequently attributed these evidences of emotion to any cause rather than the true one.

In becoming the husband of Ida Trevanion he had given himself to her wholly, and he was fully conscious of her claim upon his undivided affection.

Still, he could not but know and feel that his position was a false one: and that, should Ida one day discover how she had been misled by his silence, all confidence must be forever at an end between them. He was, however, aware that their income could by no means suffice to their present style of living; for while he frittered away the very limited amount which was exclusively his own, his wife unaccustomed to economy in any shape, and totally ignorant of the real value of money, was equally expensive in her own habits, while, with perfect satisfaction, she believed that by dispensing with a carriage and even a male domestic, and living in a mere cottage, all further retrenchment was unnecessary.

Never indeed, perhaps, were two individuals more thoroughly self-deluded than were Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone at this precise period. She, calmly, and patiently happy in the fullest confidence that she was more than ever necessary to her husband, who, after long and weary hours of monotonous occupation, could look only to her for companionship in her hours of periods of leisure; and he in the equally baseless conviction that his friends *could* not help him as they had hitherto done; and that his first brief would at once induct him into all the duties and habits of a man of business.

And meanwhile all things went on smoothly; and even, if Ida did occasionally feel that rouge, paint, and practice as she might, the time would hang heavily upon her hands, she struggled against the weakness, resolved that Sydney should never suspect her of so puerile and selfish a folly; and thus it was, that she constantly welcomed him to his home with a bright smile and a cheerful voice.

As her husband's day, according to the world's notion of diurnal existence, ended, hers own began; for Sydney's society was now the only dissipation and excitement to which she could look forward; while he, on the contrary, anticipated the matrimonial *tête-a-tête* with a sense of actual enjoyment and repose that acted like a precious balm upon his conscious and worn spirit.

Not even the necessity of concealing any unusual fatigue under which he might occasionally be laboring was entailed upon Ida; for he was not compelled either to avow or to explain it, for Ida was so convinced, when she saw him return to her with a pale cheek and an exhausted frame, that she possessed the true word of the enigma, that while an un-

not to crush his moral energies by a word of pity, or a look of care which would inevitably have brought him to her feet, with a full avowal upon his lips, she only redoubled her efforts to restore his cheerfulness and become gay herself, as she remarked the unfailing effect of her endeavor.

There was much that was great in the character of Mrs. Elphinstone, too much, indeed, for her own peace, when the powers of her mind and will were called into action by imagined wrong—but which was eminently admirable when exerted for the happiness of another.

In those she loved, self was forgotten; there was no trial too bitter to be borne, no sacrifice too painful to be made, for him in whom she had garnered up her heart, while she felt that her affection was returned, freely and fully, as it had been bestowed, and without stint or limit. Thus, even her intervals of mental weariness never degenerated into moral suffering—she was happy because Sydney loved her: because he was toiling for her: because they were all in all to each other; and when she sometimes reflected how any invasion on her present solitude might involve her in doubts and suspicions, which to her jealous nature amounted to actual torture, she reproached herself for every regretful thought.

Thus wore away an entire year: and then again came spring, sweet, blossom-scented spring; and already the young leaves might be seen swelling and brightening amid the delicate tracery of the trees; once more a resurrection of life and gladness had come upon the earth; and even the most worldly-hearted experienced a sensation of glad relief as they escaped from the gross vapors of the over-peopled city, where man, and the works of man, seemed to be all in all, and emerged into the broad, pure and sun-lighted landscape, where the songs of the birds, the lowing of the cattle upon the hills, and the soft murmuring of the streams through the pleasant valleys, spoke of a nobler origin, and a wider purpose.

This was a season of delight to Ida, for once more she could surround herself with flowers, and scarcely a week elapsed that she did not find upon her work-table, some brilliant exotic, placed there to await her waking by the hand of her idolized husband; while, day by day, she found occupation for her pencil in the less costly blossoms of her own well-tendered flower-beds.

For some months, however, she had enjoyed more of Sydney's society; there was, as he very truthfully declared "nothing doing," although it was probable that they did not both attach the same meaning to the phrase; then, his chambers were dark, gloomy, and deserted, and he felt that he could read and study alike with more profit and with more pleasure under the same roof, and in the presence of his wife; an argument of which he required no logic to convince his delighted listener.

So the confidential clerk was, officially as well as actually, invested in his government at the Temple, with the full privilege of luxuriating peacefully in both news and novels, and a portion of Mr. Elphinstone's professional library was transported to the cottage, where he actually did spend an hour or two each day in turning over their pages. That he was not more assiduous in his learned labors did not, however, excite one regret in his exulting wife, who occupied every other instant of his time.

When the sunshine tempted her to walk—and, be it known to those who know it not, there are some charming walks in that pleasant neighborhood—he was her constant companion; and as she hung upon his arm, the first bright days of her married life, ere the necessities of the world had torn him from her side, seemed to have come back upon her. When she was occupied at her embroidery-frame, he watched the movement of her slight and skilful fingers, and enlivened her task with a multitude of ludicrous masculine suggestions, over which they laughed together as she convinced him of their utter impracticability; when she sang, his voice was blended with her own; and when too happy or too indolent to provide her own amusement, he read to her from the works of some favorite author; or, seated on a cushion at her feet, he accompanied on his guitar some of the wild romances which he had learned in Grenada or Seville.

Such was the life they led; and if indeed there were an adder among the roses which strewed the path of Ida, it was, for a time at least, coiled and hidden beneath the perfumed leaves.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LETTER.

"I REALLY think, love," said Sydney, on one occasion, as they returned home from a saunter through some of the quiet lanes in which they both delighted; and he spoke so gravely, and so much with the air and manner of one who has arrived at a very serious decision, that Ida involuntarily glanced up at him, marveling what was to follow; "I really think I shall not renew my subscription at my club."

"My dear Sydney!" exclaimed his wife; "what an extraordinary resolution. What *can* be your reason?"

"I am so much more happy in your society than elsewhere."

"But consider, dearest—"

"I *have* considered, and I think that I am right."

"But the world will not think so, Sydney," persisted Mrs. Elphinstone, almost aghast; "a man without a club would be such a solecism in society—it would never do for you to lose caste just as you are endeavoring to follow your profession."

"I am quite aware of that, my dear girl; and there can be no doubt that a club has its advantages, but it is so deucedly expensive."

"Well then," said Ida, as though she were suggesting something so easily accomplished that it required no second thought; "we will curtail our expenses in some less objectionable way; for I could not endure that you should be subject to such a privation. No, no; it is not to be thought of. Remember, too, that you may occasionally have correspondents to whom

you may not consider it desirable to give your private address."

"That is probable enough," acquiesced her husband; "in which case I shall refer them to my chambers."

"Depend on it, the scheme is a bad one," insisted Ida, who, habituated to the prejudices of the particular set to which she belonged, could not comprehend that a man could pass respectably through the world unless he conformed to all its conventionalities. "If you love me, Sydney, say no more about it. I am half angry with you for having conceived so wild an idea. Our discussion, however, reminds me that you have not been near this said club, which has suddenly become so odious to you, for the last four days; and, who knows? there may at this moment be letters awaiting you there—grave business letters—giving promise of a brief! Suppose my prophecy should prove to be a correct one, would you quarrel with the poor club again!"

"Probably not, fair tyrant."

"Then I will play the sybil, and predict that if, in obedience to my behest, you hasten there within this very hour to claim the prize, it shall be yours; and until you return I will closet myself awhile with Glück and Beethoven; and then while away the remainder of the time in devising some expedient which shall render your late mighty project both unnecessary and impossible."

"If you are quite determined, dear Ida—"

"My will is immutable, Mr. Sydney Elphinstone; a thorough woman's will, so that you have no alternative save obedience."

"*Au revoir*, then, love."

"*Au revoir et sans adieu.* I shall be quite anxious to know if I am indeed the sybil that I feel."

"—And look!" smiled her husband, admiringly.

Ida laughed, waved her hand, and disappeared into the house.

By what strange fatality is it that, not content with awaiting our destiny, we are always so prone to assist its progress, even in our brightest and holiest hours, when we know that any change may diminish, or even destroy, our present happiness?

Mr. Elphinstone went to his club, and there, as his wife had predicted, he found a letter awaiting him. It contained, however, no legal matter—no claim on his forensic eloquence—but that it was none the less welcome, was evident from the well-pleased smile with which he perused it.

As usual, he was cordially greeted by his numerous friends; for even at that unfashionable time of year, when London was still a desert, and the season only in perspective, there are always men either too indolent to abandon the ordinary routine of their habits, or too sagacious to relinquish their club enjoyments, when they have not secured an equivalent in the well-appointed country seat of some more wealthy friend.

Few heirs-apparent to an extensive estate, or a title, indeed; for they are always secure of change, be they as fickle or fastidious as they may; the very knights and castles of the social chess-board, without which the game of life must lose its interest; but shoals of younger brothers, the pawns of the play, who are at times indispensable, it is true, but who can be withdrawn from the board when their services cease to be available; travelers newly arrived in England, who indulge themselves with a week's run in town before they settle down in a hum-drum family-party in the country; and officers of the household troops, whose tour of duty detains them in the dull and dingy city.

Sydney's heart was very light that day; Ida had appeared to him to be more lovely and more fascinating than ever; he was very partial to his club, and he had really, as he stated, began to feel that it was a luxury too great for his means; but the arguments of his wife had been forcible enough to silence all his compunctious feelings; she had convinced him that, in justice to himself, he must maintain his proper position in society; and, long before he reached St. James's street, he had become quite of the same opinion.

It was, therefore, with a feeling of the most complete and quiet gratification, that he lounged away an hour among his gay and idle associates, skimmed over a couple of the daily papers, played half a dozen games at billiards, read the names of the new novels that were strewn over the library tables, and, finally, turned his face homeward.

But although it was still early when he left the club, his arrival at his own house was less punctual than was his ordinary custom; and during the half hour which preceded it, Ida had built up a very charming little romance upon the corner-stone of her own prophecy, founded entirely on his prolonged absence.

Yes—the letter—singular as such a coincidence would unquestionably be—the letter which she had foretold, was in truth awaiting him, and he would at last have the opportunity so long and so earnestly desired, of doing justice to his own high intellectual powers, and of justifying her choice in the eyes of all who might now seek to blame it.

Sydney, once famous, would no longer dissuade her, as he now did, from seeking a reconciliation with her father, for fame in his profession was the sure guarantee of wealth; and, consequently, he could then have no apprehension that he should be accused of mercenary motives, when sanctioning the overtures of his wife.

Perhaps Mr. Trevanion, softened by a renewed intercourse with his child, might even consent to a general amnesty, and include Ida's uncle in his forgiveness; and then, indeed, he felt as though no shadow could again cross his spirit.

The past was forgotten in this brilliant day-dream; while even the present—that present which to her was fraught with love and peace—seemed a mere period of probation, tending to a still brighter and a happier phase of existence.

Mrs. Elphinstone lay buried among the cushions of her *dormeuse*, her eyes closed, and a smile upon her lips, wandering in fancy through her old haunts, inhabiting her old home, and surrounded by her old associates, when at length the well-known and welcome step fell upon her ear, and she started up to receive her husband.

"Forgive me, Ida—" he commenced.

"Fergive you, love! For what?" was the laughing rejoinder—"for your brief delay? How could it be otherwise, when my promised letter suddenly involved you in such a whirl of pleasant occupation?"

"Were you then really aware—"

"Of course I was, rebellious unbeliever! or how could I have put wings to your heels a few hours back by my potent spell?"

"Still the letter does not mention your knowledge of the arrangement," said Sydney, thoroughly mystified.

The low sweet laugh of his wife was her only reply.

"However," he pursued, gayly, "you are right; the said letter did give me considerable occupation, although, with all deference to your opinion, be it said, fair lady, that I found it more essential than agreeable."

"My poor Sydney!" said his wife as she touched his up-turned brow with her lips, "it is weary work, I have no doubt, but still—"

"You are right, dear Ida, as you ever are; still it was my duty to undertake the task without a moment's delay, and right glad am I that I did so, as I flatter myself that I have succeeded to admiration."

"Succeeded, Sydney!" exclaimed his wife, mystified in her turn, "what, already?"

"Yes, dear love, so you see that I was worthy of the 'winged heels.' I have secured the snuggest little box for them; and only think—"

"We *must* be playing a game of cross-purposes," interposed Ida, becoming suddenly grave; "what were the contents of the letter?"

"What! Is the sybil at fault?" demanded Elphinstone; "I was actually deluded by your manner into the belief that you knew all about it. However, here it is; read it; and then I will tell you how I have fulfilled my appointed mission."

Ida took the paper from his hand, and her first glance at the superscription sufficed to drive the blood from her cheek; the handwriting was that of a woman; she hastily drew the note from its envelop, and as hastily ran her eye over its contents, which were these:—

"As I am sure that I may trust to your kindness in all things, my dear Sydney, I do not hesitate for a moment to request that you will render me an essential service. I find that the utter seclusion of our otherwise comfortable retreat has produced a very depressing effect upon my dear child's spirits, which reflected itself in some degree on her health. I had not calculated on the dreariness of a long winter during the previous season of leaves and sunshine, and while the near neighborhood of your accomplished wife and yourself rendered us independent of all other society; but I am compelled to confess that even at my age, when rain, wind, and snow confined us to the house, I felt that I had relied too much upon our home-resources, and exposed my poor Edith to a trial which was both severe and unnecessary.

"What I would ask of you is, therefore, that, if practicable, you will secure for me a small but ladylike residence, consistent at once with my present means and position in life.

"I have unfortunately mislaid your address, of which I only retain the word 'Brompton.' I shall, consequently, direct my letters to your club; and leave you to offer, in my name, my very sincere apologies to Mrs. Elphinstone for this demand upon your time and energies, which I feel sure that she will pardon.

"My essentials are pure air for my dear girl, and a small garden, in which she may amuse herself with her flowers, a sight of green boughs from our windows, and a situation which will not involve us in the necessity of making acquaintance with our neighbors.

"Now it strikes me that upon all these points Mrs. Elphinstone must have been as imperative as myself; therefore, I may sum up all my requirements by requesting you to do for me precisely what you have done for her; and I need scarcely add that if, in your own immediate neighborhood, these requisites can be secured, I shall be doubly gratified, as we shall then have the opportunity which we both covet, of forming, as I trust, a close and endearing friendship with your amiable and gifted wife.

"Lose no time, my dear boy, in complying with my request, as I am becoming anxious about Edith; and, to own the truth, shall not be sorry myself to be brought into more immediate contact with the 'human face divine' than I have been for the last few months. Say for us all and every thing that you know will be acceptable to Mrs. Elphinstone, and receive assurance of the sincere affection of your own and your mother's friend,

CLARISSA MALCOLM."

Poor Ida! Her air-built castle was prostrate, and in the void created by its destruction uprose a host of bitter anticipations. She had been *so* happy even in the house of her enforced solitude; and now—

She still sat silent with the fateful letter in her hand, when she was recalled to a more vivid sense of her self-inflicted suffering by the voice of her husband, who, surprised that she made no comment on its contents, suddenly discontinued his occupation of removing the decayed leaves from the plants in her *jardinière*, and exclaimed joyously:

"Is it not charming, Ida? We only required the society of Lady Malcolm and Edith to make our home a little Paradise; I may confess to you, now, that I reproached myself with every hour which, during my absence, condemned you to solitude; while, after their arrival I shall be able to leave you with a lighter heart, well assured that they will do all in their power to make the time pass pleasantly."

"Have I ever complained, Sydney?" asked his wife, tremulously.

"Never, dearest; and there were even moments;" he replied, with a shade of compunction in his voice, "when I almost wished that you had done so; that you had told me you could not support so wearisome an existence; and that I must be less apparently regardless of your happiness."

"I should have scorned myself for such egotism;" said Mrs. Elphinstone; "how could I complain, when I knew and felt that you were compelling yourself to a life ungenial to your tastes, in order to secure an existence of comfort and tranquillity to me?

"No, Sydney; you do not understand me yet. There can be no solitude, no weariness for me in a home, which I know will a few hours hence be gladdened by your presence. The proud conviction that you are laboring to do justice to yourself, and to fulfill my fondest dreams suffices, and ever must suffice, to my happiness. Do not rejoice for me, therefore, for I have nothing to desire—nothing to wish, I have made you my world, and am well content to abide in it."

There was much in the words of Ida calculated to inflict a pang upon the heart of her husband, but of that fact she was unconscious; for a moment only he replied by a silent caress, but soon rallying, he thanked her tenderly for her patience and forbearance; and ever sanguine, declared his conviction that the day was not far distant when he would be enabled to repay her all.

"Only love me, Sydney;" she said; "love me, and me only, and I can ask no more."

"Are you not my existence?" was his rejoinder; "does the world contain a second Ida?"

"May it never do so in your eyes;" murmured his wife.

"And now let me talk to you of the Malcolms," said Sydney, as he repossessed himself of the letter, which his wife still held, and replaced it in the envelop; "for despite all your generous self-abnegation, I can not help feeling delighted that since you have resolved to shut yourself out altogether from the world, you will at least secure the society of two individuals who can understand and appreciate you. I need scarcely say that after spending an hour at the club, I hastened to commence my undertaking.

"My first impulse was to hurry home, and consult you on the subject, but on second thoughts, I resolved not to do so, lest you should volunteer to accompany me in the search, a fatigue to which I was unwilling that you should be exposed, so like a sober and experienced Benedict, I entered upon my task unaided, feeling, that as I had, on a former occasion, been successful, where my heart was even more interested, I should scarcely fail to day."

"And you again succeeded, if I understand you rightly?" said Ida, forcing a smile.

"Beyond my hopes! Only imagine, dearest, that after having walked through a score of 'villas,' 'cottages,' 'lodges,' 'elms,' and 'oaks,' and 'roserys,' I had abandoned all thoughts of accomplishing my purpose today, when I was directed to the adjoining grounds, where you may remember my having drawn your attention to an avenue of acacias just bursting into leaf, and where I found, in fact, at the termination of the said acacias one of the very prettiest of all pretty cottages.

"Nothing could be better, nothing more convenient; I liked it both inside and out, and in less than ten minutes all was arranged. The house will be ready in a fortnight, and we have only to break a door through the wall which separates the two gardens, to become like one family, and to defy the prying curiosity of all the gossips of the neighborhood."

Ida almost gasped for breath; the reality was even worse than she had anticipated. She was to make a common home with the being whom she dreaded most on earth, and that, too, without being able to advance one valid objection to the arrangement.

The vision of Edith in her pure, fresh loveliness, swam before her eyes; she felt faint and sick at heart; her first impression had not deceived her; this young, and apparently guileless girl, was the rock upon which her married happiness was to be ultimately wrecked; doubtless, there were scores of women even more attractive in the world than Edith Malcolm, beautiful as she was, but Mrs. Elphinstone, with bitter ingenuity, easily convinced herself that in the hands of Edith Malcolm lay her fate.

Why, were it otherwise, when they had parted with every prospect of a prolonged separation—for Lady Malcolm had expressed some vague intention of residing for a year or two on the continent—why had she been pursued to her very threshold by the object of her distrust?

Again and again did she ask herself the question, and carefully did she note every word uttered by her husband, on the ever recurring subject of the speedy arrival of their new neighbors; note his undisguised exultation at the pleasure expressed by Lady Malcolm at the prospect of so soon rejoining her friends, for whom she felt so warm a sincere a regard, and watch his perpetual visits to the house, and his eagerness to complete the arrangements necessary to secure their comfort.

Nothing could be more simple, nothing more natural, than that Elphinstone should both feel and act as he did, but Ida saw and judged every thing through a distorted medium; encouraged the morbid feelings against which, for the sake of her own peace, she should have struggled, and thenceforward looked with a jaundiced eye upon all that related to Lady Malcolm and her daughter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEW HOPES.

On the day fixed for her arrival, Elphinstone was at the station, ready to escort his mother's friend to her new home. Ida had raised no objection to this arrangement, and did she, as he gayly bade her adieu, after having assured himself that all was in due order at the cottage to receive the in-coming tenants, sadden his pleasant anticipations by a look or a word of discouragement, although she was conscious, as she watched his departure, of a strange feeling of restlessness and indisposition, for which she could only account by supposing that the near approach

of the trial to which she had been looking forward with dread for the last fortnight, had produced a painful effect upon her nerves.

Anxious, therefore, to conquer what she considered as a weakness unworthy of her, and peculiarly ill-timed at a moment when she required the exertion of all her energies, she resolutely abandoned her sofa, shook off the oppression which was stealing over her, and endeavored to divert her thoughts by personally superintending the preparations which were making in her little household to welcome the expected guests, who were to spend their first evening under her roof.

With her own hands she arranged fresh flowers in the vases, gave a more graceful fall to the soft draperies of the windows, and selected from a pile of music, such compositions as she knew to be peculiar favorites with Miss Malcolm.

It was a species of voluntary martyrdom which she thus inflicted upon herself; but true to her dignity as a wife, and anxious that the home of her husband should be worthy, even in its simplicity, both of him and of herself, she resolutely pursued her task, until her sense of physical suffering became so great, that unable longer to struggle against it, she was compelled to ring for assistance.

A succession of fainting-fits, alarming from their duration, at length so terrified her two attendants that one of them hastened to procure professional advice; and ere she was sufficiently restored to consciousness to forbid it, she found the solitude of her cottage invaded by the presence of a stranger.

"It will be nothing, positively nothing," said a low, pleasant voice, as the application of a powerful stimulant aroused her once more from the torpor into which she had fallen; "come, my dear madam, do me the favor to swallow a few drops of this essence; and believe me when I assure you that in an hour or two you will be perfectly restored."

Ida languidly opened her eyes, and raised herself into a sitting posture; she was still too weak to give utterance to a syllable, but she felt soothed, and as the large tears fell slowly on her cheeks, she slyly averted her head to escape the look of involuntary admiration which was fixed upon her.

"Over-excitement, no doubt," pursued her visitor; "but you must control your feelings, my dear young lady, you must, indeed; it is absolutely essential that you should do so. Gentle exercise, cheerful society, and the new interest which existence now offers to you, will be your best physicians."

Mrs. Elphinstone glanced at him inquiringly.

The physician smiled. "Leave me for a moment alone with your lady," he said to the maid who still lingered beside her mistress, and who instantly withdrew.

"I can not be deceived, my dear madam," pursued the old gentleman, as he seated himself near her, "in believing that I am the harbinger of good tidings. You are about to become a mother."

Ida sprang to her feet, and pressed her hands tightly together, while a smile of triumphant happiness lit up her countenance into almost unearthly beauty. In the excess of her joy she almost gasped for breath; then, after one long gaze into the venerable face of her companion, she sank upon her knees, and buried her burning brow among the cushions of the sofa.

Dr. Darnell neither spoked nor moved, until the vehement sobs by which her whole frame was convulsed had gradually subsided, and then, after having strictly enjoined an hour or two of perfect repose, he rose, and took his leave.

As the door closed behind him, Ida sprang from the floor and hurried to her own room, where, having carefully locked the door, she felt secure from all intrusion.

She needed to be alone with her new-born happiness—to dream of it—to dwell on it—Edith Malcolm was forgotten; she could think only of her child—of Sydney's child—of the sacred tie which was about to bind them a thousandfold more closely together.

There was no faintness at her heart now; her pulses throbbed with an emotion which defied alike sickness and sorrow; life was all brightness, the future all sunshine; rest! how could she rest? with a fevered cheek and a kindling eye, she paced up and down her chamber, until at length exhausted nature gave way beneath the violence of her excitement, and, casting herself upon the bed, she fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

She was still buried in this death-like slumber when Mr. Elphinstone and his guests arrived, and great was the alarm excited in the whole party by the tidings which awaited them—an alarm which was increased almost to an agony in the breast of Sydney, when, on rushing up stairs, he found the door of his wife's chamber shut against him.

His voice, however, soon aroused Ida, who hastened to admit him, with a cheek so bright and an eye so radiant that he started back in surprise.

"They told me that you were ill, my own love," he exclaimed, as he drew her toward him, "ill, very ill, my Ida. Why did they torture me by such a fable? You are not, you can not be ill. Only tell me that—"

"No, no, Sydney, I am not ill; I am quite well, and, oh! *so* happy!"

"But what mystery is this, dearest? You can not imagine the torture which I endured until I once more saw you beside me."

"Mystery!" echoed Ida, with a bright blush, as she pillowed her cheek upon his shoulder; "oh, there is no mystery; I have been weak, very weak, since you left me, and played the woman, I believe, sufficiently to faint and terrify our ignorant Abigail; but I have slept since then, and, as you see, am perfectly recovered. But we must not forget our guests; return to them at once, dear Sydney, while I gather up my disheveled hair, and make myself presentable."

"Ida, you can not deceive me," said Sydney, uneasily; "you are feverish and excited."

"It is nothing," was the laughing reply; "I have had a dream, which I may perhaps confide to you hereafter if you obey me now."

"A dream—" murmured her husband, still only half-convinced; "and you will not tell me the true meaning of your evident emotion?"

"Not now, not now; remember that you are about, for the first time since our marriage, to play the host in your own house: you owe yourself to your friends; go, and acquaint yourself with your new duties, and I will join you within an instant."

Elphinstone reluctantly obeyed, and his agitated account of his brief interview with his wife by no means prepared Lady Malcolm, who during his absence had questioned the attendant on the subject of her mistress's indisposition, for the bright and radiant appearance of Ida, who shortly afterward entered the room with a glad smile and an elastic step, to offer at once her apology and her welcome.

If Lady Malcolm had occasionally thought the manner of Mrs. Elphinstone uncertain and capricious, she certainly found no cause to do so on the present occasion. Nothing could exceed the courteous urbanity of the young hostess, who did the honors of her house with a frank and cordial kindness which at once diffused its charm over the whole party; and ere long the conversation became as gay and animated as though no heart in that little circle had ever known care or doubt.

From that time the health of Mrs. Elphinstone became so delicate that she was seldom able to leave the house; but it is nevertheless certain that, had she been less ingenious in self-tormenting, this would have been one of the happiest periods of her life.

The devotion of her exulting husband, who watched every look and anticipated every wish; the gentle and unwearied kindness of Lady Malcolm, who was her constant companion; and the pretty playfulness of Edith, who came and went in the sick-room like a sunbeam, brightening and gladdening all around her, were well calculated to divest even indisposition of its dreariness.

But the very charm shed over the party by the presence of the fair girl, who was never weary of ministering to her comfort, was a perpetual source of wretchedness to Ida, as with closed eyes she lay upon the sofa, contrasting in her own mind the buoyant graces of Edith, her unimpaired health, and elastic spirits, with her own faded beauty, and depressed energies.

The two small households had, indeed, as Sydney had anticipated, become like one family; and while his wife was too languid for any exertion beyond skimming over a few pages of some favorite book, or listening, while Lady Malcolm relieved her of even that slight fatigue, Edith assisted Elphinstone to tend her flowers, feed her birds, and perform all those graceful little duties in which she had herself hitherto taken delight.

Every hour in the day they were together, generally engaged in the same pursuit, and evidently interested in the same objects. They played, sang, and drew together; and although Ida was present, still it was with a bitter pang that she saw them thus engaged, and felt that their mutual enjoyment was independent of herself.

Occasionally, Elphinstone would stroll down to his club; and at long intervals, he even extended his walk to the Temple, in the vague hope of hearing from his clerk that some strange foot had passed the threshold of his chambers; but no; every new visit was only a new disappointment; and even sanguine as he was, there were moments when he felt sick at heart, and began to ask himself how all this must end!

Town was filling rapidly, and whenever he made his appearance in his old haunts, he was overwhelmed with invitations, but he no longer suffered himself to be seduced into dissipation

Since the arrival of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, he had never passed a weary hour, and he consequently resisted the importunities of his friends without an effort, quite satisfied in his own mind that it was the present situation of Ida which had invested his home with a new charm.

As time passed, a fresh trial awaited Mrs. Elphinstone, to which she submitted in silence, anxious to conceal from the observant eyes of Lady Malcolm the weakness which, painful as it was to endure, would, as she was well aware, appear not only ridiculous but even offensive in the eyes of others.

During one of his daily visits, Dr. Darnell—for Sydney had at once declared constant attendance upon his wife to be essential—was struck by an appearance of languor in the voice and movements of Edith which was foreign to her usual habit; and after having watched her attentively for a few seconds, he said, in a tone of gentle decision:

"I can not afford, young lady, to have two patients in one house, and, therefore, I have to request that you will take more exercise. You are young and active, but in order to benefit by your energies, you must develop them. You are here in excellent air, I admit; but you must not always breathe the same atmosphere. You must walk, change the scene, and lay in a stock of new ideas, for the mind requires employment as well as the body. Have you been to the Exhibition yet? No! well, then, go to-morrow; it is well worth a visit; and as you are an artist yourself, you can not fail to pass an hour or two delightfully.

"Here is Mr. Elphinstone, an idle man, of whom his wife will be glad to be rid now and then; you could not have a better escort. Follow my prescription, and I shall find your cheeks a little brighter when we next meet."

Sydney was enchanted by the proposition, and eagerly offered his services, which were as frankly accepted by Lady Malcolm, who looked upon the son of her friend as her own; and, while Ida drove back the tears of jealous mortification and annoyance which sprang to her eyes, as she witnessed the pleasure evinced by the rest of the party, it was finally decided that should Mrs. Elphinstone be sufficiently well on the following day, for her husband to leave her without uneasiness, and the weather prove propitious, the plan of the worthy physician should be carried out.

As may be anticipated, this first absence of Sydney and Edith was succeeded by many others; the benefit derived by her child from

moderate exercise and mental occupation, led Lady Malcolm to overlook the possibility that Mrs. Elphinstone might be less gratified by the arrangement than herself; and as Ida carefully abstained from all expostulation, no suspicion of the truth ever intruded itself upon her mind.

At length the event so anxiously anticipated by all took place, and Elphinstone, to his unmeasured delight, found himself the father of a noble boy; while even Ida herself, victim as she was of a diseased imagination, felt for a time alike proud and happy.

"Would," she murmured to Lady Malcolm, who sat beside her bed; "would that my father could see this precious babe. He would take me to his heart again; and I am sure he would; for I now feel what it is to be a parent."

"Do not despair," was the whispered reply; "rely on it that, estranged as Mr. Trevanion may seem to be, he is not ignorant of any thing which affects your welfare or happiness: and, therefore, like yourself, I look forward with a hope that this dear boy will prove a new and lasting bond between you."

As Mrs. Elphinstone shortly afterward sank into a deep and refreshing sleep, Lady Malcolm sat for a time in earnest thought; and then, relinquishing her post to the sick-nurse, hastened home, and rapidly wrote and sealed a letter, which she at once dispatched to the post-office by a servant.

Admitted as she had now been for a considerable time into the intimacy of Mr. Elphinstone's family, and fully acquainted as she was with the extent of his resources, Lady Malcolm had felt many misgivings as she noted the slight value which was attached to money by either himself or his wife, and their total ignorance of its real capabilities.

More than once she had been on the point of hinting her apprehensions to Sydney, but the subject was one of so delicate a nature, that despite her better judgment, she had shrunk from the task. Now, however, she believed that she had discovered a method of assisting the young couple without wounding their pride; for she felt that, let Mr. Trevanion resent his daughter's marriage as relentlessly as he might, still he could not be insensible to the gratification of learning that he had a grandson, or sufficiently regardless of his own dignity to suffer the child to be reared in obscurity and indigence.

Nor did she deceive herself; for although he in due time acknowledged her communication coldly and briefly, without comment of any kind, many days did not elapse before a packet was delivered to Mrs. Elphinstone, directed in a business-like hand with which she was totally unacquainted, and containing a bank-post bill for a thousand pounds. Great was the astonishment, both of Sydney and his wife, and numerous were their conjectures; while a shade of mortification lessened the happiness which such a gift at such a moment could not fail to afford; for a sense of obligation, be it to whom it may, is always galling to a proud spirit; but still they could not but acknowledge to themselves that never had so generous an offering been made more opportunely.

Nevertheless, however, the mystery was a painful one; and when Lady Malcolm, anxious to soothe their irritated feelings, ventured to suggest that it was in all probability a present from Mr. Trevanion to his future heir, Ida eagerly embraced the idea, and began once more to dream of pardon and reconciliation.

Her recovery was rapid. Never weary of watching over her infant, she sat with him for hours upon her knees; while Sydney, as much engrossed as herself by his new happiness, appeared to have lost all interest in existence, save that which centered in his wife and child. Sometimes, although reluctantly, the young mother would resign her precious charge for a time to Lady Malcolm; but when Edith would occasionally plead for the same privilege, Ida, gently, but firmly, declined to place him in her arms, alleging as her excuse that she was too timid to trust him to any one who was not accustomed to children.

It was her first revenge, and she had not strength of mind to forego it.

Sydney was, as we have said, wholly engrossed for a time by his little son, but it is not in the nature of any man, however kind and affectionate, to emulate the persevering love and devotion of a mother. As time wore on, therefore his old tastes and habits resumed their sway, and he no longer spent hours beside the little cot, in which, nestled amid lace and cambric, lay the tiny object of so many cares and hopes.

While Ida was still fully occupied in registering every look and movement of the babe, Sydney had resumed his walks, his music, and his gardening; and in all these pursuits Edith was, as formerly, his companion; nor was it long ere Mrs. Elphinstone, even amid her preoccupation, had fully succeeded in convincing herself that her co-operation in their several employments, was requested rather as a matter of courtesy than of choice; never suspecting, how often her husband felt jealous of the absorbing affection for her child, which appeared to have weaned her heart from him.

Poor Edith! she was so childlike and so innocent that no thought of evil ever paled the roses on her cheek, or palsied her young heart. She loved Mrs. Elphinstone sincerely, and admired her with the fervor which only youth can feel. Little did she imagine that to the object of her regard she was herself a source of bitter and perpetual suspicion; little did she imagine that the mind which she believed to be so lofty had degraded itself by the admission of one impure idea, and that her image was interwoven with it.

So true it is that even those with whom we are most intimately connected never know us as we really are; to them we are what we desire to seem; into our inner life they can not penetrate, and thus society is, in point of fact, a clever masquerade, in which the ablest actors play the highest parts, and wear their motley the most gracefully.

Now and then the pressure of circumstance may rend away a portion of the drapery from each and all, but still much remains concealed, until the game of life is played out, and goes down even to the grave at once undetected and unsuspected.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

THE grace and beauty of Mrs. Elphinstone, the manly bearing of her husband, and the refinement of every thing about them, had singularly excited the interest of Dr. Darnell, who was well able to appreciate such qualities in those with whom he came into contact.

That their pecuniary resources were by no means equivalent to their pretension she at once discovered, although no inference to that effect had ever escaped from either; and that some mystery was connected with the little household he felt satisfied, while, at the same time the intimacy which existed between the Elphinstones and the somewhat stately Lady Malcolm, together with the presence of her young daughter, sufficed to convince him that it could not be one of a discreditable nature.

Thus, there was a certain romance flung over his new friends which tended to heighten rather than to diminish the feeling of affectionate regard that he soon experienced for them, and which led him ultimately to express an anxious hope that their accidental acquaintance might be suffered to grow into friendship.

"I am no longer a young man, my dear madam," he said, affectionately, taking the hand of Ida; "but my heart has not run so rapid a race as time; it can still sympathize in the happiness of others, and exult in sharing it. As I can no longer keep you as a patient, I am anxious to retain you as a friend; I will, indeed, be frank enough to confess to you without disguise that I can not coldly look forward to the loss of your society just as I have learned to value it."

"You have only anticipated my own intention, my good friend," was the cordial reply of Mrs. Elphinstone; "for, believe me, when I assure you that I am far from insensible to the charm of your conversation, or to the peculiar benefit which constant intimacy with a person of your character and principles can not fail to confer on so young and inexperienced an individual as my husband, who, with the warmest heart, and the noblest nature upon earth, is ill calculated to wrestle with the world single-handed."

"So be it, then, my dear lady; from this hour we sink the physician in the friend," said the doctor, heartily; "and I trust that neither party will ever have cause to repent the compact."

And Ida judged rightly, when she declared that the friendship of Dr. Darnell must prove valuable to Sydney, for Dr. Darnell was no common character. Possessed of admirable taste, and good practical common sense, he had seen enough of the folly and frippery of fashionable life to estimate it at its true value, and had sufficient moral courage to avow that he could and did relish the charm of unaffected simplicity, alike in speech and principle.

Talking for effect, was his aversion, nor did he even endeavor to conceal his contempt of the talker; while he joined cordially, and genially in the pleasant, unstudied, home-breathing gossipry which is, after all, the great charm of the social fireside. The puerile vanity, which sought to cheat itself by a sophism, and to make words stand proxy for ideas, was to him as hateful as a vice; and it was precisely this absence of all stage-effect in the language and bearing of Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone, which had attracted him.

Unfortunately, however, the proffered friendship of the estimable and somewhat eccentric physician, involved, as a natural consequence, the acquaintanceship of his wife, who, although a well-meaning woman, was extremely weak, and like all weak people, fancied herself more clear-sighted and judicious than every one about her.

Her pretty person, and still more, perhaps, her modest fortune, had proved irresistible to the young doctor, at a period when he was striving to establish himself in his profession; and thus two persons, as widely sundered as the poles, both in taste and intellect, had been united in a life-long tie which it was idle to lament when, in after-years, both discovered their mistake.

Dr. Darnell, frequent as his visits had been to the cottage of the Elphinstones, had discovered nothing there but what, to a mind constituted like his own, was genial and charming; but it was far otherwise with his lady, who was never happy save when she was peering below the surface of things, and detecting some hidden rock beneath the apparently placid waves.

Her husband had forwarned her that although evidently persons of high-breeding and elegant habits, Mr. and Mrs. Elphinstone, were apparently far from affluent, and strictly cautioned her to avoid all reference to the fact; nor did she fail to give a promise to that effect, even while she exalted in the consciousness that, on this one point, at least, there could be no rivalry between them.

A greater contrast to the calm and gentle Lady Malcolm could scarcely have presented itself in the drawing-room of Ida, than the little, fussy, gayly-attired wife of the staid middle-aged doctor. If there were one fact, which more than every other, Mrs. Darnell had been unable to comprehend, it was the ravages produced by time, upon her once blooming face and graceful figure; and thus, in her fiftieth year, she assumed the dress, and aped the manner of fifteen.

Too thoroughly self-possessed to be absolutely vulgar, her little affectations were simply ridiculous; and Ida scarcely knew whether to be amused or annoyed by the absurdities of her new acquaintance.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Darnell was perfectly in her element, as she watched with a keen eye every member of the little party; caressed the baby with voluble comments on his extraordinary loveliness, congratulated Lady Malcolm on the acquisition of Acacia Lodge, and examined with all the assumed gusto of an artist, the sketch upon which Edith was engaged, and which chanced to be the one with Mrs. Elphinstone's figure in the foreground.

"Well! this is really very nice," she exclaimed, patronizingly; "very nice, indeed. You have a charming talent. I absolutely do not think that I ever saw a more graceful figure."

"It is, indeed, admirably executed," said Edith; "but I regret to be compelled to confess," she added, ingenuously, "that my little sketch is indebted to Mr. Elphinstone for its greatest ornament. The scene is one dear to us all, and the portrait is, as you have probably discovered, that of his wife."

"Of course, it is; no one could mistake it for a moment," acquiesced the visitor; "and how very delightful it must be for you, Miss Malcolm, to have so skillful an assistant in your studies."

The remark was common-place enough, but the glance turned upon Ida as the words were uttered was infinitely more significant; an expression of blendid pity and surprise could be read for an instant in the keen eyes which were riveted upon her, and beneath which her own fell, while she felt the warm blood rush to her cheek and brow.

By that one look, Mrs. Darnell had justified Ida to her own conscience. She did not pause to reflect upon the impertinence, should she indeed have read the glance aright, of such an inference on the part of a perfect stranger; she did not dwell on the ill-breeding, or, still worse, on the ill-feeling, which could have prompted a suspicion of evil where all was apparently frank and simple; she forgot, as by magic, the wonder and almost disgust with which she had regarded the lady half an hour previously; she only felt that her secret had been read, and that one individual, at least, could sympathize in her suffering.

From that moment Mrs. Darnell became in her eyes invested with an interest which produced an immediate effect upon her whole manner; her flippant nothings were rewarded by a smile; her offers of friendship were graciously acknowledged; and when she at length rose to take her leave, she was warmly pressed to repeat her visit.

As Sydney conducted the lady to her carriage, Lady Malcolm looked up quietly from her knitting, and asked, demurely:

"Well, my dear, what do you think of your new acquaintance?"

As her mother spoke, Edith also glanced toward Mrs. Elphinstone, while a smile, requiring only one word of encouragement, twinkled in her eye and quivered about her lips, but it faded beneath a look of astonishment, as Ida calmly answered:

"I think her both pretty and pleasant."

The surprise of Lady Malcolm equaled that of her daughter. That Mrs. Elphinstone, who she well knew to be even hyper-fastidious in her tastes, should not only tolerate, but actually profess to admire a woman so conspicuously deficient in all the attributes of high breeding, was an enigma which she felt herself unable to solve.

"Pretty, perhaps," she said; "yes, undoubtedly she must have been pretty—once; but pleasant, my dear! Can you really think her pleasant?"

"Very pleasant," persisted Ida; "and I am, moreover, convinced that she is sincere and warm-hearted."

"Upon that point I must defer my judgment," said Lady Malcolm; "and, as she has promised me the honor of a visit in my turn, I shall be delighted to have the opportunity of doing her justice."

"I am so sick of the empty conventionalities of the world," was the rejoinder of Ida, "that it is really refreshing to me to meet with a person so thoroughly unsophisticated as Mrs. Darnell. In the artificial state of society in the present day it is difficult to distinguish friends from foes, or a seeming kindness from a secret wrong."

"Come, come, you must not encourage such gloomy ideas," said Lady Malcolm; "take a fancy to this fussy little dame if you will, for it will serve to amuse you, but do not on that account misjudge the rest of the world."

Ida smiled somewhat bitterly, and rang for her baby.

Meanwhile, the unsophisticated wife of the worthy physician was rolling toward home in her well-appointed chariot, a self-gratulatory light gleaming in her restless eyes.

"So, so," she mentally exclaimed, "the poor doctor has then, with all his boasted penetration, frequented these people for months, and never suspected the truth. Good, easy man! So this, then, is the earthly paradise that he taught me to expect. Paradise, indeed—a new Eden with a new serpent; but its fangs shall be drawn, if it depends on me. Infamous! So beautiful as she is, that her worthless husband should be flirting—and, for what I know to the contrary, perhaps even intriguing—with that demure-looking girl, before her face; and the mother sitting by, too, looking as calm and as stately as if she were not giving her countenance to such an enormity!

"And they flatter themselves that the poor injured wife does not suspect the truth—does not see the looks which pass between them, nor how perfectly they understand each other. But they are deceived; she does more than suspect; she knows it, or why should she have shrunk when our eyes met, and then suddenly become so friendly in her manner?

"There is no mystery there, at least; she saw that I had discovered the truth, and that I felt for her, which no one else does.

"Poor thing! Poor thing! well, my duty is plain; I will not leave a stone unturned to serve her; and I know that it will ease her poor breaking heart to pour out all her grief to me. I will call on her again in a day or two. I shall be so delighted to give her comfort."

And fully satisfied with herself and her own good intentions, Mrs. Darnell proceeded to pay another visit.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOPES AND FEARS.

"I HAVE brought you some visitors, Mrs. Elphinstone;" said Lady Malcolm one morning, as she entered the drawing-room of Ida unannounced; "and most welcome ones, I feel convinced."

The young mother, who had been bending

over the couch upon which her boy lay asleep, looked up in surprise; but before she could reply, her eye met that of Sir Jasper Trevanion, who at that instant passed the threshold of the apartment.

"Sir Jasper Trevanion!" she exclaimed, as she sprang forward to meet him; "this is indeed an unexpected pleasure—and my cousin too!" she added, as she extended her disengaged hand to his son, by whom he was closely followed.

"You will forgive us this intrusion, I know;" said the baronet, as he led his niece back to her seat; "when I tell you that since our first and only meeting, I have vainly endeavored to ascertain your place of residence; which we at last learned to-day from Lady Malcolm."

"I was not aware that you were known to each other;" said Ida.

"Oh, we are old and tried friends;" was the reply; "but we will talk of that another time. And now tell me, my dear niece, are you well? are you happy?"

Ida pointed with an exulting smile to her sleeping child.

"I am answered;" said Sir Jasper; "he is indeed all that a mother's heart can wish. Look at him, Hubert, is he not worthy of the Trevanion blood?"

"Hubert!" exclaimed Ida, with a kindling eye; "is it possible, my dear sir, that your son bears the name of my father?"

"It is an old family name;" said the baronet, more coldly than he had yet spoken; "we have been Huberts and Jaspers from time immemorial, and I was too thorough a Trevanion not to respect the prejudices of my ancestors."

There was a painful pause, for Mrs. Elphinstone too readily understood the full meaning of the words to which she had just listened; but eager to diminish their effect, she turned with forced gayety toward her cousin, saying reproachfully, "and you Mr. Trevanion, have you not, also, a word of praise for my little nursling?"

As she asked the question, she for the first time looked steadily into the face of the young man, and was startled by the change which she perceived in his appearance.

He was still superbly handsome, but a settled flush, too deep and too brilliant for health, gave a fevered expression to his countenance, which was heightened by the unnatural brightness of his eyes.

A pang smote upon the heart of Ida as she met the radiant smile with which he replied to her inquiry; and she involuntarily glanced from him to his father. No symptom of alarm or uneasiness could, however, be detected in the look or manner of the baronet. It was evident that if her terrible surmise were a correct one, it had as yet never awakened one suspicion in his mind.

"You must forgive me, my dear niece;" said Sir Jasper, after having suffered his eye to wander over the well arranged but still modest apartment; "if I appear more unreasonable than my relationship may seem to warrant. You have a pretty home, and the hand of taste is visible in all its arrangements; but still I can not help thinking that it is not precisely the home suited to *my* niece. Tell me truly; have you no wish which it may be in my power to gratify?"

"None;" replied Ida, in a tone which she strove to render calm, but which still betrayed a shade of bitterness; "I am already, perhaps, more fortunate than a discarded daughter had any right to expect. I am quite satisfied with my destiny."

"Yet you had every reason to anticipate—"

"Pardon me if I request of you not to speculate on the past: I made my own future, and I look forward to it without one misgiving."

"You are right, quite right; I am rebuked for my worldliness—the philosophy of the heart is the only true one. And who are to be sponsors of this noble boy?" pursued the baronet, as the child awoke, and laughed in the face of his mother. "If not too late, I should be delighted to offer my own services."

Tears filled the eyes of Mrs. Elphinstone, but they were tears of joy, as she replied; "Then, indeed, will one of my most earnest desires be fulfilled: of the other I have, unfortunately, no hopes."

"Well, well;" said Sir Jasper, cheerfully "thus much at least is arranged, and I assure you that I shall be sincerely proud of my godson."

"A thousand thanks!" exclaimed Ida; "oh! you know not of what a heavy load you have relieved my heart."

"And I?"—asked Mr. Trevanion, one of whose fingers was clasped in the plump little palm of the infant; "may I venture to present myself as the substitute of the favored individual who has excited the implied regrets of my fair cousin?"

Ida extended her hand to him in silence; her heart was too full for words.

"An excellent arrangement;" said Sir Jasper; "and one which induces me to waive one of my rights in favor of my son, my dear niece. I was about to make it a point that you should give my name to your boy; but we will call him Hubert—for many reasons it may, perheaps, be desirable."

"Nothing could be better;" observed Lady Malcolm; "and as this little cherub is to be my godson also, we can at once decide that henceforth he is to be known as Sydney Hubert Elphinstone."

"Hubert Sydney;" said his mother, in a low but decided voice.

"Right, right;" smiled the baronet, evidently much gratified; "and the next time, we will have Sydney Jasper, will we not, Master Hubert? See the young rogue, how heartily he enters into the conspiracy against his younger brother. By Jove, madam, he is already a Trevanion from head to heel."

It had been long, very long, since Ida had felt so intensely happy. The consciousness of isolation which had pressed so painfully upon her since she had become a voluntary exile from her father's house seemed suddenly removed, and she forgot that her uncle and his son were in reality strangers, while remembering that they were the only relatives who still acknowledged her claim.

In that hour she had only one regret, and that was induced by the absence of her husband, who had unfortunately yielded to the request of Dr. Darnell that he would accompany him several miles into the country, where he had been called to a patient; and who thus missed a meeting which his wife ardently desired should have taken place.

As Sir Jasper Trevanion was anxious to leave town within a few hours, the visit was necessarily a brief one, but it left a cheering impression on the mind and spirits of Ida; who, after the departure of the gentlemen, inquired with natural curiosity of Lady Malcolm, why she had hitherto made a mystery of her friendship with her uncle's family.

"I will tell you;" was the frank reply: "the General and Sir Jasper were college-companions, and, in after-life, firm friends. Such friends, indeed, that it was proposed between them, in the event of the arrangement becoming possible, that an union should take place between their children. Sir Archibald had more than once mentioned the subject to me, but it was one which I did not encourage, as, in my secret heart, I had at that period, different views for Edith; and as it was a point upon which he did not insist, I considered myself, after his death, exonerated from the fulfillment of a promise which I confess that I regarded merely as the caprice of two young men who had expressed an idle wish, rather than entered into a serious compact.

"Some time ago, however, my own reasons against the proposed marriage were removed by circumstances, and consequently, when Sir Jasper, disregarding the decline of our fortunes, recently wrote with a generosity which I could not fail to appreciate, to suggest that our children should meet, and that we should thus enable ourselves to judge whether the proposed union would tend to their mutual happiness, I assented at once."

"And what has been the result?" asked Ida, thoughtfully.

"It is, as yet, impossible to say. They have met but three times; still I can not but think that a young and disengaged heart must do justice to the attractive qualities of Hubert Trevanion; while, with the partial affection of a mother, I am equally inclined to believe that Edith, on her side, is well calculated to inspire a sincere and lasting attachment."

"This is all very strange;" said Mrs. Elphinstone, moodily; "nor, I confess, can I yet comprehend why, when aware of my connection with the Trevanions, you should have maintained so extraordinary a silence regarding this contemplated marriage."

"And yet I do not think that on reflection you will consider my reserve as singular. A thousand circumstances might have occurred to render the union undesirable, or even impossible; in which case, delicacy demanded silence on both sides; a feeling in which Sir Jasper and I alike concurred."

"I am obliged to admit the truth of your reasoning;" said Ida; "but may I, without impertinence, inquire how Lady Trevanion, who has been represented to me as a purse-proud and overbearing person, has been induced to consent to the marriage of her only son with a young lady, who, however beautiful and fascinating, is, as you yourself have assured me, almost without fortune?"

"Lady Trevanion, my dear;" said her companion; "has now been dead upward of a year. She was indisposed at the period of your marriage; and from that illness she never rallied. The retirement in which you have subsequently lived could alone have kept you in ignorance of the event."

"This is indeed a day of revelations!" exclaimed Ida; "and now that you are kind enough to enlighten me upon so many points connected with my own family, I may perhaps be forgiven if I inquire the reason of your original reluctance to bestow the hand of your daughter upon my cousin."

"I had wished her to marry elsewhere:" repeated Lady Malcolm, gravely, but without hesitation.

"Did you then alter your opinion of the person for whom you designed her?"

"By no means."

"This is more enigmatical than all the rest."

"The resolution of the enigma is simple, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, the gentleman in question selected another wife."

"Ha!"

There was silence for a moment, a gloom had gathered upon the brow of Lady Malcolm, who was evidently buried in deep and painful thought; while the life-blood of Ida had sprung from her heart to her cheek, and burned there like a lava-flood.

Sydney, then, was the husband that she had coveted for her daughter! Sydney was the idol at whose shrine Edith was to have worshiped!

"It is to be hoped," she said at length, with an ambiguous smile, "that the happy individual to whom you allude will have no reason to repent his precipitation."

"I fervently trust that he never may!" was the half-unconscious reply.

"Perhaps had he known your flattering intentions in his favor—"

"He never even guessed—he never will guess—the visions of a mother's heart," interposed Lady Malcolm; "I have reason to believe that he is happy—very happy—and in that conviction I forgot my own disappointment."

"And Edith?"

"Edith knows nothing whatever of the circumstance."

"That, at least, is fortunate; but the gentleman himself?"

"Is in equal ignorance."

"And the unfortunate woman who has so unconsciously traversed your projects?"

"My dear Mrs. Elphinstone!" exclaimed her companion; "how do you imagine that she, of all persons upon earth, could ever have fathomed the secrets of my heart? A perfect stranger, whose very name was unknown to me before her marriage."

"There is more romance in the world than we are willing to believe," said Ida, "and I confess that I am woman enough to rejoice that poor Sydney was not thus predestined to another and a brighter fate when he made me his wife. It would scarcely be a comfortable reflection."

"I respect you too much to reply by one word of flattery to such a remark," observed Lady Malcolm, courteously, but with a sudden suspicion that she had been somewhat unguarded in her communications, "yet I may nevertheless admit that it is not the fate of every man to become the husband of such a woman as yourself. You can have nothing to regret—nothing to apprehend."

The eyes of Mrs. Elphinstone were riveted upon her as she spoke, but she remained calm and self-possessed under the scrutiny.

"I am grateful for your good opinion," was the cold rejoinder, "and although we were talking of the romance of real life, believe me, I have no ambition to become a heroine; regret is a weakness which I should scorn, and apprehension a folly for which I should despise myself. And so Edith is to be my cousin! How delighted Sydney will be when I tell him of our meditated relationship."

Although the voice of Mrs. Elphinstone had suddenly assumed a gayety little in unison with its previous tone, Lady Malcolm felt uneasy and embarrassed; nor was the feeling diminished by a consciousness that she could not in any way account for the impression which it produced upon her.

Perfectly true and right-minded, she never for a moment suspected that her motives were misjudged, and her meaning distorted by one to whom she had shown nothing save affection and consequently she could only explain the manner of Mrs. Elphinstone by the painful apprehension that there lay hidden beneath the grace and beauty for which Ida was so eminently distinguished, a defect of temper which must sooner or later prove the destruction of Sydney's peace.

She admitted this fear with reluctance, but still it grew upon her, as day by day she watched the clouded brow of Mrs. Elphinstone, and detected the shade of sarcasm which gave point to words otherwise trivial in themselves.

"Poor boy!" she mentally exclaimed, "secure as he now is in his unconscious happiness, a bitter day of trial awaits him yet."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FIRST QUARREL.

"And I have still more news for you, Sydney," said his wife on his return home; and she informed him of the unexpected visit of her relatives, and their proposals to become sponsors to her boy; and while speaking she narrowly watched the effect of her words; "our little friend, Edith, is to be the wife of Hubert Trevanion."

"By Jove! he is a lucky fellow!" was the reply of Elphinstone, as his cheek became flushed with genuine pleasure.

"Very;" pursued Ida; "that is, of course, should the marriage ever take place, which I confess appears improbable."

"Why so?" was the eager inquiry.

"Because," she continued; "if I am not greatly mistaken, my poor cousin's days are numbered."

"My dear Ida, what can have induced so fearful an apprehension?"

"The unnatural and settled flush upon his cheek, and the extraordinary brightness of his eyes. I am familar with the symptoms, Sydney. Hubert Trevanion is consumptive."

"Poor dear Edith!" murmured Elphinstone.

"You should rather, I think, say, poor dear Hubert!" exclaimed his wife, impatiently.

"And so I do, my love, I pity them both from my soul; but my instant sympathy for Edith grew out of the conviction of what my own feelings, would have been had I lost you under such circumstances, when my whole heart was full of joy and hope." And as he spoke, Elphinstone fondly drew his wife to his bosom, and pressed his lips to her cheek.

"Nonsense, Sydney;" she exclaimed, only half appeased; "you can not for one moment suppose that child to be capable of so engrossing an affection as you describe."

"You are greatly mistaken. I have, as you know, seen Edith alike in her grave and in her gay moments—I remember her as a mere girl, before there existed any necessity to conceal her real feelings, and then she was warm-hearted to impetuosity; I have studied her since, and even amid the trammels of what are considered, and perhaps justly so, the proprieties of society, I am convinced that there is a depth and intensity in her character, which no one who knew her less intimately than ourselves would even suspect, vailed as it is, beneath her mild and gentle manner."

"You are a profound student, Sydney."

Elphinstone laughed.

"In her case, perhaps I am;" he said; "for it has been to me a very interesting study."

"And a profitable one, no doubt."

"I hope so; for the contemplation of excellence can not fail to be profitable; and depend upon it, that the more insight you obtain into that girl's heart, the more you will love her."

"One love satisfies me."

"Traitor!" said Sydney playfully; "when not a day passes that you do not compel me to feel jealous of our boy."

"Jealous!" echoed Ida; "oh! Sydney, tell me the truth—are you, could you ever be jealous?"

"Not of you, dearest;" replied her husband, in a voice of the deepest tenderness: "not of you—I should hate myself were I capable of such a heresy; but still I confess to the egotism of murmuring against all and every thing which distracts your attention from myself. Come now, confess—have I not some reason to complain of that riotous urchin who has usurped all my rights? Does he not occupy almost every hour of your time?"

"But you have found other occupation, Sydney."

"You compelled me to it. I love the boy dearly—of that you need no assurance—but, were it not that he has your eyes and your smile, there are moments when I could almost wish that we were once more all in all to each other."

"And are we not so?" asked Ida, hastily.

"Yes and no: in heart no doubt we are: but, I repeat it, that boy has sadly encroached upon my privileges."

"Perhaps I have been to blame, Sydney; but still you will admit that while I have been engaged with our child, you have found, or created other pursuits in which you have, to all appearance, at least, taken very considerable interest."

"What could I do? You abandoned me to my own resources."

"Do not mistake me, love;" said Mrs. Elphinstone; "I am not speaking to blame you, I am only anxious to exonerate myself; and most certainly I should have been less independent in my own movements, had you not secured so charming a companion as Edith Malcolm."

"She is a sweet girl, that I am quite willing to admit;" conceded Sydney; "but still she is not my wife."

Ida bit her lip.

"Surely," she said; "that circumstance, at least, can be no drawback to your pleasure in her society."

"Certainly not; but you do not appear to understand me."

"Be under no apprehension of the sort;" replied Ida, with a forced laugh; "I am not so obtuse as you imagine. I think that I understand you perfectly. But really, Sydney, it has just occurred to me that, under existing circumstances, it might perhaps be as well if you were not for the future to engross quite so much of Edith's time and attention."

"What *can* you mean, Ida?"

"My meaning must be sufficiently obvious. As an engaged woman—"

"Nonsense! Is she not engaged to your own cousin?"

"So it would appear."

"Then it seems to me that 'existing circumstances' should rather tend to heighten than to decrease our intimacy."

"That may not, however, be the light in which Mr. Trevanion may regard it."

Elphinstone suddenly looked away from the glass before which he was somewhat fastidiously arranging his hair, and gazed steadfastly into the face of his wife:

"In that case," he said, with a gravity unusual to him, "it must have been unpleasant to yourself, or so strange an idea could never have entered your mind."

"*My* mind!" echoed Ida, with a constrained attempt at playfulness. "Oh, that is quite a different affair; it is only *before* marriage that people are supposed to resent the intrusion of a third person between them; and I am now an old married woman, who must be swayed by facts rather than feelings."

Sydney was silent; there was something in the tone of his wife's voice which, for the first time, jarred upon his ear.

"Surely," he said, at last; "you can not imagine—"

"Imagine nothing," interposed Mrs. Elphinstone; "I have not a particle of romance in my composition."

"If I supposed that you could for a moment think me capable—"

"My dear Sydney, you are really fighting against a shadow! You quite terrify me by your dark looks. What have I said or done to anger you?"

"Nothing, Ida, nothing; I am wounded, but not angry—I could not be angry with you; but I confess—"

"Confess nothing; it would appear that we have been exchanging words and not ideas; a mental gladiatorship is by no means desirable. What are your plans for the day?"

"I have formed none."

"Edith is anxious to go to the National Gallery; there is still time enough before dinner; will you accompany her?"

"No."

"No! are you serious?"

"Perfectly so."

"And what can be your reason?"

"I shall remain at home with you."

"My poor Sydney, you will be *ennuyé à mort*."

"Ida," said her husband, as he seated himself beside her, and took her hand in his, while large tears were swelling in his eyes. "There is something alike in your voice and manner which I endeavor in vain to comprehend. Since the hour in which you became my wife, the sole study of my life has been to secure your happiness. If I have failed, tell me at once the cause of that failure, that I may at least strive to repair it. Be frank; be sincere; I can support blame when I am conscious that it is merited; but let me at least understand the ground on which I stand."

"Have I uttered one word of blame?"

"You have not; but you have done worse; you have implied it. Have I deserved that you should treat me with this cold and bitter sarcasm? How am I to interpret either your manner or your words? Tell me plainly and at once in what I have offended you."

"Why should you suppose that I am offended?" asked Mrs. Elphinstone; "are you conscious of having given me cause of offense?"

"On my soul, I am not."

"Then the question is a strange one."

"Ida! Ida! you will drive me mad," he exclaimed, starting from the sofa; "I have not deserved this."

"Will you explain your meaning, Sydney?" asked his wife, calmly.

"I will—would that I were unable to do so, but I can not deceive myself—oh, Ida, that you, whom I have until this hour regarded as the most perfect of your sex—that *you* should indeed be guilty of such a weakness. But no, no; I wrong you—it can not be—you are too high-minded, too pure in heart, to wrong either that innocent girl or myself by so foul a suspicion; only tell me that it is I who ought to blush for even venturing to glance at such a thought—reproach me, upbraid me, Ida, for so vile a distrust of your generous nature—for so frightful a belief, transient as it was—only say that you forgive me, though I can not promise to forgive myself."

"Calm yourself, Sydney," said Mrs. Elphinstone, to whom the very intensity of her feelings gave an unnatural composure, which added to the emotion of her husband; "I have no reproach to utter—what I foresaw has come

to pass; you placed too great a reliance on a mere transitory passion, and you are beginning to discover your error. I have long seen this—long felt it—but I was strong enough to suffer in silence; I am so still; I shall remain so until I feel that my suffering can avail me nothing, and that it has become my duty to assert myself.

"You have forced this avowal from me; or rather, perhaps, I have been led to make it from a sense of delicacy toward my cousin, who will probably be susceptible on the subject of his future wife."

"And who would dare to malign that pure young girl, who is as innocent as an angel?" asked Elphinstone, passionately.

"Her purity and innocence may be considered questionable, when it is known that she has alienated the affections of a husband from his wife," was the cold reply.

"Listen to me, Ida," exclaimed Sydney, with a vehemence that even startled his apparently impassive companion; "I could have borne all but this; *my* honor is at your mercy, trample on it if such is indeed your pleasure, but I will brook no slur on *hers*—she is the child of my mother's chosen friend, the playmate of my boyhood, the hope and pride of a widowed parent's heart; earth contains not a more blameless, a more guileless spirit. If you have decided on the ruin of our domestic peace, I must submit, but your insane suspicions must extend no further, touch not a hair of her head by calumny, but if you have indeed ceased to respect your own dignity, at least respect her innocence."

"Mr. Elphinstone," said his wife, indignantly; "you appear to forget that I am at your mercy."

"No, Ida, no; I forget nothing, and you may believe me when I declare that now you have learned to look upon me as the base and unmanly ruffian that your words imply, I rejoice from my inmost heart that you have so opportunely secured partial and powerful friends, who are able to offer you a more fitting home than that which you accuse me of having dishonored."

"Sydney," exclaimed his wife, "you are cruel even to cowardice; you do not even shrink from threatening me with a second desertion. Forgetting that for you I became an alien from my home, you presume upon my helplessness to insult me. Did I not tell you when you combated my reason with your specious sophistries, that you would one day remember that you had sacrificed yourself to a woman older than yourself? Did I not warn you against the folly of believing that you would not one day feel this, and visit the penalty of your mistake upon my weakness? Do me justice in this at least."

"Ida, do not urge me too far; you have no right, you have no reason to talk to me in such a strain as this."

"Enough! enough!" gasped out his wife; "you justify yourself by casting the blame on me, and I must submit. Be it so; there must be a victim—sacrifice *me*—as I before admitted, I am at your mercy. The world will be ready enough to exonerate you; there will be little sympathy, and less pity for the woman of six-and-twenty, who entrapped the affections of a boy."

"This is too much!" exclaimed Elphinstone, as he started from his seat, and rapidly paced the room; "all is indeed over between us—we must part. How I have loved you, none have known, none can ever know; I would have clung to you through life and death. You were every thing to me; the very air I breathed was not less essential to my happiness; but now—well, it is idle to repine; I am ready to pay the penalty of my mistake. You have withdrawn from me alike your confidence and your affection, and for both our sakes, it is better that we should part."

Ida suddenly clasped her forehead with her spread hands, and fastened a gaze of agony upon her husband.

"Is it so?" she asked in a whisper which fell upon the ear with all the shrillness of a suppressed scream; "is it really so? And could you indeed part from me so willingly? Sydney, Sydney, how have I deserved this?"

For a moment the whole frame of Elphinstone quivered, and he resolutely averted his eyes, but gradually the flush faded from his cheek, and the frown which had darkened his forehead passed away.

"No," he murmured, tremulously; "no; you are right; it would be the rending asunder of body and soul; and yet even that were better than we should live on under the same roof, the one suspected and despised, and the other—"

"What of the other, Sydney? What of the other?" passionately demanded his wife, springing from the sofa, and throwing herself upon his bosom; "Oh, Sydney, what of the other?"

"I can not, and must not dwell upon the subject," was the agitated reply; "I have fallen from such a height into an abyss so frightful that I want moral courage to probe my wretchedness to its actual depth."

"Yet you did love me, Sydney."

"Love you!" echoed her husband; "do you ask me if I loved you? look into your own heart, and read there if I have merited that such a question should be put to me! It is because I loved you so entirely, so devotedly, that I am at this moment incapable not only of deciding how I ought to act, but even of so acting, if my reason pointed out the proper and becoming course."

"And do you not love me still?"

"Ida, you have made me very, very wretched."

"And I? am I not also most miserable? Did I not for your sake abandon father, mother, home—and brave the comments of an unsparing world? And now you threaten to desert me—me, and my worse than orphaned boy. Oh, Sydney, Sydney, can you indeed do this?"

"Tell me, Ida, only tell me that this is a frightful dream," said Elphinstone, as he stood encircled by her clinging arms; "I can not, dare not think that I have really lost my every hope of happiness. Tell me that all about me is a delusion, a cheat of my disordered fancy."

"Nothing is real my own Sydney, nothing but my repentance. Do you not see my tears? do you not feel the throbbings of my heart? Shall I kneel to you for pardon?"

"Hush, Ida, hush!" said Elphinstone, hoarse with emotion; "I can bear no more. Let us strive to forget all that has just past; let us remember only our days of happiness, those days when there was trust and confidence between us; let us think only of our child, and for his sake endeavor to bear with each other's faults, and to repair our own. I have erred—unconsciously, indeed, but still I have erred, or the woman in whom I had centered all my earthly hopes, would not have accused me—the faults shall be repaired. I will state frankly to Lady Malcolm, that the constant intercourse between her daughter and myself has been a source of uneasiness to my wife, and that I consequently feel it to be my duty—"

"Sydney," exclaimed Ida, "do you wish to see me expire at your feet? would you make me a mark for the scorn and ridicule of an irritated mother? Oh, this is too—too much."

"In what other way can I convince you of my willingness to fulfill my share of the compact I have suggested?" demanded Elphinstone, with a dignity of manner which awed his excited and exhausted wife, who was sinking beneath the violence of long-suppressed and unconquerable emotion; "only name your wishes, and they shall be obeyed."

"Pity me—pardon me," broke in a low murmur from the lips of the wretched and self-tortured wife.

"I do both; and now listen, Ida." But he spoke to ears which were no longer conscious of his voice—her over-taxed energies would endure no more—and she had fainted.

To raise her nerveless form, fold her frantically to his bosom, and implore her to forgive him was the work of a moment to the unhappy Sydney; who, as he gazed upon her faultless face, now pale and cold as marble, and contemplated that "life in death" which is so fearful a counterfeit of actual dissolution, felt as though he were in very fact the murderer that he called himself.

Vainly did he press his fevered lips upon her cheek and brow, his caress remained without response; equally vain were his wild entreaties that she would look at him—speak to him. The closed eye and rigid mouth remained still—the very pulses of her heart had ceased to beat—and, at length, fairly maddened by his fear and his remorse, the poor young man sank down beside her, and buried his face amid the folds of her dress, as still and motionless as the slight form against which he leaned.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RECONCILIATION.

An hour passed away, yet Elphinstone neither spoke nor moved; but unlike that of his wife, who lay in a state of utter unconsciousness, his period of inaction was far from being one of rest.

An agony of spirit too intense for physical demonstration, crushed him to the very earth. His bodily energies were dormant, but his mental powers were painfully, bitterly active.

Like one in a hideous dream, he looked back upon the illusions of the past only to be scourged once more into suffering by the realities of the present; and what did that present now offer to his contemplation?

In the severity of his great and absorbing happiness, in the joy of loving, and feeling that he was beloved, he had willfully put from him all the uncertainties of the future; like the unwary traveler who, engrossed by the glorious landscape around him, forgets the sure progress of time, and finds himself suddenly benighted without refuge or shelter, he had sauntered on in the pleasant path which spread itself before him, without taking one precaution against the hour when it might become tangled and hard to tread; and thus he found himself unable to cope with the difficulties by which he was surrounded.

Had he been less devoted to his wife, all would have been comparatively easy, as, in the event of a reconciliation, he might have consoled himself under the miserable conviction of her weakness by once more courting the smiles of a world ever ready to bestow them upon the young and gifted who can bring appropriate incense to its shrine; or even—were this reconciliation impossible, it would still have been in his power to commence a new career, trammeled indeed by bitter memories, but still open to a sanguine and energetic nature. Now, however, it was far otherwise, for, young as he was, Sydney Elphinstone had staked his all of happiness on his love for Ida, and he loved her still, even in this hour of agony when he could not conceal from himself that she had forfeited a portion of his respect. He probed his heart unshrinkingly, but no accusing voice came from its depths—not a thought, not a wish, had wandered from her; and the blow fell with corresponding weight.

What was to be the end? what hope, what trust, could he ever again rest upon her affection after she had thus so cruelly misjudged him? He felt that henceforward he should be perpetually standing on the brink of a precipice down which he might be hurled at any moment, without having himself made one onward step. It was a harrowing reflection; he was as yet only on the threshold of manhood; he had barely entered his twenty-second year; and already he had experienced one of the most bitter trials of life.

Hot tears flooded his heart, and stagnated there—his burning eyeballs were dry. He had become an object of suspicion to the woman whom he would himself have trusted even to the death. True, she had evidently repented her ungenerous want of confidence, while it was equally certain that she still loved him—there was no mistaking the cry of anguish with which she had thrown herself upon his bosom;

but what, to such a nature as his, was love without faith? Nothing; less than nothing: a perpetual mockery which must wear away not only her existence, but his own also.

There could be no return of the halcyon days when heart met heart without misgiving; henceforward, every word and action must be weighed, and a never-ceasing restraint, like a mortal coat of mail, never to be put off, must exist between them.

Not once, during his long and painful vigil, had it occurred to Elphinstone to summon assistance. The dead silence which had succeeded to the storm of passion appeared so natural a consequence of the previous excitement, that he continued helplessly engrossed by his own miserable thoughts, until a deep sigh from Ida recalled him to a sense of her situation. Slowly, then, and with a sigh whose intensity formed a fitting echo to her own, he rose from his knees, and pillowing her head upon his shoulder, deluged her pale face with an essence which he found upon her table.

His hand shook, and his lip quivered, as he looked upon her, so lovely and so helpless in her unconsciousness; and when, as he almost frantically pressed a kiss upon her forehead, she at length opened her eyes with a wild and inquiring expression, a convulsive sob which he could not repress, replied to the appeal.

"Ha!" murmured Ida, as she swept her hand across her brow, "now I remember all—all—but you will not abandon me, Sydney? you will not make our child fatherless?"

"Be calm, Ida, be calm," he answered in a voice so changed that it sounded strange even to his own ears; "have we not already decided that we must endeavor to forget the past? Let us fulfill the pledge. I have lived too long for myself; for the past I will substitute the future. There are duties hitherto neglected, which henceforth shall be performed: indulgences which henceforth shall be abandoned; you shall have no further cause of complaint against me."

"Sydney, what mean you?"

"I will no longer be a mere man of pleasure, forgetting all my home-happiness, the responsibilities which have devolved upon me. I will at last be strong and earnest; I have work before me—it shall be accomplished; hitherto, in the egotism of a false and unworthy pride, I have shrunk from suing for the help of others to aid me on my onward path; now I will shrink no longer; but boldly put from me the weak shame of soliciting what I can not command. My day of sloth is at an end, and that of labor shall commence in earnest. When you know that I am toiling for you and for our boy, you will learn to trust me."

"Oh, speak less coldly—I can not bear it."

"Poor girl!" said Elphinstone, "we must both strive to bear our burden. I am not cold, but I have aged two years within the last two hours, and I must seek to profit by the experience so dearly bought. Rouse yourself, Ida; the realities of life have come upon us—suddenly and harshly, it is true—but they have come, and we must face them bravely. We have dreamed a glorious dream, but let us not embitter the awakening by useless repinings for the past."

"And is this all? Have you, indeed, cast me from your heart forever?"

"No, Ida, no; while it beats, it must beat for you. But we can no longer deceive ourselves; a gulf has yawned between us in which the dearest of our mutual illusions have gone down—your faith in me—my trust in your confiding affection. It is a sad truth, but we can not conceal it from ourselves; let us, therefore, rather mourn over it together: it will be another bond of sympathy between us."

"Sydney, my heart is breaking!" gasped his wife.

"Rest it upon mine," was the reply, as he drew her closer to him, and folded her in his arms. "We can still love each other, Ida—let that be our consolation."

"But if I solemnly vow never again to doubt you—"

"Strive, for both our sakes, to place what trust in me you can, but make no vow—it would be at once idle and impotent."

Mrs. Elphinstone sank back upon the sofa convulsed with agony. She no longer recognized her husband: the idolizing lover had been transformed, as if by some occult magic, into the stern and moralizing mentor: his heart was still hers, but his reason had condemned her.

All around her was a blank waste—she felt as if she could have shrieked out in her anguish, while she had not even power to stay the large cold tears which were chasing each other down her cheeks.

Sydney, meanwhile, sat with his head buried in his hands—he was still dizzy from the effects of his sudden wretchedness, and thus they both remained for a time, silent and motionless.

Suddenly Ida arose from her recumbent position, and sprang to the bell.

"Bring me my child," she said to the servant who obeyed the summons; and in an instant he was in her arms.

"Sydney," she murmured, as she sank on her knees before him, and held toward him the unconscious infant, laughing, and struggling to reach its father; "pardon me, and trust me for his sake."

Elphinstone looked up; a wild burst of grief shook him as with an ague fit; he strove to speak, but his words were inaudible; yet Ida was satisfied; the infant was clinging to his bosom; her own head rested upon his knee; and she felt his hot tears rain down upon her hair. He did not attempt to raise her from the ground; he was evidently unconscious of the lowly posture in which she had sued for forgiveness; his moral strength was spent that last agonizing cry came from the mother of his child, and his heart had melted within him.

How could he doubt her at that moment, when the soft little hand of his firstborn was pressed against his cheek? He did not; he was incapable of following up the train of thought by which he had just been oppressed, his sense of wrong had spent itself; he could only yearn for peace, and rest.

"My own best love!" he at length faltered out; "come to my heart, Ida; let me hold you there together."

With a wild gasp his wife flung herself upon

his neck; and both believed as they clung together in that close embrace that they were once more happy beyond the reach of fate. Alas! that those clinging arms should ever relax—that the blessed oblivion of that moment should ever yield to the memories of the past, and the threatenings of the future! The eastern traveler, after thirsting and panting in the desert, indulges in the same fallacy, as he reaches the green oasis, casts himself down under the sheltering trees, and laves his parched throat with the sparkling water; he forgets the weary waste of sand behind him; he casts no anxious glance over the arid wilderness before him; the present is for the moment all in all; but still the fact remains unchanged, that on the tract which he had passed he has left time, and strength, and energy; and on that which he has still to pursue, the same, and perhaps greater perils, await him.

Yet both body and mind may well seek rest in these halting-places of life and travel, for without them, few could survive the journey.

And there were peace and love once more in that modest cottage; fond endearments, and gentle words, and looks more eloquent than words; the leafy boughs still afforded their grateful shade; the limpid water still touched their lips refreshingly, the grass was green beneath their feet, the heavens blue above their heads—and the desert lay afar off in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TEMPTER.

On the following morning, true to the resolve which he had made to himself, Elphinstone proceeded early to the Temple; where, in default of any more active professional occupation, he passed several hours in close and earnest study, and resolutely flung from him the languor consequent upon the excitement which he had undergone on the previous day.

Occasionally, sad thoughts, and even forebodings, forced themselves upon him, but suffering had made him strong, and he would not yield to that yearning for mental repose which would have rendered him unable to pursue his task.

With Ida, however, it was far otherwise. Her husband had for months past been constantly at home, and she had become so habituated to his presence, that, had she even been free from every other cause of suffering, her solitude would of itself have been irksome to her. As it was, therefore, it became after a time, almost unendurable.

She had whiled away the early hours of the morning with her infant, but at length he slept, and she had no resource save her own thoughts, when, after having seated herself at the instrument, and discovered that her irritated nerves could not support the sound of music; turned to her easel, and found that her unsteady fingers failed in their accustomed skill; and thrown aside a book over which her eyes wandered mechanically, without taking in its sense; she at last threw herself hopelessly into a chair, and abandoned all further attempt at occupation.

For awhile she could not collect her ideas; all seemed vague and dream-like: her husband's sudden assumption of authority; her own submission; all appeared unnatural and impossible; but gradually the mental mist was swept away, and she recalled with a distinctness that made her pulses throb, and her brow burn with emotion, every look and word which had passed between them.

Silently she sat, with clasped hands so tightly clinched together, that the tips of her fingers were bloodless from the pressure. The first question that she had put to her own heart had been—How could I doubt him? How had he deserved that I should so wrong his frank and noble nature? And, under this first impulse, bitterly did she condemn herself; but as time wore on, the busy fiend for whom she had so long made a home within her bosom, began once more to struggle into life; her jealousy had been crushed by fear, not annihilated by conviction.

She remembered that Sydney had upbraided her for a suspicion which he had denounced as impure and unwomanly, and that he had even volunteered to forego the society of Lady Malcolm and her daughter; but she also recalled the fact to mind that, while blaming her, he had been enthusiastic in his praise of Edith; and that he had not once striven to exculpate himself: that he had been indignant, but not explanatory; loud in deprecation of her own conduct, but silent with regard to his own personal feelings.

Was this fair? was this manly? were her next mental queries; and the inward demon murmured—no—you were borne down by words; you were overwhelmed but not convinced; and yet you were weak enough to yield to mere idle declamation—the declamation of a boy, proud in his sense of power, and wielding his pigmy bow with as much importance as though he were, like Sagittarius, about to bring down a constellation at every shot, when, in point of fact, he was only firing into the void. Were you required to make your own heart, which he had already wounded, a target for his weapon? It would have been time enough to have played the submissive wife when he had justified himself in your eyes—but what proof had you?—what proof did he offer to you that you had wronged him? None—he reproached and threatened, while you wept and sued; and what have you gained? Conviction? Peace of mind?—And with a shuddering sigh, Ida answered—"neither—I am *not* convinced—I am *not* at peace."

And still her child slept on!

"Delightful!" exclaimed a cheerful voice, as the drawing-room door opened, and the full-plumed bonnet and searching eyes of Mrs. Darnell appeared, glancing and fluttering their way toward Ida; "Mrs. Elphinstone not only at home, but also alone! How pleased I am that I made my first visit here. The Doctor told me that I should weary you with my company if I called too often; but men understand these matters so badly that I was determined to persist. Only say that you are glad to see me."

"I am *very* glad to see you;" said her hostess extending her hand, and, by a violent effort, arousing herself from her abstraction; "and duly appreciate your kindness in wasting your time upon a recluse, when you must have so many more agreeable engagements."

"Recluse, indeed, my dear young lady; but why should it be so? with your beauty and your talents, you could always command society."

"I care little now for what is called the world;" was the reply; "I have tried it, and found it alike hollow and heartless."

"We have all done that in our turn;" said the visitor, with as much sententiousness as she could contrive to throw into her tone and manner; "but we can at least pay it back in its own currency. The world amuses me; it has amused me all my life; and I am contented to make use of it in its own way."

"You are a practical philosopher," said Ida, with a smile.

"Now, that is so like one of the Doctor's remarks!" exclaimed the voluble little lady, settling herself upon the chair. "He is always telling me that I am this, that, or the other, of which I have not the most remote idea myself."

"In your modesty;" said Ida, with a gleam of her old humor; "you are then, probably, like Molière's gentleman, who had talked prose all his life without being aware of it."

"Very likely; at all events, I know that it is very pleasant to talk with you—particularly when you are alone—for I have taken an immense fancy to you, and am glad to have you for once all to myself."

"I can not but feel greatly flattered," replied her hostess; "and only regret that I shall prove a sorry companion to-day, as I am suffering severely from nervous headache."

"A nasty complaint," said Mrs. Darnell; "a very nasty complaint. Do let me be professional, and recommend camphor julep, or, better still, fresh air and exercise. You are too much in the house, Mrs. Elphinstone."

"Perhaps I am; but I am ashamed to confess that I have not courage to walk alone."

"Of course not; it would be highly incorrect for you to do so; but there is your husband, who must only be too delighted to show himself with a beautiful woman upon his arm. All men like it; it flatters their vanity."

"Mr. Elphinstone is engaged at the Temple."

"Not always: I have frequently seen him walking with Miss Malcolm."

Ida's cheek flushed slightly, but she controled herself. "He was an idle man at that time," she said, quietly, "but now he is about to devote himself to his profession."

"All very proper, no doubt; I have not a word to say on the subject; it is only a pity you did not profit by his period of idleness to lay in a stock of health."

"I was a nurse all that time, and could not leave my boy."

"My dear Mrs. Elphinstone," said the little woman, demurely, "let me hope that you will not fall into the same error as many young mothers, and by devoting yourself too much to your infant, allow your husband to perceive that he can do without you: it is a lesson that men soon learn, and never forget. At this very moment I could really find it in my heart to be seriously angry with you, for not going at least a short distance to meet Mr. Elphinstone, instead of allowing Miss Malcolm to do so."

"What *can* you mean, my dear Mrs. Darnell?"

"Mean!" echoed the lady; "what can I mean, but that I passed them on the road as I came here; and that I consider that I am only doing my duty by proving to you that you should be more cautious."

"I am sure you are very kind"—gasped Ida.

"I am sure that I wish to be so," was the ready reply; and you young creatures all require the assistance of older and wiser heads than your own. 'Experience makes fools wise,' says the proverb; and you must have time before you can gain experience."

"It appears to me, nevertheless, that some experience is forced upon us very rapidly."

"No doubt of it, but is it worth much? Does it make you happier or better?"

"Neither, I fear."

"Of course not; that is quite a different sort of thing. The experience that I mean—"

Mrs. Darnell paused; if she really did not know what she meant, she was certainly unable to express it; and after an instant's silence, she resumed abruptly:

"Now, as an example of what I want you to understand—suppose, for instance, you had occasionally waived your duties as a mother to fulfill those of a wife, do you not see at once that you would have been more necessary to your husband, and not have thrown him so constantly into the society of that pretty girl, Miss Malcolm? Very dangerous, very dangerous, indeed, my dear lady; for men will be men; and although you are so much handsomer than your young friend, you ought to remember that she is not his wife, and that there is always a charm in novelty."

"She is not *my* friend," said Ida, bitterly; "Lady Malcolm and Mr. Elphinstone's mother were greatly attached; and as a natural consequence—"

"Yes, yes; I perfectly comprehend—" said the visitor, with a sagacious nod; "the old family affection has created a sort of cousinship, which is all very well when not carried too far; but really I have seen so much trouble brought about by sentimental attachments of that kind, that I feel it more than ever my duty to warn you to be upon your guard. Mr. Elphinstone is a charming young man, but still he is *very* young, and can not be expected to calculate the consequences of any little indiscretion into which he may be led by a warm heart and high spirits. I have, as I said before, taken a great fancy to you, and therefore I venture to be frank; they say, you know, that 'lookers on see most of the game.'"

"And what have you seen?" asked Ida, struggling to retain her composure.

"Little as yet, very little, I confess," was the unsatisfactory reply; "but then you must remember that I have only recently made your acquaintance."

"But something you must have seen," persevered Mrs. Elphinstone, "or you would not have considered it necessary to urge me to greater prudence."

"These affairs require delicate handling," said Mrs. Darnell, with a complacency which betrayed her perfect confidence in her own skill and tact; "a look or a word may mean so much or so little; and as my only aim is to tranquilize your mind, and to impress upon you your responsibilities as a wife, I can not, of course, wish to make you see with my eyes, or understand with my understanding. All that I shall venture to say, therefore, is this—do not encourage the intimacy between your husband and Miss Malcolm too far."

How, had her visitor exhibited an equal amount of low breeding and want of charity upon any other subject, would the high-minded Ida have loathed and despised her. How soon would she have silenced the busy tongue which sported so glibly with the holiest and most sacred feelings of others. How indignantly would she have rejected the companionship of a vulgar gossip, whose prying eyes saw deep into the darkest corners of a quiet home, and peopled the void with phantoms!

Now, however, it was far otherwise; and Mrs. Darnell was not more convinced of the kindness and sagacity of her own proceedings than was her unhappy listener.

"You may be right," she said, after a moment's silence; "it may have been imprudent on my part to permit so close an intimacy between the two families, but it is only just to Mr. Elphinstone to tell you, that he voluntarily offered to put an end to it, should such be my wish."

"Poor thing!" almost whispered her companion, as an expression of very sincere regret settled upon her usually joyous face. "Has it already come to that? I am sorry to hear it—very sorry—for that was precisely what I was anxious to prevent. I did hope to open your eyes before your husband could suspect that he had given you one uneasy thought. All might have been so easily arranged in some way or other; it is a sad disappointment to me to find that the subject has been broached between you."

"You can not regret it more than I do," said Ida, gloomily; "I am sorry to have been so rash, but in an unguarded moment—"

"I can quite understand you, quite; but it is to be deplored that you were so far excited as to lose your self-command; for I know well by experience how these things end: let the wife be as perfect as she may, she must give way at last, so that, by attempting to protect and justify herself, she only loses ground."

"Which she may, perhaps, never regain," murmured Mrs. Elphinstone, rather speaking to herself than addressing her companion.

"A very rational remark, my dear young lady," said Mrs. Darnell, approvingly; "and one which gives me a great respect for your understanding: my late grandmother, who was a very superior woman, never took leave of a bride without saying to her: 'You will be the idol of a month, but only a wife for the rest of your days; remember this; and, above all else, beware of the first quarrel—quarrel as much as you please afterward, but beware of the first time, for rest assured, that although both may forgive, neither will forget!' She gave the same warning to scores of young women in her time; and I am really very, very sorry that I was not able to do the same kind office for you before it was too late."

Ida made no reply; a weight had fallen upon her heart, and rested there like an incubus.

"However," resumed the pertinacious visitor who had not penetration to discover that she had stretched her listener upon a moral rack which strained and tore every fiber of her spirit: "we will hope better things for you. Mr. Elphinstone is, as I before remarked, so very young, and you are so very beautiful, that no doubt all will come right in time. Only, I entreat of you, take my advice; profit by his offer, and get rid of that very dangerous young lady.

"I have had an unpleasant task to perform, but the extraordinary interest which I feel for you rendered it a duty, according to my ideas of Christian charity and sisterly love. It would have been better, certainly, if Lady Malcolm had spared me so ungracious an office, as she most decidedly would have done had she displayed proper prudence; but I care little for my own feelings when I can relieve those of others.

"Look upon me, therefore, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone, as a warm and sincere friend, confide in me, and make use of me without ceremony or scruple, whenever I can be of service to you; for, as the doctor truly says, I am never so happy as when I am mixed up with the troubles and trials of others. And now, that I flatter myself I have comforted and soothed you, I will leave you to reflect upon our conversation. I need not say that I will soon see you again."

There was a flutter of gauzé and feathers, a rustling of silk and velvet, a clasping of hands, an exchange of courteous words, and Mrs. Darnell disappeared. She paused for a moment in the hall to desire the maid, who attended her to the door, to be very, very careful of her poor mistress; and then the sound of her carriage-wheels died away in the distance; and still Ida stood erect and rigid on the spot where they had parted.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STORM CLOUD.

DESPITE the fond embrace with which he had parted from his wife, Elphinstone could not conceal from himself, as he at length closed his books and left the Temple, that his home had ceased to be to him the haven of peace and love which it had once been.

All his most cherished associations had suddenly been shivered about him, and it was in vain that he strove to restore the fragments

into a perfect whole: the shock was still too recent: the blow had been at once too heavy and too abrupt.

His sense of delicacy revolted at the recollection that Ida, who had even until the previous day been to him an object of worship, should suddenly have become a suppliant for pity and for pardon; and that the confidence which he had placed in her affection should have been so cruelly requited; his love for her continued unimpaired, but with it came a new and unwelcome feeling, that robbed it of half its charm

Unconsciously his step grew languid, and he lingered on his way as he had never hitherto done after an absence of so many hours from his beautiful and gifted wife. What security had he that even in that comparatively short space of time, she might not have encouraged new doubts, as wild and baseless as those which had already caused him so much misery?

The Malcolms, too—how could he ever again meet them as he had hitherto done, conscious that every look and word must be weighed and measured, and even then, perhaps, adduced as evidence against him?

Poor Sydney, with his impulsive temperament and frank-heartedness, he keenly felt how difficult a task lay before him; and, had he not been restrained by his promise to Ida, he would at once have confided to Lady Malcolm the embarrassing nature of his position, and left it to her more matured judgment to discover some mode of escape for both parties; but Ida had shrunk from exposing her weakness to the mother of Edith, and he resolved to respect her dignity with as much jealousy as herself. Thus he had no resource save in his own moral courage, and bitter was the reflection that it should be first called into action to secure the tranquillity of his own hearth.

Such were the musings of the young husband as he slowly proceeded on his homeward path, a path which, for the first time, he felt to be irksome; nor could he conceal from himself that it was actually a relief to him when he encountered Lady Malcolm and her daughter, who were taking their accustomed walk, and to whom he felt compelled to offer his protection. The meeting, even trammeled as it was by a consciousness of the annoyance which Ida would feel could she be aware of the accident, was of service to him, as it served to direct his thoughts from his own trials, and to give them another direction.

Soothed by the calm good sense of his mother's friend, and enlivened by the gentle gayety of her daughter, the moments passed swiftly and pleasantly; nor was it until he parted with the ladies at their own gate, that he was startled by the recollection that there no longer remained the time necessary for the walk which he had proposed to his wife as he left her, and for which she had promised to prepare herself against his return. Never before had he failed in any appointment involving her gratification, and at what a moment and in what a manner had he done so now! He actually trembled with eagerness as he reached his own door, and anticipated the merited reproach with which she would probably receive him on his return.

Herein, however, he instantly discovered that he had deceived himself. As he entered the room, Mrs. Elphinstone was seated at the piano, from which she instantly rose with a smile to greet him.

"Will you forgive me, my love," he asked; "for not having fulfilled my promise to return at an earlier hour than this? I am really quite distressed to be so late, but I have been detained"

"Are you late?" asked Ida in her turn, affecting to consult the little French timepiece; "oh, no; we shall not dine for an hour yet, so that you have more time than you will require for your toilet.

"But the walk upon which we had decided?"

"Ah, true;" she replied in the same accent of calm indifference in which she had first spoken; "I remember now, that we did talk of a country ramble; but, as you see, I had forgotten it, and had consequently made no preparation."

Sydney was deeply hurt, and his countenance betrayed it; but Mrs. Elphinstone was carefully collecting her music, and did not, or would not, seem to remark his annoyance.

"Your forgetfulness can not, however, exonerate me—" he commenced, struggling to assume as much composure as herself.

"Oh, not a word more, my dear Sydney," she interposed, "upon so unimportant a subject. I feel convinced that you were more usefully occupied; and although I can not boast of having passed my time as profitably as yourself, I have at least spent it very pleasantly."

"Are you, then, becoming so much enamored of solitude, Ida?"

"By no means," was the quick rejoinder, "nor have I been solitary; on the contrary, Mrs. Darnell paid me a very long, and a very kind visit, for which I feel greatly indebted to her."

"Mrs. Darnell!" echoed Elphinstone, emphatically. "It is impossible that you could derive any pleasure from the society of that trifling, mindless woman."

"You are quite in error, I assure you, Sydney, I have a decided *engouement* for Mrs. Darnell; and, more than that, I have also a great respect for her. She is so frank and warm-hearted, and, moreover, possessed of such admirable judgment, that I consider her friendship to be a valuable acquisition to one so inexperienced in the duties and privileges of a wife as myself."

"Ida! I had no idea that you could be so sarcastic."

"I intended no sarcasm. I have simply expressed my conviction of her character," said his wife, firmly, "and surely you must be happy to find that such a friend is willing to enliven the hours rendered dreary by your absence."

"I should, indeed, be so," rejoined Elphinstone, "could I enter into your feelings toward her; but the expression of such an opinion from *you*, has, I confess, astonished me not a little."

"You perhaps think her too old to be agreeable," replied Ida, dryly.

"Too old?" echoed Sydney; "you do me

injustice. It depends on women themselves to be agreeable at any age. They have it in their power to be charming at every season, like the roses of the Philippine Islands, which are white at sunrise, pink at noon, and crimson at twilight; changeful it may be, but charming in every change."

"Who is sarcastic now?" asked Mrs. Elphinstone.

"Certainly not I," laughed her husband, "and I think you must at least be compelled to admit that I have treated your new friend very poetically."

"But you dislike her?"

"I confess that I do not admire her general deportment, and that I have rather a mean opinion of her understanding."

"You do her injustice," said Ida, with a flashing eye; "she is a shrewd and clear-sighted woman, who only requires to be known in order to be appreciated."

"Now, how on earth, my dear girl," asked Sydney, "have you been able to make so extraordinary a discovery? what can Mrs. Darnell have said or done to establish her fussy little self so firmly in your affections?"

"She has taken a sincere interest in me, and is anxious to contribute to my happiness."

"She is too kind," replied Elphinstone, in a grieved accent, "but I trust that your happiness does not depend on her very supererogatory aid and support. You already possessed a friend equally anxious to render you every service in her power, and one who would, I should have thought, have been infinitely more congenial to so refined a nature as your own, in Lady Malcolm."

"Comparisons are invidious, my dear Sydney."

"Neither do I seek to institute a comparison between two women who are the antipodes of each other," was the impatient rejoinder, "and you must forgive me if I frankly confess at once that to me the vulgar-minded wife of Dr. Darnell is positively insufferable."

"What can you have to fear from my friendship with the poor lady, who has so unconsciously inspired your dislike?"

"Fear! nothing assuredly for myself; but I feel disappointed that you should find pleasure in the society of a woman to whom I am satisfied that you would not have accorded a second glance before you became my wife."

"Perhaps not," said Ida, with an ambiguous smile, "for, at that period, although I lived in what is emphatically called 'the world,' I had never looked below its surface, and was consequently only one of the bubbles that floated down the tide, without comprehending what lay beneath; now, however, when I have to struggle against the current, I must learn to turn my gaze from the sunshine that gleams above to the impediments which may possibly impede my progress—the rocks and shoals that are hidden in the depths of the stream."

"And has such a struggle really commenced for you Ida?"

"Certainly, my dear Sydney; am I not a wife and a mother? Are not our prospects uncertain? Our resources rapidly diminishing?"

"True," said Elphinstone, gloomily, "true; your trials have indeed commenced, and if you conceive that they can be lessened by other sympathy than my own, you have every right to try the experiment."

Ida made no reply, but after having, with great apparent care, smoothed the dark bands of hair which fell low upon her cheeks, before the mirror, she turned toward the book-case, and with the same affectation of fastidiousness, selected a volume, with which she established herself upon the sofa, apparently forgetful of her husband's presence.

Elphinstone was bewildered, and as he paced slowly to and fro, he asked himself in vain what could be the meaning of his wife's extraordinary manner. Suddenly he stopped immediately in front of her, and gazed inquiringly into her face, but she read on calmly, with a smile playing about her lips, as though pleasantly engrossed by the book in which she was occupied.

At this moment the servant announced dinner.

"Already!" exclaimed Sydney; "and I have not even changed my dress. Will you excuse me for five minutes, Ida?"

"For any time you please; there is no hurry in the world;" replied his wife, without raising her eyes from the volume.

After another long look, which remained unnoticed like the last, Elphinstone, hurriedly left the room. As he did so, the book fell from his wife's hand to the floor, her eyes were strained in the direction where he had disappeared, and her trembling lips became livid. It was evident that she struggled fiercely to control the violence of the emotion which shook her whole frame to agony; but she did control it; not a tear moistened the quivering eyelids, not a sigh escaped the overcharged breast; all was still, strong endurance; the shaft hurled by the idle hand of Mrs. Darnell, had struck home, and the iron which rankled in the wound was crushed back as resolutely as the Spartan boy crushed back the living death that he carried in his bosom.

Already? while the kiss of reconciliation was yet warm upon her lips—while the words of promise and of hope were still sounding in her ears.—Already had Sydney again sought the society of the woman whom she feared and hated; and forgotten his pledge to her. A low bitter laugh escaped her once, and once only; nor did she stir a limb until aroused by the hasty step of her husband as he crossed the hall. Then she stooped, picked up the volume that lay at her feet, and, resuming the attitude in which he had left her, was once more, to all appearance, absorbed as before.

"Are you ready, Ida?" asked Elphinstone, as he paused at the door.

"Quite;" she replied, rising with alacrity and moving toward him.

The young man's heart throbbed painfully. Could he have mistaken her? Had the book which she had persisted so pertinaciously in reading, really so much interested her that it had caused her to overlook his want of punctuality, and even rendered her for the moment independent of his society? It must be so; and he had been doing battle with a shadow.

Strong in this conviction, she had no sooner reached his side than he took her hand, but it was instantly withdrawn.

"What can this mean?" he asked; "have I again offended you, Ida?"

"Oh, no;" was the reply, as by a violent effort she recovered her self-possession; "why should you suppose so?"

"Because you would not suffer me to take you hand."

"It is unnecessary;" she said, quietly; "the distance is not great."

"True;" acquiesced Elphinstone as he followed her to the dining-room, thankful that the presence of the servant must for a time at least avert the storm which he saw was once more gathering around him.

The dinner passed almost in silence, and as the wondering attendant quietly performed her duties, Sydney felt the very air oppressive, so heavily did the singular demeanor of his wife weigh upon his spirit; nor was it until they were again alone that he could rally sufficiently to make any attempt at conversation; while even then the calm pale face of Ida actually awed him.

"You appear to have been singularly interested in your book to-day," he said at length. "May I inquire what it was?"

"I really do not recollect:" was the reply; "it lies yonder; perhaps you may like to read it."

"Not at present, I would rather converse with you."

"I shall be but a poor companion. My head aches horribly."

"I feared as much;" said Elphinstone, eagerly, endeavoring to delude himself into the belief that he had now found the true solution of the enigma; "I felt sure that something was wrong. You are very pale, love; shall I send for Dr. Darnell?"

"Oh no, no;" exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone; "I will apply a better remedy," and laying her hand on the bell, she desired the servant by whom it was answered, to beg Lady Malcolm and her daughter to do her the favor to take their coffee with herself and Mr. Elphinstone.

"My dear Ida;" said her husband, as the attendant withdrew; "would not a perfectly quiet evening have been more beneficial in your present state than even the society of your friends?"

"Perhaps so, as regards myself;" was the cold reply; "but I am not selfish enough to sacrifice your gratification to my own—and it will, I should imagine, be pleasant to both Miss Malcolm and yourself to talk over your morning's walk. They will no doubt be here in a few minutes, and meanwhile, I will go and ascertain if Hubert is asleep."

As she ceased speaking, she rose and left the room, while her husband, who instantly comprehended the whole extent of the new difficulty in which he had so innocently involved himself, remained motionless with surprise and mortification.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ESTRANGEMENT.

From the evening recorded in the last chapter, no allusion was ever again made by Mrs. Elphinstone to her husband's implied admiration of Miss Malcolm, but he too well comprehended the nature of his wife to imagine for an instant that she any longer placed the slightest confidence in his affection; and while he could have taken her to his heart, and wept over her pale cheek, and the rapid attenuation of her still graceful, but now fearfully fragile form, and poured forth all the agony of his soul at her mistrust, he shrank from the slightest demonstration, lest the appeal which he would fain have made to her reason should only lead to a renewal of the bitter scenes through which they had already passed.

And thus they lived on; Sydney smothering his better feelings, and sacrificing his innate sense of dignity, to that morbid love of ease which formed so prominent a feature in his generous but weak nature; and Ida gnawing away her own heart in silence, conscious that when the moment of conviction came, the lava-flood of her indignation must carry ruin with it.

Elphinstone chafed under an injustice as baseless as it was unworthy; while his wife, misled by her own wretched suspicions, and confirmed in her error by the inane consolation and advice of a mindless and ill-judging acquaintance, never for an instant suffered herself to doubt that she had become the victim of his inconstancy.

Thus, in order to escape from a thralldom which was hateful to him, the young husband, who, at the commencement of his married life, had looked upon his chambers in the Temple as exile, because they involved an occasional and brief separation from the object of his idolatry, soon learned to feel that his most genial home was there—there, where no cold but ever-watchful eye noted his every movement; where no quick but apparently careless ear drank in his every word; and where no diseased and distorted imagination converted even his most inconsequent actions into matters of moment, pregnant with inquiry and meaning.

The ready smile and unquestionable docility of his wife wounded him to the quick, for they were no longer the assurances of affection and devotedness; the smile was hollow, and the docility overacted and unnatural; there was no longer any communion of spirit between them; Ida was a mere human automaton, answering to every spring at his pleasure, but originating no movement of her own.

To his anxious inquiries regarding her health, he always received the same stereotyped reply—she was quite well—quite—could not desire to be better; to his attentions she resigned herself passively, as though this resignation were a part of her wifely duty. Nor did she, on her side, neglect to exhibit toward Sydney all those minor courtesies which are so dear and grateful to the heart when they are the spontaneous growth of mutual affection; but this was rather from an impulse of high breeding than from a genuine desire to increase his happiness; and Elphinstone was not slow to see and feel the painful truth.

There was no pleading now for another hour when her husband, immediately after breakfast, day by day, lingered for a moment in the hall to caress his boy ere he caught up his hat and gloves, and with a hasty kiss upon her

brow, hurried off to town; no inquiry as to the probable hour of his return; nothing but a calm and unquestioning submission to his will, an apparent indifference to his movements, which had gradually built up a wall of ice between them, that sent its bitter chill to the hearts of both.

Scarcely, however, had Sydney disappeared, and her child been placed in her arms, than Ida passionately pressed her lips upon the rosy little cheek still flushed from the pressure of her husband's kiss; while hot tears, long and painfully suppressed, streamed down her face, and fell into her bosom. She had ceased to trust, but she still loved him with the whole vehemence of her ungoverned nature.

Poor Ida! with all the elements of happiness within her reach, she was hopelessly, irremediably wretched. Her capricious inconsistencies, her wayward fits of temper, had seriously alienated the affection of Lady Malcolm, who had, moreover, resolutely refused to expose her daughter to a constant companionship with Mrs. Darnell, to whose mind and manners she alike objected; nor had she failed to impress upon Ida the inexpediency of encouraging her visits. The advice was, however, at once rejected, as the ill-fated woman instantly attributed to her right-minded and well-judging friend a motive totally foreign to the real one, and felt a bitter pleasure in disregarding her advice.

Still for Sydney's sake, Lady Malcolm resolutely supported the occasional annoyances to which she was exposed through the waywardness of his wife; nor was it long ere she discovered that Mrs. Elphinstone had some hidden sorrow, and then the warm stream of her woman-heart welled up, and she forgot her own feelings in her anxious endeavor to soothe those of Ida.

Vain, however, was the attempt; her inferences were disdainfully denied; how, she was asked, could the wife of Sydney Elphinstone—the wife who had abandoned every thing for his sake, and to whom his affection was all in all—be otherwise than happy, most happy?

"Were you indeed aware that he had ceased to love me," she pursued with a kindling eye; "you might suspect that I was the victim of a hidden grief; but now—"

"You misconceive me, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," replied her companion, mildly; "I have had so sad an experience of the world, that I too well know how possible it is to have a sorrow totally unconnected with home and home-affections. Did I dare to do so, I believe that I could point to the cause of your evident depression."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ida, scornfully.

"Yes, indeed," pursued Lady Malcolm; "can you imagine that I have never reflected upon the suffering with which you must dwell upon the estrangement from your parents? Surely not; and from the bottom of my heart I pity you. Have courage, my dear young friend: remember that there is a silver lining to every cloud; your father must have loved you deeply; have regarded you with pride as well as affection; and rest assured that when once the wound which you have inflicted upon his ambition has had time to heal, his heart will yearn toward you with a tenderness which he will not seek to control."

"I can only pray that your propheey may be fulfilled before I have ceased to feel an interest in any thing," said Mrs. Elphinstone, moodily, "for Hubert's sake I will hope, even when I cease to do so for myself."

"In that case judge of your father's heart by your own," replied her persevering comforter; "and do I entreat of you, struggle against a depression which is evidently undermining your health. I can see that Sydney is wretched about you."

"Sydney wretched about me!" echoed Ida, with a forced laugh; "I do not think that Sydney was ever more happy in his life. During the first few months of our marriage he was my devoted slave, poor fellow! obedient to all my caprices: subject to all my whims; and it was then, or never, that I might have supposed him to be wretched about me, as I must necessarily have involved him in every dangerous or disagreeable fancy in which I saw fit to indulge; but he is now altogether released from this peril; I have grown weary of practicing upon his patience; he is perfectly independent in all his actions; he comes and goes unquestioned; I make no demand upon either his time or his tenderness; but receive with proper wifely gratitude the portion of each, which he finds it expedient and proper to bestow upon me."

"My dear young friend, you terrify me!" said Lady Malcolm, uneasily; "you are in a frightfully morbid state of mind; and I sadly fear that, from some misconception or another, you are doing serious injustice to your husband."

"Oh no, no; do not alarm yourself about *him*;" was the quick retort; "I can assure you that he makes no complaint; and I have not a doubt, from his regular and unwearied attendance at the Temple, that his affairs are prospering there also. It is really admirable, is it not, Lady Malcolm, to see how pertinaciously he pursues his profession? for, as I never hear of his spending the hours that he is absent from me elsewhere, I naturally conclude that he is at his chambers."

Her companion started; had Ida laid bare her heart before her, she could not more thoroughly have read its secret than she did at that moment. Mrs. Elphinstone was the victim of jealousy, but who could be the object of her suspicion? Vainly did Lady Malcolm ask herself the question; Sydney had, at the request of his wife, so utterly abandoned the world, that the only conclusion at which she could arrive was that Ida might possibly have been informed of some previous attachment on the part of her husband, which, now that the first effervescence of married happiness has subsided, was pressing upon her mind; and even while she condemned such a weakness, the gentle-hearted matron could not withhold her sympathy for the self-tormenting sufferer.

"Will you forgive me, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone," she asked; "I hazard another guess?—I can not mistake your meaning—you doubt Sydney."

"Have I any cause to do so?"

"Certainly none of which I am aware."

"In that case," observed Ida, haughtily; "you might have spared me the suspicion."

Lady Malcolm rose.

"I am truly glad to find that I am in error," she said, with dignity; "rejoiced alike for your own sake, and Sydney's, for believe me, Mrs. Elphinstone, when I assure you that no weakness on the part of a wife is so calculated to estrange a husband's heart as jealousy; where the suspicion is just he becomes irritated under his own sense of error, and where he is conscious of his own rectitude, he revolts from an accusation which robs the woman he has chosen of that charm of mental purity which had hitherto compelled his admiration and respect.

"I am, therefore, I repeat, most happy that I had wronged you, and you must pardon my offense, arising as it did out of my maternal anxiety for your mutual welfare."

"All apology is unnecessary," was the cold reply; "and I am really happy, in my turn, to have set your heart at rest. Question Sydney yourself, and I am convinced he will tell you that, however exacting I may have been for a time, I am now the very model of a wife. Oh, depend upon it, my dear Lady Malcolm, that should we again emerge from our hermitage, we shall be quoted as a marvel of connubial devotion; a species of show couple to be gazed upon with awe and admiration; a fitting example in fact, for my cousin Hubert and your fair daughter; and more than this I am sure you can not be unreasonable enough to wish."

Ida had overacted her part, but her companion was too judicious to suffer her to perceive this, although her heart ached as she slowly walked along the garden-path which led to her own house.

"Poor Sydney! Poor fated boy!" she murmured to herself; "this is even worse than I had feared. I have indeed lived to rejoice that *she* is in her grave, whose heart his misery would have broken. Yes—it is better so; this crowning sorrow she at least is spared."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE FIRST BRIEF.

As a natural consequence of the state of things which we have described, Sydney Elphinstone gradually estranged himself more and more from his ungenial home; and, with the impetuosity which formed so strong an element of his character, plunged into study with an ardor and perseverance that enabled him for many hours in the day to banish from his mind all memory of the blight which had withered the best feelings of his heart.

Shut into his chambers, half-buried with books, and grappling with difficulties from which he had hitherto shrunk with disgust, the gay young man of fashion had subsided into a plodding student; lines of thought began to trace themselves upon his lofty brow; his step became less buoyant, and his words more measured.

The youth was rapidly ripening into the sober maturity of manhood; and if he rarely smiled, and the music of his ringing laughter was no longer heard, at least neither had been succeeded by the querulousness of discontent, or the gloom of asceticism.

Toward his wife he still exhibited the same watchful attention and courteous kindness as ever, but it was no longer with the lover-like devotion of old; care had aged him in more than looks; and while Ida wept in secret over a change which wrung the chords of her heart to agony, and remembered that it had been her own work, she bore it in silence rather than by one concession make an effort to repair the evil.

"How know I," she would murmur to herself, "that the hours of his absence are, indeed, spent in study? How dare I even hope it, when I am so well aware that all mental exertion is antagonistic to his careless and impulsive nature? Could I only be sure that such were the case, how different would be our relative position!

"But no, no; I must not yield; it is clear from his continual and consistent coldness that his heart is no longer in his home, and that it has found another resting-place. Be it so; I will endure the suspicion until it has grown into certainty, and then—then—"

A month or two passed on thus; and at their close the earnest prayer of Elphinstone was granted—he held a brief: nor was it the least agreeable or welcome feature of this long-wished-for event, that it had been offered to him at the desire of Lady Malcolm, who had at length decided on endeavoring to rescue at least a portion of her property from the unworthy hands into which it had fallen.

Information recently acquired had convinced her that her case was far from a hopeless one, if skillfully conducted; and, much as she shrank from the excitement and uncertainty of a lawsuit, she still felt that she owed a duty to her child which must be performed even at the expense of her own feelings; while the consciousness that she had it in her power at the same time to serve the son of her still-lamented friend greatly tended to reconcile her to the anxiety of the trial.

Thus then, when he had almost despaired of such a result to his labors, and had pursued them rather as a resource from more painful thought than as the necessary means to accomplish a career, Sydney found himself suddenly summoned to exert all his energies in a cause in which the best powers of his heart and intellect must be alike called forth.

His cheek glowed, and his breast heaved with excitement; he was now to try his strength—he was now to prove to Ida that her faith in his intellect at least had not been misplaced; she had ceased to love him, but he might still compel her respect; and then a shadow fell over his joy: how differently might he have gone forth to meet his first struggle, strengthened by her encouragement, elated by her conviction of his coming triumph. The blood faded from his brow, and fell back cold upon his heart; he still grasped the important document, but half its spell was broken.

Then he roused himself; he remembered that he was to be associated in his task with

one of the most eminent counsel in England; and that he must endeavor by his industry and care to render himself worthy of such an association; that he must not suffer the success of a cause which involved the future independence of Edith Malcolm to be secured solely by the eloquence of Sir F—— T——, but that he must labor assiduously to convince his co-adjutor that, inexperienced as he was, he was nevertheless worthy of the trust which had been reposed in him.

His facilities for obtaining every information relative to the case were necessarily great; and many an hour was spent at the villa of Lady Malcolm over papers and documents, or in confidential conversation connected with the one important subject; hours which Ida might have known to be so spent, had she ever stooped to ask one question as to the manner in which he passed his time; but this she never did: and when Sydney, in the exuberance of his exultation, informed her of the fact of his having received his first brief from Lady Malcolm, she congratulated him so coldly on the event that, stung to the very heart, he never again alluded to the subject, save to apologize for the lengthened absences to which he was compelled by the exigences of his occupation.

Thus it was from her kind and sympathizing acquaintance Mrs. Darnell alone, that she learned the fact of her husband's long and frequent visits to the mother of Edith; visits which were considered by both ladies as Elphinstone's chosen relaxation in his intervals of leisure.

"Was I not right to warn you?" was the triumphant inquiry of the visitor on such occasions; and what will you do now?"

"I will wait," was the unvarying reply.

And Ida did wait; and meanwhile, brooding over her imagined wrongs, her gloom and coldness increased; and had not the mind of her husband been absorbed by the one great interest of the moment—the pivot upon which he felt that all his future fortunes must necessarily turn—it would have been impossible to have longer delayed an explanation which must have proved fatal to every hope of domestic happiness forever.

As it was, however, Sydney perseveringly pursued his system of conciliation and kindness; spoke cheerfully and fondly to his wife; caressed his child with a tenderness and pride which even trial and disappointment had failed to diminish; and endeavored by every means in his power to recall, were it only for a moment, the smiles of happier days.

Every comfort and every luxury permitted by their slender means he lavished upon Ida unsparingly; but accustomed to other and far more costly indulgences, she had begun to disregard those which she still enjoyed, and to regret others which were beyond her reach.

Suffering had made her selfish; had she not, by her one fatal fault, thrown happiness far from her? had she still trusted as deeply as she loved, she would have jested at every privation, and been careless of every sacrifice; but now it was far otherwise; the constant companionship of a coarse mind had produced its effect; and she even felt a weak pride in upholding without murmur or reproach the character of a victim.

"Poor dear Mrs. Elphinstone! you really excite my wonder," was the frequent exclamation of her confidential friend; "I can not understand such fortitude and patience."

But Ida was not strong; she was not patient; she was simply ungenerous and unjust. Was there no tacit murmur in the averted eye and the rigid lip? no reproach in the moodiness of manner, and ungenial coldness of deportment, which checked the warm and honest impulses of her husband's heart, and left him to fight his battle with the world, destitute alike of home sympathy and support.

Had she been made to comprehend the bitterness of his feelings in this utter isolation, she would have smiled, and gloried in the miserable triumph; and gloried the more, because, even while she was thus torturing his noble and forbearing nature, she felt that he was necessary to her existence; that she still loved him beyond all else on earth—even beyond her child—none knew or guessed how, in the solitary hours, she dwelt with intense and agitating anxiety upon his coming trial—how she prayed for his success—how she yearned to throw herself upon his neck, and send him forth strong in the armor of a wife's and a woman's love.

But no: in these moments of spiritual healthfulness, ever uprose the vision of Edith Malcolm, while the insidious venom of Mrs. Darnell's inferences fell like molten metal upon her mind's ear, scorching and withering all her better and purer impulses.

"He will be armed with *her* affection—he will be strong in *her* cause—" was ever the climax of her reverie. "It would be idle indeed for me to stand forth as his champion: one word of encouragement from *her* will suffice to arouse his best energies to action: and so let it be. For my boy's sake I will bear the burden, heavy as it is, until its weight threatens to crush me to the earth: and then he shall be made to feel that I will not fall alone."

CHAPTER XL.

THE EARLY LOST.

While the cloud thus darkened over the modest cottage at Brompton, suffering in a more tangible shape had made its abode under the stately roof of Trevanion Hall. The heir of that ancient house, the idol of his father's heart, the object of many a hope, and many a sigh, was rapidly sinking into a premature grave.

Hubert Trevanion, whose manly beauty and moral worth had endeared him to every heart, had ceased to struggle against the conviction that he was the destined victim of the insidious disease which had long been sapping the principle of existence, and while the preternaturally bright eye and blooming cheek deceived the fond father into a belief that a life of happiness and honor awaited his darling son, that son himself felt with a

resignation rare and beautiful under such circumstances, that for him there existed no future upon earth.

Day by day, and almost hour by hour, he became aware that the silver cord was loosened, gently and gradually, but not the less surely.

Often did he yearn to throw one gleam of light upon his father's mind; to awaken him to at least a possibility of their early separation, but his strength of purpose was insufficient for the effort. He felt that he *dared* not turn the proud and exulting happiness of his last parent into bitterness and mourning.

"The blow will come soon enough, come when it may," he would murmur to himself, as he listened with a brow steeped in the chilly moisture of exhaustion, and with closed eyes, to the projects of the unconscious baronet, in all of which he was necessarily involved, and while Sir Jasper talked with enthusiasm of the fair young creature who would, as he trusted, ere long become the mistress of the Hall, Hubert, instead of a wedding-garment, saw only a shroud; instead of wedded bliss, reveling in light and life, only inanition and a grave.

With mistaken and persevering affection he continued, however, to rally his failing energies, and little did those who saw him the companion of his father's rides and walks, the indefatigable sharer in all his pursuits, and the anxious promoter of all his enjoyments, imagine at what a price the devoted son at length purchased the privilege of brightening and gladdening the declining of his self-deceived parent.

Often, after a long attendance in a heated justice-room, or a rapid gallop over the downs, when the baronet returned home excited and refreshed by a sense of a duty performed, or a healthful sensation of augmented vigor, his son, after a painful effort of simulated strength, no sooner found himself alone in his chamber, than he tottered to a couch, where, bathed in the cold and clammy dews of consumption, and laboring for breath, he lay shivering and helpless, until by the aid of some powerful stimulant, he once more recovered sufficient energy to resume the wasting struggle.

At the close of a few months, however, this fearful exertion became no longer possible. His physical powers were exhausted, the flush upon his cheek deepened and concentrated itself into a burning spot, the fire of the large dark eye gleamed keen and cold, and this noble form became attenuated and feeble. Whispers circulated among the household, and many and earnest were the anxious looks turned on him by the gray-haired retainers of the family.

"It was thus," said the most aged among them, "that his grandfather had died—it was thus that he would die; the child of prayers and hopes, in whom his father had garnered up all his affections, for whom his mother had hoarded all her wealth."

It was strange, very strange, that Sir Jasper did not see that he was perishing before his eyes; but at length came the low and hollow cough, that sound of doom which can never be mistaken, the slight but painful spasm by which it was succeeded; the quivering of the wasted hand; the uncertain accents, which at intervals rendered the once melodious voice hoarse and discordant, and then indeed, even the doting father, whose pride in his only son had hitherto cast out fear, could no longer delude himself with the belief that all was well with the object of his idolatry.

The blow smote the stately old man to the earth, and in the first agony of his grief he gave way to a vehemence of feeling which had nearly proved fatal to the invalid. Medical assistance was summoned from far and near—there *must* yet be hope.

Alas! there was none. The fiat had gone forth, and Hubert Trevanion, the last representative of his noble family, gifted with all that the world can offer to its favorites—youth, wealth, and intellect—a noble person, and a heart rich in the best and holiest impulses of human nature, was about to share the common fate of all created beings.

No mortal skill, even although purchased with the ransom of a kingdom, could avail him now, and he learned his fate from the friendly physician—who had been induced, at his own entreaty, to name the probable period of his release from suffering—without the quivering of a pulse.

"My poor father!" was all he said as he ascertained that his very hours were numbered; "how will he bear this blow?"

"Sir Jasper is a man and a Christian, my dear sir," observed his companion, soothingly.

"But he is also a father," murmured Hubert, as he swept back the masses of dark hair which clung dankly about his brow; "and so strong a link can not be wrenched asunder without a struggle too powerful for his age. I must not, however, dwell upon this painful thought, or it may unnerve me when he most requires my support."

"Right, right," said the physician; "you must strive to keep up both his spirits and your own, difficult as it may be to do so; but you are equal to the effort, as I well know."

Hubert smiled sadly; for himself he was resigned; he had long felt that his doom was sealed, and that he was predestined to an early death; but he could not so certainly contemplate the sufferings of a father to whom he knew that he was all in all; and while, had he been alone in the world, he could have yielded his last sigh almost without regret, he felt a yearning to live for his father's sake, which shook him to the very depths of his spirit.

"Thank you for your frankness," he said, as, at the close of a violent paroxysm of coughing, he withdrew the handkerchief from his lip, and held it toward his medical friend, deeply stained with blood; "although, as you see, all further attempt at self-delusion would be useless on my part, even were I weak enough to encourage it; and now I have a last favor to ask of you—"

"Name it."

"Will you undertake to break the truth to

my poor father? the whole truth, I mean. For the abstract fact of my early death he is already prepared; but I would fain see him reconciled to the probability, nay, the certainty, of its almost immediate occurrence. Will you oblige me in this?"

"I can not."

"And wherefore?"

"Because I have been acquainted with Sir Jasper for the last forty years," said Dr. Fernley; "and am well aware that although, like all his fellow-men, he has had many annoyances to combat, he has never yet been subjected to the searching trial of a great sorrow. Some one who has less regard for him than myself must undertake the task."

"Yet who could perform it so tenderly?"

"You mistake, my young friend, you mistake," said the worthy doctor with an emotion which sufficiently attested his sincerity. "It must be done by one who will not feel *with* him as well as *for* him. It is the only request of yours with which I can not comply."

"I regret it deeply," replied Hubert; "for in that case, painful as the effort will be, I must communicate the fact myself. I could not bear that his first and bitter grief should be exposed to the eye of a stranger, or a hireling."

"It will destroy you!"

"No," said the dying man, firmly; "my last act will have been one of duty, even of mercy, and that consciousness will give me strength; but it must be done at once, for I dare not dwell on the trial that is before me; I should only multiply my own moments of suffering."

"Let me entreat of you, Mr. Trevanion—"

"Nay, nay, do not unman me unnecessarily beforehand; my purpose is fixed, and I am too physically weak to contend, although morally strong enough to persist in my purpose. Only do me the favor to be present at our interview; he may need your assistance, —perhaps I may even need it myself."

"Only wait until to-morrow."

"That were worse than useless. My poor father! He has now but little time for preparation; why should I, by my cowardice, seek to abridge it? Surely it is wiser and better that his grief should have time to subside into resignation before—"

"Well, well; be it as you will," said his companion, reluctantly; "but I own that I could have wished—"

"You will comply with my request," interposed Hubert, with a sad smile; "and I thank you. Saunders shall summon his master at once, and my first and most bitter pang will then be over."

The physician was silent; for, even while he admired the courage and self-abnegation of his patient, he shrank from its probable result.

Ten minutes afterward the baronet, with bowed head and unsteady step, entered the sick-room.

An hour passed away. There are periods, or, at least, there is ever one period in the lives of even the most favored of human beings, when an age of suffering may be compressed into one brief hour of existence; but although the anxious watchers in Sir Jasper's household, dreading they knew not what, and fearing to question their own hearts, lingered near the door of the death-chamber, no sound escaped thence from which they might infer what was passing within; the arrow which enters the heart does its work noiselessly; nor was it until they saw their master come forth, leaning on the arm of Dr. Fernley, bent as though the weight of twenty additional years had suddenly fallen upon him, turning meekly and unquestioningly in the direction where he was led, his eyes glossy and tearless, and the muscles about his mouth quivering as though he no longer retained any power over their action, that they understood how surely all hope was at an end.

Morning broke, clear, and cold, and grey; the birds began to twitter among the boughs, and the deer to shake the dew from their dappled hides, and to emerge from their nightly covert. The lowing of cattle came upon the wind, and at distant intervals the cheerful whistle of the early hind was audible from the low pasture-lands. The world was once more awake; but on a sumptuous bed, in a darkened room, surrounded by all the appliances of wealth and all the cares of affection, lay one for whom sight and sound could no more be, and for whom there was no awakening upon earth.

Hubert Trevanion had passed away for ever, and so calmly, that his anxious watchers could not even guess at what precise moment the dreamless sleep which so mysteriously transforms the living sentient being into the dull, inert, and passionless atom retaining nothing of humanity save its outwards emblance, had fallen upon him

The dead was at peace; at peace in his manly beauty; another brief week, and he would be but a memory; while by his side sat his grey-haired father, who had stolen to the death-room, as noiselessly as though his muffled step would have disturbed the sleeper.

His quick ear had caught and interpreted the hurried whispers of the attendants; and without the utterance of a word, he had motioned them all from the room, fastened the door behind him, and sat down tearlessly beside his dead son.

Close to the pillow that supported his head; so close that his thick labored breath heaved the dark curls which rested on the spotless cambric; and sometimes he clutched at the sheet by which the body was covered, and sometimes he passed his hand slowly over the noble features, as if to impress their outlines more forcibly upon his memory.

Morning brightened, and the eastern sky became one prism of glory; the song of the wild birds pealed out an universal chorus, from which the clear and exulting notes of the early lark detached themselves like the triumphant outgushing of an emancipated soul ascending in rapture far above the dregs and dross of earth. Nature was gladdened by the birth of a new day; and the sons of toil were already entering upon its duties; but still the death-chamber was closed.

"This must not be—this should not have

been"—exclaimed Dr. Fernley, the noise of whose carriage-wheels had been the first sound which awoke upon the deep silence of the mansion; "why were you so imprudent as to permit your master to shut himself in with his dead son? The door must be opened instantly."

Vain, however, were all his efforts to obtain admission; there was no answer to his earnest appeals, and at length the lock was forced, when the unfortunate old man was found stretched across the body of his son, as insensible as the pale form upon which he rested.

Hours passed ere he was restored to consciousness; and even then his return to existence was pitiable. Obedient as a child, he complied with every request, and resigned himself to every arrangement with a vague, unmeaning smile, which betrayed that he had lost all power of volition; at intervals he wrung his hands, and murmured out "My son! my son!" But these intervals were rare, and for days he continued a mere human machine, mindless and will-less.

Under these circumstances, Dr. Fernley, who had established himself at the Hall, had no alternative save to ascertain the name and address of his nearest relative, in order that he might be summoned to superintend the arrangements which were imperative under the circumstances; and accordingly an express was dispatched to Mr. Trevanion, the nephew who had been for so many years an exile from his ancestral home, and who was thus suddenly called upon to assume the duties of its master.

The last sad offices were performed for the dead, while the bereaved father sat supinely in his cushioned chair, clad in a suit of sables over which his dull eye glanced without perception or emotion, and the long-estranged relative, who had never exchanged one sentence with his heir, officiated as chief-mourner at his funeral.

And then Mr. Trevanion entered upon the more onerous responsibilities of his position. At the express request of the family physician, a consultation was held upon the unhappy baronet, whose mental condition was declared to be beyond hope, although his bodily health still promised, as they unanimously declared to withstand the shock.

CHAPTER XLI.

SOLITARY REFLECTIONS.

"And now, gentlemen;" said Mr Trevanion, as the party withdrew from the chamber of the sufferer; "I must, before we separate, request that I may be favored with your advice regarding my unfortunate uncle. I have personal duties to perform which entirely preclude the possibility of my residence at the Hall, or my own superintendence of his health and comfort, which must be my first consideration. All other points are of minor importance, and may bide their time.

"That Sir Jasper Trevanion has executed a will there can be no doubt, while it is equally certain that it must have been made in favor of his son; there can not, therefore, exist any necessity for torturing him by efforts (which would, moreover, in all probability prove abortive) to make him comprehend the necessity of such a precaution; even did his present state of mind hold out any prospect that such a document, executed under such circumstances, could be considered as a legal one.

"All I apprehend, therefore, that can be done, is to insure his perfect comfort and convenience so long as he is spared; and I am anxious that those should be scrupulously and efficiently secured. As I know little of the personal tastes or idiosyncracies of my uncle, I am by no means qualified to decide on the most desirable mode of effecting such an object; nor should I feel satisfied to follow the suggestions of mere domestics, who, however attached to their afflicted master, may err in their estimate of his requirements. I therefore appeal to you.—I shall feel gratified by your assistance."

"Frank and manly, Mr. Trevanion," said Sir D—— D——; "but no more than I should have anticipated from *you*. Your position, as regards the invalid, is difficult and peculiar, but he could not have fallen into better hands. You are right; he is powerless now, and you can afford to forget the past."

"After the scene which I have just witnessed," was the reply; "the past is only to be regretted. I have learned a stern lesson in that silent room. I now feel only that Sir Jasper Trevanion is my nearest kinsman, and the head of my house."

"And in that house let him remain, my good sir," broke in Dr. C——; "it would be like rending the ivy from the oak, to remove him from his old and accustomed home."

"I am quite of that opinion," said Mr. Trevanion; "and, moreover, that the attendants to whom he has become habituated should also remain about him. With two of them I am myself familiar, as they were already installed here in my boyhood, and have grown gray in the service of their master. I have had interviews with both since my arrival, and they are anxious to end their days under the roof which has for so many years been their only home. I know them to be thoroughly trustworthy; and I think that could Sir Jasper be consulted on the subject, he would be as desirous as myself that they should retain their present sway over his household."

"You allude, of course," remarked Dr. Fernley, "to Mrs. Pearson and Tomkins?"

"I do."

"Admirably decided. In fact, I do not see how the services of either one or the other could now be dispensed with; the worthy old housekeeper is worth her weight in gold in a sick-room, while her co-adjutor is equally valuable in his own department."

"We will, if you please, gentlemen, put his abilities to the test," said the merchant, as he laid his hand upon the bell; "after your hurried journey you must require some refreshment."

As no objection was raised to the suggestion, a speedy adjournment was made to the dining-room; where, enlivened by a well-spread board, and some of the choicest wines from the baronet's cellar, the sufferings of

the invalid himself were soon forgotten by the professional brethren, who entered into a political discussion with as much earnestness as they had previously done into the ailments of their patient; while Mr. Trevanion, seated at the head of that table to which he had been so grudgingly admitted in his youth, was compelled to take his part in the conversation, and to affect an interest which he was far from feeling in the subject of their discourse, occupied as he then was with objects of more personal consideration and anxiety.

"It strikes me, Mr. Trevanion," observed Sir D—— D——, as he dissected a partridge, "that you would do well to ingratiate yourself with the landholders of the county, to whom, as I am informed, you are almost, if not entirely, a stranger. Take my word for it that we are on the eve of a general election, and it would be idle to stand on ceremony under present circumstances. Sir Jasper, poor man! is naturally *hors de combat*, and you are his most fitting successor. I have some interest here myself, and shall be most happy to exert it in your favor."

"In that case we shall have a contest," said Dr. Fernley; "as Lord Dronemore has long been anxious to start his elder son."

"What! The poet who has just returned from the Pyramids?"

"The same."

"But, my good sir, we want politicians, not poets, in the Lower House," interposed Dr. C——; "sound practical men, who care little to hear themselves talk; working bees, who will know how to store their own hive—not honorable tourists, who scatter their honey that others may hoard it."

"Perhaps so; but I still adhere to my opinion. What say you, Mr. Trevanion?"

"Simply, that I never intend to offer myself to the electors of ——, until I have a stake in the county."

"Unfortunately," observed Sir D—— D——, with a courtly inclination of the head; "the prospect is by no means a remote one, and the subject appears to me to be worthy of consideration."

"Had I a son—" commenced the merchant.

"You have, I believe, a grandson," said Dr. Fernley.

Mr. Trevanion started. The existence of Ida's child had been a forbidden topic in his presence from the moment of its birth; and he was consequently unprepared for so abrupt a reminder. The stern man had resolved to forget the fact himself; and, as a natural consequence with one of his peculiar character, he had calculated that others would follow his example.

"My grandson is not a Trevanion," he remarked, coldly.

"True; but that circumstance does not militate against the fact that he is heir-presumptive to the baronetcy."

The merchant winced again.

"And a fine little fellow he is," pursued the pertinacious physician; "I never saw a more noble boy."

"You are a fortunate man, sir," said Dr. C——, who was entirely ignorant of the family history; "and we will, with your permission, drink to the young man's health in a bumper of this splendid hock."

Mr. Trevanion bowed stiffly, as his guests prepared to do honor to the proposed pledge; he even raised the glass to his lips as the toast was drunk, but the cool liquid seemed to scorch him, and not one word of acknowledgment followed the draught.

"And now, gentlemen," said Dr. Fernley, to whom the silence which succeeded was perfectly intelligible; "I must request of you to excuse me, as I have two important visits to make before sunset."

"While I," followed up Sir D—— D——; "must be back in town to-night, and consequently have little time to spare. It is wonderful how the hours fly by when one is pleasantly engaged."

"While your carriages are preparing," said the family physician; "will you allow me to suggest that we should take a parting look at our unfortunate friend Sir Jasper?"

"By all means," was the ready reply, and once more the party ascended to the baronet's sick room, but every effort to rouse him into mental consciousness again failed; and the men of science finally departed, leaving the weary and irritated merchant alone in the vast and lonely mansion.

Then it was that, abandoned to himself, and left to wrestle with his own thoughts for the first time since this signal change had taken place in his social position, Mr. Trevanion keenly felt the isolation which his own vindictive passions had created about him.

The garrulous old physician was right; he had a grandson, and that grandson must, one day should he live to manhood, inherit the lordly estates, and the proud title of his ancestors, while the daughter whom he had cast forth, alike from his heart and from his hearth, would rule over a splendid home for which she would be indebted to her son and not to him.

The thought was wormwood to him! And then, as his eye traveled over the vast dimensions of the gorgeous rooms in which he sat, he pictured to himself the crouching insignificant form of his wife, who would probably at an early period become its temporary mistress, and with a sensation of disgust and scorn, he rose and paced the floor like one suddenly awakened to a sense of injury.

The frivolous Miss Clara Rotheringbury, the inert and mindless Mrs. Hubert Trevanion, to fill the place of his own beautiful and high-born mother! The proud man shuddered as he contemplated such a contingency, while slowly and uninvoked, there rose up before him the radiant vision of his daughter; that daughter, whose beauty and whose grace had flattered his vanity, and satisfied his pride; and like one under the influence of mesmerism, unable to contend against a will stronger than his own, the picture broadened and deepened until she seemed to stand before him with her infant in her arms, her proud brow glowing with matronly dignity, and her eyes bright with natural love.

It was a splendid picture, and the merchant's heart throbbed as he lingered on it; but after awhile he shook off the spell.

"Perhaps it must be so," he murmured to himself; "but not yet—not yet—Hubert Trevanion will not forgive, even if *Sir* Hubert be ultimately compelled to do so. I am still master of my own actions; and when no longer able to control them, I must e'en follow the example of the French prince, and not suffer the long-descended baronet to revenge the injuries of the money-seeking merchant. Yet, when I remember that she might have entered this house as a peeress, it almost maddens me!

"And to think too that *he*—that the vain boy who, by a few idle flatteries, blighted all my views—that *he* may one day play the master here—I could almost wish that the poor old man who crushed my youth, and who now in his helplessness can not resist the slightest of my wishes, might live on until the world and the world's honors had ceased to hold out any charm to the penniless adventurer who robbed me of my daughter."

It was fortunate that, at this period of his self-communing, Mr. Trevanion chanced to remember that he had still many and important duties to perform before he left the Hall; and with his habitual energy he immediately prepared to execute them. There were solicitors and land-stewards to consult and instruct; tenants to receive, servants to discharge, and a host of minor arrangements to make, as essential as they were harassing.

At length, however, all was accomplished. The papers of Sir Jasper, including his will, of which a duplicate was in the possession of his attorney, were duly examined and sealed; the family diamonds and those of the late Lady Trevanion, all of which had been recently reset for the destined bride of the unhappy Hubert, together with the costly service of plate, were transferred, under the care of Tompkins, to the baronet's banker in town; leases that were falling in were renewed, in accordance with the instructions previously given by Sir Jasper; the wages of the several servants retained at the Hall were doubled; the stud was reduced, and all the equipages, save one, were disposed of.

Nothing, in short, remained to be done, when Mr. Trevanion took his departure from the Hall, which could conduce to the convenience or security of its afflicted master; while so ably had the still active Pearson seconded his efforts, that, while in the apartments tenanted by the baronet, all was luxury and comfort, even the strong-minded merchant felt his heart sink with a strange sensation of awe and repulsion as he traversed the spacious suite of state-rooms, and found their gorgeous draperies and stately mirrors shrouded in their Holland coverings. Life seemed indeed to have been put out in the home of his fathers.

"I shall close the gallery altogether, sir, as soon as you are gone," said the ancient housekeeper in a low voice, as she followed him in his last circuit of the mansion, her voluminous black garments sweeping with melancholy monotony along the uncarpeted floors, "and only open it to air the rooms, and to dust the furniture, all of which will of course be done under my own eye. You know that you can trust me, Master Hubert—I beg pardon, sir; I meant to have said Mr. Trevanion; but really, now, when all seems to have passed away except yourself, my old brain is clearer about early days, than on what is going on about me. Poor Sir Jasper! To think that he who was a boy to me, should have come to this, while I am still hale and able; it is strange and sad indeed, sir, is it not? And that dear boy—the sweetest youth that ever trod the earth, gone too! How often he made me talk of you, Master Hubert, and tell him how, although you went out from these doors without a friend, to seek your fortune in the wide world, you came to be a great and a rich man, the companion of proud lords and a guest in the king's palace."

"But how came you to know all this, my good Pearson?" demanded the merchant, with a curiosity which he could not repress.

"Oh, sir, we always knew all about you," was the eager reply, as planting the stick by which she was compelled to support herself while walking, the aged woman suddenly stopped in order to give greater emphasis to her words; "for you were no sooner gone than Sir Jasper, poor dear gentleman! began to have a thousand fears about you; and although he never dared to name your name before her ladyship, he often talked to Tompkins and his own man about his unhappy nephew; and I do believe, Master Hubert, that if you had only bent your pride to write a letter to my master, and to ask him—"

"I had nothing to ask of him, Pearson."

"More's the pity, sir, more's the pity that you had not, for then we should have had happier hearts at the old Hall."

"So then I am to understand that Sir Jasper—that my uncle—really did regret his harshness when it was too late."

"Indeed he did, Master Hubert, indeed he did; and of late years, since my lady died, often and often did he and his poor dear son tell me how honored and how happy you were, and what a credit you were to the family name; and that you had a daughter so beautiful that she might have married the greatest lord in the land."

"And so she might," said the merchant, bitterly, "but she did not."

"So I heard, sir, so I heard; but then Sir Jasper learned from her own lips that she had wedded the man of her heart; and such a boy as she had, my master said; it was really wonderful to hear him talk of that child; and of course you know, sir, that the poor youth you laid to rest only a few days back was to have been his godfather, although he was too ill to go up to town for the christening."

"Ha! indeed!" exclaimed her startled listener, "was Mr. Hubert Trevanion really to have been the sponsor of Master Sydney Elphinstone?"

"Of your daughter's son, sir," said Pearson, "but he was to be called Hubert; the young lady would have it so, they told me, because it was her father's name."

"It is cold here, my good Pearson," said the merchant, huskily; "let us leave these desolate-looking rooms. Poor Sir Jasper! How much I wish that he could recognize me before I leave."

"No, sir, no; there is no hope of that,"

whispered the housekeeper, mysteriously, "my master's mind will not come back to this world till he is about to leave it altogether; and then it will be but a blink of light, faint and feeble, so that soul and body may go together."

"A strange doctrine, that, my good old friend," smiled Mr. Trevanion, "but we will hope better things. Who knows? The constitution of my uncle is a sound one, and he may yet rally."

"Ay," murmured the aged dame, "he *will* rally, but it will only be at the sound of that trumpet which will call us all from our long sleep. And now you had better go to the dining-room at once, Master Hubert; there is a fine fire there, and your dinner will be served in a few minutes."

CHAPTER XLII.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW.

GREAT was the astonishment of Lady Mary Brooklands, for of the actual mistress of the house there was no question, when she was requested by Mr. Trevanion on his return to town, to oblige him by putting the female servants of his establishment into the handsomest mourning compatible with their station; and that, at the same time, a hundred-pound note was placed in her hand, with a respectful entreaty that she would be good enough herself to appear in the same sable habiliments in honor of his deceased relative.

"Do me the favor also, my dear Lady Mary;" he said; "to impress upon Mrs. Trevanion the necessity of wearing the deepest sables, for I have almost a twofold death to deplore; as I have not only buried Hubert, but have, moreover, left my unfortunate uncle in a state of dying death, even worse than actual annihilation. She can not, as I well know, appreciate the delicacy of my position without your prompting, and I consequently throw myself, as far as she is concerned, upon your accustomed kindness and consideration."

"Rely on it, that I will do all that is right, my dear sir;" was the reply of the lady, as she crushed the fragment of tissue paper between her glove and her hand; "and I am sure you will believe me when I say, that your anxiety to do every thing in a proper manner, and one suited to your position in the world, at so melancholy an occasion as this, is precisely what I should have expected from you.

"Dear me!" she pursued, dropping into a chair, and assuming an expression of sentimental sympathy; "what a trying visit yours must have proved, Mr. Trevanion; father and son, at one blow—or rather from what you tell me, it would have been less deplorable, had the bereaved old gentleman really followed his child to the grave."

There can be no doubt of it;" replied her companion, in the same tone; "no doubt on earth of it; for his condition is, as you judiciously remark, indeed deplorable. Mindless and powerless, he retains nothing of humanity but the form; and so long as he survives, I see little hope of any amendment."

"The affair is altogether very untoward;" observed Lady Mary, carefully examining the pattern of the Valenciennes upon her handkerchief.

"Worse, worse;" said the merchant contracting his heavy eyebrows; "my responsibility has suddenly become most painful."

"But in a sensible point of view, you are actually the head of the family, and the representative of the Trevanions."

"True; in a sensible point of view, but not in a legal one; I am, in fact, nothing more than the guardian of Sir Jasper, and have neither power nor influence while he lives."

"It is monstrously provoking!" drawled the family friend; "and I know by experience how long, how very long, persons in his peculiar state *do* often live. Where there is no wear on the mind, the body is wonderfully tenacious of existence."

"It is at least consolatory that he suffers no pain;" said Mr. Trevanion, calmly.

"Very."—was the retort, as the titled matron applied her handkerchief to her nose; "but still—you will excuse me, I know, if I repeat that the whole thing is nevertheless monstrously provoking. The baronet, by your account, does not live, he only vegetates; and I confess that, feeling as I do toward yourself, I could have wished—"

"No, no; I thank you for your interest in my welfare, Lady Mary;" interposed the merchant, "but I must not suffer myself to glance at what might have been."

"Yet he had injured you so deeply."

"Like many other men who pride themselves upon their moral strength, he was at last compelled to succumb to a stronger will than his own, but I have had satisfactory proof that he repented his harshness when it was too late."

"I am glad to hear it;" said Lady Mary; "if the abstract fact affords you the slightest gratification. And now, my dear sir, that Ida's son has become an important little personage in your family, I trust that you will be induced to pardon her *escapade*. As you are well aware, with all my affection for the dear girl, I have never hitherto presumed to plead her cause."

"I am aware of it, Lady Mary, and have estimated your delicacy at its just value. No—you have never striven, by word or look, to moderate my just resentment."

"I could not venture to do so; my position as a relative of Mr. Elphinstone's was so onerous, that I shrank from every species of interference."

"I fully estimated the reasons of your silence. Had you, like her mother, harassed me by weak repinings and still more idle reproaches, the breach between us could never have been repaired."

"That was precisely what I felt, my dear sir; but now—"

"Now, madam, I must have time to reflect. A father whose child deceives him, and elopes from beneath his roof, leaving him to brave as he best may the comments of the world, merits but little indulgence at the hands of her outraged parent; and I tell you frankly, Lady Mary Brooklands, that had Mrs. Sydney El-

phinstone become the mother of a girl, instead of presenting an heir to the Trevanions, I would have abandoned her for ever to the miserable obscurity of her present lot."

"But as it is?"

"As it is, I shall be ruled by circumstances: I am not yet Sir Hubert Trevanion, and I can afford to wait."

Little did the stern and unrelenting father imagine that his daughter had, like himself, declared her willingness to "bide her time."

The disconcerted Lady Mary, who on the restoration of her nephew's wife to favor, had rapidly built up a cloud-castle of advantage to herself, was too much accustomed to the inflexions of Mr. Trevanion's voice, and the portentous action of his eyebrows, to prolong the discussion; and accordingly, after having pledged herself to superintend the personal arrangements of Mrs. Trevanion on this important occasion, she hastened to terminate the interview, and so well did she redeem her pledge, that within a week the merchant's wife, despite her "dear mes," "how very disagreeables," and sundry other inane expletives, found herself attired in the deepest sables, for a man whom she had never seen, and who she had been taught to regard with aversion, as an impediment in her husband's path toward greatness.

Nevertheless, with her usual apathy, she resigned herself to her fate. She had, as we have shown, long ceased to contend, and although on Ida's evasion from the paternal roof, she did, with the true instinct of a mother's heart, for a time revolt against the inflexible harshness of her husband, the mere force of habit soon crushed her back into her habitual insignificance, and surrounding herself with novels, she endeavored to forget her own sorrows in those of her favorite heroines, and suffered the titled matron who had usurped her place in the household, not only to act, but even to think for her.

The mental condition of Mrs. Trevanion in her Richmond Villa, was little superior to that of Sir Jasper in his ancestral halls.

Far different was the effect produced by the intelligence of the melancholy events which had taken place in ——, on the two families so closely allied by blood and friendship to the baronet and his son.

Upon Lady Malcolm, who had anticipated a life of honor and affection for her gentle Edith, the blow fell heavily indeed, although she derived consolation from the fact that the fair girl herself, however she might, and undoubtedly did, admire and respect Hubert Trevanion, had yet seen too little of him to render her sorrow at his loss of more than a temporary nature. Edith was, in truth, only learning to love him; her young heart had been awakened, but not won, and though she wept, it was rather in pity for his fate than in regret at her own disappointment, while her mother, with all a mother's anxiety, looked into the future of her child, and shuddered as she felt how suddenly it had become a void.

Their retired existence, which had hitherto been brightened and gladdened by a thousand innocent and happy projects for the future, had in one brief moment lost its charm; the one perpetual subject of discourse had become only a theme of sorrow and regret; the light of their modest dwelling was extinguished; and as Lady Malcolm, with a troubled eye, followed the movements of her daughter, her heart swelled, and for the first time in her life she felt disposed to repine.

The grief of Mrs. Elphinstone was twofold; for even in the brief interviews which had taken place between them, she had learned to love her long-estranged relatives; while the only ray of sunshine which her miserable infatuation permitted to fall upon her heart, was the hope of soon being relieved from the presence of Miss Malcolm by her marriage with Hubert Trevanion.

That hope had now passed away forever; while the calm and unimpassioned resignation of Edith, who, in the presence of her mother even restrained her tears in order not to augment the distress of her parent, awoke a new suspicion in the self-tormenting mind of Ida.

"She never loved him," she murmured to herself; "she never loved him, or she would have needed the consolation which she is so eager to afford. What can be the blighted ambition of a mother when placed in competition with a heart whose first affection is cast back upon it?

"No, no; she would have shed other tears over the grave of Sydney Elphinstone; her secret passion was hopeless, and she had self-control enough to obey the bidding of her maneuvering parent.

"Poor child! she is playing her part badly now, when even *I* can detect the truth. Hubert is happy to have escaped a fate like mine; better to die young—ay, to die a thousand deaths—than to live on, unloved and neglected, when all the illusions of hope and passion are rent away, and the bleak, bare realities of existence alone remain."

And with this gratuitous suffering came a renewed feeling of isolation; the tie which had existed between herself and Sir Jasper, and which was to have been rendered still closer through her child, had greatly tended to reconcile her to the unrelenting silence of her father, which she now felt with double force.

In the early months of her marriage, the passionate devotion of her husband had sufficed to render her independent of all other affection, and she had consequently endured it with patience and submission as the consequence of her own act; but now, when she believed the heart of Sydney to be estranged from her, she shrank appalled at her loneliness.

There did appear, indeed, no prospect of a reconciliation now, when the unhappy events which had taken place in the family, and which would have afforded so favorable an opportunity for Mr. Trevanion to summon his only child once more to her home, had been coldly and officially announced to her by Sir Jasper's attorney, in precisely the same form as they had been made known to Lady Malcolm.

Never, until this moment, had Mrs. Elphin-

stone confessed, even to herself, that she had involuntarily looked beyond the affection to the generosity of her uncle; and it was, consequently, with terror that she remembered how fearfully her slender fortune had dwindled away, and that she had no longer a friend on earth to whom she could appeal for assistance.

On Sydney's professional gains she had long ceased to calculate; it was Sir Jasper's intercession with her father which had formed the mainstay of her hope, and now Sir Jasper was dead to all human sympathies.

She strained her infant to her heart almost convulsively as these fearful thoughts flashed across her brain. What would become of her boy? For herself, she could die; death had no terrors for her; it would be peace, and rest, and oblivion; but her noble boy—he was too young, too beautiful, too beloved, not to live long and happily; and yet to what a fate was he reserved!

Her own trials faded before her fears for him; and as his soft arms encircled her neck, and his rosy cheek rested against hers, the wife was forgotten in the mother, and she shed tears as holy as an angel might have registered.

It was in this wild burst of grief, to which she had yielded herself up immediately after the departure of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, that she was discovered by her husband on his return from the assize-town where the cause, upon which he had been engaged for Lady Malcolm, had been tried and gained in a manner which had surpassed his most sanguine hopes. Sir F—— T——, upon whose well-known eloquence its success was considered mainly to depend, when in the very act of putting on his gown, had been seized with sudden and violent indisposition: his appearance in court was accordingly impossible; and it was too late to secure the services of any other leading counsel.

Under these circumstances, there was no alternative save to leave the cause entirely in the hands of Mr. Elphinstone, whose familiarity with all its details rendered him the most eligible person to conduct it; and it was consequently fortunate that the industry of the young man, in the first place, and his intense anxiety for his friend at the critical moment when he was called upon to incur so heavy a responsibility, produced a degree of excitement that for the time overcame the nervousness to which, on his first appearance in so prominent a position, he would most probably have yielded.

Forgetting his own identity in the important duty before him, he watched the case as it proceeded with a care and tenacity which enabled him to garner up every fact and argument adduced by the opposing counsel; and when, after closely and cleverly cross-questioning the witnesses brought against him, he at length rose in his turn to reply, the ease and skill with which he analyzed and commented upon the speech of his opponent, the lucid manner in which he brought forward and connected his own proofs, the extraordinary grace of his action, the animation of his handsome countenance, and above all, his minute acquaintance with every detail of the case, however trifling and futile in appearance, soon excited universal attention.

The Judge leaned forward in his seat, evidently interested both in the cause and the orator; the gentlemen of the bar desisted from their several occupations; squibs were left half written, and caricatures half sketched; the audience were silent and absorbed; while even the opposing counsel, who, on finding himself pitted against a mere youth, a legal novice hitherto unknown on the circuit, had performed his duty somewhat less punctiliously than usual, was observed more than once to suffer an approving gesture to escape him, as the speech proceeded.

But the enthusiastic speaker noticed nothing of all this; his whole heart was in his cause; nor did he imagine when he at last resumed his seat, that in the estimation of most of his professional brethren his cause was already gained. Such, indeed, was the result, and Sydney Elphinstone was both a proud and a happy man when, to his surprise and gratification, he heard himself complimented by the learned Judge who had presided, and congratulated by the counsel who were seated about him; while, as the climax of his triumph, he had scarcely been an hour at his hotel, when a note from his intended coadjutor was placed in his hand, containing not only the thanks and felicitations of Sir F—— T——, but also the handsome fee with which his own eminent services had been retained.

"The gold which you have so ably won, my dear sir, you must be content to wear," said the high-minded lawyer, "and I trust that you will accept with it my very sincere hope that we shall ere long meet again with the same happy result."

His first step toward forensic celebrity was taken, and the ground was firm beneath him.

Such were the circumstances under which the young husband returned to his home, only, as already stated, to find his wife absorbed in grief.

"Ida, my own, my darling Ida," he exclaimed, as he hurried to her side, and folded her to his heart, forgetting every thing save his love and her sorrow; "what has happened? why do I find you in this miserable state? Speak, darling—do not torture me with suspense."

Mrs. Elphinstone replied, by placing in his hand the letter which announced the death of Hubert Trevanion, and the imbecility of his father.

Sydney was greatly shocked.

"This is, indeed, appalling!" he said, in an accent of deep feeling; "how I pity your poor father, who will, no doubt, be greatly shocked that all possibility of a reconciliation with his family is now over. Do not think me heartless, Ida, if, however painful as these facts are, it is a consolation to me to find that no misfortune has happened to either yourself or our boy."

"Myself!" echoed his wife, bitterly; "and is it then no misfortune to be alone in the world?"

"Alone, Ida! Did you say alone, with your

husband by your side, and your child upon your bosom?"

"But for that child, I should indeed be alone."

Elphinstone withdrew his arm from her waist, and rose from the sofa.

"Have I deserved this, Ida?" he asked, reproachfully.

Mrs. Elphinstone was silent.

"Even you, although you have ceased to love me, will perhaps afford me your pity," he pursued, greatly agitated; "when I tell you that I hastened home, full of hope and joy, with words of kindness and encouragement still sounding in my ears, to offer to you the first fruits of my professional success. The anticipation of your approval, the hope of your sympathy, made every moment of my tedious journey seem an hour until I reached my own door: the transition is a bitter one; but I do not blame you: our affections are beyond our own control, and I must submit to my fate."

"Do not add cruelty to coldness, Mr. Elphinstone," said his wife.

"Neither the one nor the other can you ever experience at my hands, Ida. I have loved you as woman is seldom loved; I would sacrifice my life to insure your happiness; but you willfully misjudge me. How can I regain the affection which was once mine? Only become what you were during the first months of our marriage—tender, generous, and confiding; only let me once more be convinced that I have not forfeited your love; that our sad and unaccountable estrangement is at an end, and I shall consider no effort too great which may enable me to feel that you are again the Ida of former days."

"Would that it indeed were in my power," was the gloomy reply; "but we can not deceive ourselves, Sydney; we are both changed. Like yourself, I utter no reproach; I only yearn for a renewal of the illusion which is unhappily dissipated forever."

"And wherefore? If we are only true to ourselves and to each other, what more can we require for happiness?"

"Do not urge me," said Ida, with a fresh burst of tears; "I am unhinged, and sick at heart."

"In that at least we sympathize," retorted her husband, as he turned away, unable to endure the sight of a grief which he could neither comprehend nor console; that his wife was suffering most acutely he could not doubt; and such was in fact the case, for jealousy is an intermittent fever which "has," says a celebrated French author, "its paroxysms and its hours of lassitude; no patient could long endure the violence of the ague fits which shake, chill, and agitate their victim with an universal shiver; no heart is strong enough to sustain the tension of the anger which absorbs the whole being." And thus it was with Ida; the doubts and fears in which she had so recently indulged had prostrated her powers; and now, as she looked upon the clear frank eye and proud brow of her husband, a new trouble grew upon her. Could it indeed be that she had wronged him?

She began to doubt herself; and that doubt was torture; for, if she had done so, how mean, how despicable, must she not appear in his eyes? He might profess to love her still, but *would* he do so when she had wounded him alike in his heart and in his honor?

She rose suddenly from her seat, and laying her child upon the cushions of the sofa, she moved a few steps toward her husband with the intention of once more throwing herself at his feet, and entreating him to pardon her; but just as she approached, unconscious of her purpose, he took his hat from the table, and merely saying: "I can no longer delay apprising Lady Malcolm of the success of her cause, which I was anxious to communicate personally,"—he turned, and left the room.

Once more the angel of peace folded its wings, and bowed its radiant head.

"No, I have not wronged him!" was the exclamation of Ida, as she swept back her disordered hair, and clasped her hands in passionate emotion: "he *dare* not remain to justify himself; and worse, far worse, before he has been an hour in his home—the home of his wife and child—he finds a ready excuse for hastening to reap the reward of his exertions in *her* smile.

"Fool that I was to doubt! when he takes so little pains to conceal his falsehood, why should I torture myself by self-accusings as idle as they are ill-timed? Should I not blush at the cowardly impulse which would have carried me to his feet, to be again cajoled, and again deceived?

"Father! you are revenged. Grievously have I sinned, but grievously also do I suffer. You would have made me great; and could you only know the abject thing I am, you would forego all further vengeance—loveless, friendless, and almost homeless, your proud heiress still hangs upon the smile of a man whom her love has wearied—still clings to him, even amid her wrongs."

The demon once more triumphed. Reason was drowned beneath the waves of passion.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A LAST HOPE.

His unfortunate reception by his wife, after his professional triumph, had wounded Elphinstone to the heart; and consequently, at the very moment when he should have been hopeful and buoyant he became depressed and spiritless.

Why, he asked himself, should he toil, when she whose love would have made his labor light had not only ceased to interest herself in his efforts, but had even disdained to utter a single comment on his success?

To what a different result he had once looked forward! How fondly and confidingly had Ida, on former days, listened to the air-built hopes which at that period he had so little power to realize; while now, when each and all were about to become real and tangible, she had withdrawn from him alike her sympathy and her encouragement.

Vain were all the congratulations poured on

him by his friends, and the laudatory comments of the public press; vain were even the offers of professional employment pressed upon him, to arouse him from the settled gloom into which he had fallen; and although he pursued his legal duties with care and conscientiousness, his enthusiasm was at an end; and few could now recognize in the calm and unimpassioned Sydney Elphinstone, the brilliant and sparkling orator by whose eloquence they had so recently been startled and surprised.

His crushed heart was no longer in his task; it was buried beneath the ashes of his loveless home. Young and sanguine, he had never foreseen the possibility of a spirit-void like this; and the moral desolation withered him.

Had he possessed more strength of character, he might have replaced affection by ambition, but his nature was too yielding, and too dependent upon external support, to lead him to strive for the mere excitement of the struggle, when no helping hand was stretched forth to sustain him.

It is true that the tearful gratitude of Lady Malcolm and her daughter, and the reflection that Edith was at length in secure possession of the handsome inheritance of which she had been in danger of seeing herself defrauded, and henceforward protected from all danger of pecuniary embarrassment, afforded him deep and genuine gratification; but even this consciousness was a very inadequate compensation for the home-happiness that he had lost; while amid his present wretchedness there awoke within him a dread that Ida, the bright and beloved being whose love had once made his world, might one day urge him beyond his patience, should she continue to indulge in the baseless suspicions and unjust accusations by which she had already tortured him.

"But no, no;" he murmured sadly to himself; "come what may, I must be guilty of no such cowardice; for me she abandoned rank, and wealth, and station, incurred the anger of her implacable father, and resigned herself to comparative poverty; she is the wife of my bosom, and the mother of my child.

"So long as she has no home save mine to shelter her; no heart save mine to bleed for her, I must bear all the misery which she may see fit to inflict upon me. I were less than man, were I to resent even the most cruel of her caprices; but should it one day chance that her father should relent, then indeed, it would become my duty to assert myself; to prove to her that I am not the abject thing she thinks me.

"Yes, even although in wringing her heart I should crush my own forever, we should then have no alternative save to part. She has ceased to love me; obscurity and privation have done their work; and she would find consolation in the gaud and glitter which render the contrast of her present existence so bitter to her.

"Poor Ida! why did I vainly imagine that my love would compensate for all? The fault was mine; and I must expiate it as I best may."

One word of kindness, one look of tenderness from his wife at this period, would have restored Elphinstone to her, as fond and as indulgent as ever; but the word was not uttered, the look was not vouchsafed.

Ida had, after the interview which we have described, subsided into a cold and listless serenity, which admitted of no reproach, and silenced all questioning. To the well-being of her boy she was ever keenly alive, but she manifested no interest on any other subject; Sydney came and went as he listed without either inquiry or comment; she was calmly courteous when he was near her, but seemed totally careless of his absence; it was, in short, a domestic illustration of the German tale of the dead and the living bodies linked together, and at length, unable longer to endure the joyless existence to which he was condemned, Elphinstone, in a moment of ungovernable wretchedness, poured out all his sorrow into the sympathizing bosom of Lady Malcolm, and entreated her good offices with Ida.

Hitherto he had, in so far as he was enabled to do so, locked the secret of his home-trials within his own breast, but they had gradually become too heavy to be borne alone; and as, with blanched cheeks and quivering lips, he described the daily torture to which he was subjected to the amiable woman who loved him as a son, her heart sunk within her.

True to his implied promise to his wife, Elphinstone forbore, even in his agitation, to hint at her unworthy suspicions. He well knew that Lady Malcolm would never have forgiven the insult offered to her child; and thus his listener could only recur to her original idea that Ida was causing the unhappiness of both by a weak jealousy of some former object of her husband's affection.

"You grieve me more than I can express, Sydney," she said, when his sad confession was made; "but you must remember that, painful as your present trial can not fail to be to you, there is never jealousy without love. Mrs. Elphinstone may probably have been told that she was not the first possessor of your heart—that you had loved before you became the slave of her own beauty—and, however, we may lament that she should yield to the weakness of repining at so common a circumstance, still, as her error is solely caused by her affection, it should meet with indulgence from you."

"But I swear to you, my dear Lady Malcolm, that I never loved any woman but herself. Consider what my age was when I married! Was it probable that at twenty I should offer her an exhausted heart?"

"Age, my dear boy, has little to do with passion. Before you utter any further disclaimers, try to recall the past, and to remember if there be not some name which has, at one period or other, been linked with your own."

"Never. The thing is impossible."

"And yet, if I mistake not, I have myself heard rumors of an attachment between Lady Mary Maitland and Mr. Sydney Elphinstone?"

"How dare people so trifle with the name of a woman!" exclaimed her companion, indignantly. "Lady Mary never gave me the most remote reason to suppose that she regarded me with the slightest favor; while, for myself, I looked upon her simply as a beautiful and un-

affected girl, of whom I should have been proud as a sister, but never should have chosen as a wife."

"Nevertheless, as the report reached me, it may also have reached Mrs. Elphinstone."

"I am persuaded that Ida never even heard the name of Lady Mary Maitland."

"Of that fact you can not be sure, my dear boy; and I still adhere to my opinion. That you have given your wife the slightest cause of uneasiness *since* your marriage, I am myself in a position to deny. Did I not make Mrs. Elphinstone's acquaintance while still a bride? Do I not know that up to the present day you have frequented no house but my own? that the hours which must have been devoted to a flirtation of any kind, had you been unprincipled enough to indulge in so reprehensible an amusement, have been consecrated to the interests of Edith and myself?"

Elphinstone involuntarily shrank under her frank and unsuspicious gaze.

"Thus then;" she pursued; "it can only be as I have stated; and you would do well to allude to the subject; not as suspecting the cause of her present disquiet, for that could, in either case, only wound her feelings; but speak of Lady Mary openly and unaffectedly as a former acquaintance, even as a friend, if you will; and conclude by informing your wife that the young lady is about to bestow her hand upon the Marquis of Brentwood, a fact of which I have been assured."

"Such a proceeding would avail me nothing;" said Elphinstone, gloomily; "Ida has never even dreamed of Lady Mary."

"You astonish me, Sydney, by your persistence in this opinion; I had hoped and believed that I had discovered, and could have struck at the root of the evil. But doubtlessly I have wronged your wife, by attributing to her so despicable a weakness as jealousy."

"I fear not."

"My dear boy, you are inexplicable, but I have no right to ask of you a greater amount of confidence than you are willing to repose in me. All, therefore, that I can now do, is to inquire how I may be of service to you?"

"I will tell you, my kind friend;" was the agitated reply; "on you rests my only hope. See my poor self-deluded Ida; reason with her; convince her of my unchanged and unchangeable affection; describe to her the misery which she is daily and hourly inflicting on me; ask her only to hear my justification before she condemns me; urge her to hear you in the name of her boy—she still loves him! And, above all, bear with her waywardness, should she give utterance to any thing which may wound you—look upon her rather as one suffering from vital disease than—"

"Enough, Sydney, enough—I will obey your bidding, my dear boy, for your dead mother's sake; although I am quite aware that the part, which I am about to play, is, at the best, an invidious one; at, any sacrifice of my own feelings, however, I will strive to restore peace between you, for your present existence is a sad waste of life, and must sooner or later become intollerable to both parties. Perhaps Mrs. Elphinstone will be more frank than yourself; should it happily prove so, I am sanguine as to the results of my interference."

The excited young man seized the kind hand which was extended to him, and raised it to his lips.

"And you will bear with her, even should she—"

"Yes," interposed Lady Malcolm, with an encouraging smile; "even should she tell me, as with justice she may, that I have exceeded the privilege of a friend, by presuming to intrude my advice unasked; so be of good cheer, Sydney; I will call upon Mrs. Elphinstone early to-morrow; and I trust that before I leave her I shall see her weeping out in your arms the happy tears of renewed confidence and affection. And now, in return for my concession, go home, and try my experiment regarding Lady Mary Maitland. I am not yet convinced, and shall be by no means surprised if on arriving at your house, I find my own interference altogether unnecessary."

The young man strove to return her parting smile, but it was with a sad foreboding of the failure of Lady Malcolm's attempt that he turned his step homeward.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE WIFE AND THE FRIEND.

IRKSOME as Mr. Trevanion had considered his position while under the roof of his uncle, it became tenfold more so when he was again established in his own house. The peculiar circumstances of the last month had unsettled his mind for business; while the daily increasing inanity of his wife, and the selfish condescension of Lady Mary Brooklands, alike irritated him. Mrs. Trevanion, like most weak people, had a horror of mourning, and declared that her health was injured by the gloom of every thing about her.

"I should not have cared, you know, Lady Mary;" she whined; "if I had been called upon to wear this odious silk and crape for Mr. Trevanion, or Ida, or even for yourself; because then it would have been only right and proper, but to do it for a person I never saw in my life is a great deal too bad; just as Mademoiselle Laura had sent me three loves of caps that are now sheer waste. And the servants, too; I declare they all look like people just returned from a funeral; and as for Mr. Trevanion, it is really shocking to see how little he cares how things go on now at home."

"Mr. Trevanion has a great responsibility pressing upon him, my dear madam; and can not, consequently, be expected to interest himself so much as formerly in the details of his establishment; which, moreover, he does me the honor to think that I can regulate with tolerable efficiency," was the sententious reply.

"I wish that poor Ida had never left us," resumed the lady of the mansion, after a brief silence; "there was some thing like life in the house while she was here—and I had some one to love me then—but now, I might as well be in my grave."

An equivocal smile played for an instant about the mouth of her companion, but it did not linger.

"Doubtlessly, we all miss Mrs. Elphinstone," she said, "but surely, you at least have no just cause of complaint. Mr. Trevanion is a most generous husband."

"Generous!" echoed the poor lady, with a burst of very unusual indignation; "I am sure I can not think what meaning you attach to such a word. Do you imply that I am clothed, and fed, and lodged, like a gentlewoman? I have a right to be so, for my fortune was the foundation of my husband's. But what am I to become in my own house? Do you suppose that because I bear with the indignity in silence, I do not feel the insult of seeing a stranger take my place, and perform my duties?"

"My dear Mrs. Trevanion, you amaze me!" exclaimed Lady Mary, alarmed by this sudden and unexpected self-assertion, on the part of her hitherto supine and listless companion; "in your delicate state of health, would it be kind, would it be prudent, to subject you to so great a fatigue as the superintendence of an extensive establishment necessarily involves? You surely can not be serious in thus misinterpreting the considerate kindness of Mr. Trevanion?"

"It would be no fatigue to reply if I were occasionally consulted on the arrangements of my household," said the irritated woman, to whom anger had lent a temporary energy, "but if he did not see me from day to day, I might easily imagine that Mr. Trevanion had forgotten my existence. Surely, when my daughter was gone, I had a right to be the mistress of my own house."

"Mrs. Trevanion," said Lady Mary, looking up from her worsted-work with an air of offended virtue, "I can not pretend to misunderstand your inference. You are jealous of my position in the family. You shall no longer have cause to be so. I will immediately apprise Mr. Trevanion of your sentiments, and request his consent to resign a post which has for years been both delicate and difficult. He will be delighted, I do not doubt, to find that you consider yourself equal to the exertion of taking my place."

"I am sure that I never asked you to leave us," was her terrified reply; "of course you will tell Mr. Trevanion what you please, and you know well what he will answer. I have no friend to take *my* part; no child to care for *me*, and so I must submit; but if you think that I do not feel, you are both mistaken."

Lady Mary instantly saw her advantage, and pursued it.

"I had flattered myself," she said haughtily, "that you regarded *me* as a friend, but I find that I am deceived; and that after having devoted long and weary years to the interests of yourself and your daughter, I am still considered as a stranger. Under such circumstances, Mrs. Trevanion, I can, of course, no longer remain a guest in your house."

"You were very kind to Ida, I know," conceded her companion, sullenly.

"And of what have you yourself to complain?" was the harsh inquiry; "before we part, I should desire to ascertain upon what grounds you assume the right to censure me. Mr. Trevanion, conscious that neither his connections nor your own could introduce your daughter into the society in which he wished her to move, solicited my assistance, which I granted as frankly as it was asked. I filled your house with the *élite* of the fashionable world; I did for Ida what neither her money nor her beauty *could* have done; I enabled her to take her place among them. That she did not profit by my exertions in her behalf was assuredly no fault of mine."

"You introduced your nephew to her," exclaimed Mrs. Trevanion, with a last flash of expiring spirit.

"I presented many to her besides my nephew," was the reply of Lady Mary, as a conscious flush rose to her cheek; "but I never counseled her to marry him. On the contrary, I represented to her the folly and rashness of such a choice. Had she been my own daughter, I could not have advised her more disinterestedly. But it is of yourself that I would speak rather than of your daughter. Do *you* not also owe many hours of gratification to my good offices? Have you not seen yourself surrounded by some of the greatest and noblest in the land? And have you forgotten to whom you were indebted for such a privilege? Your husband has a better memory, and to him I shall have no cause to appeal."

"Ah, those were happy days!" murmured out the broken-spirited woman, once more crushed beneath the well-acted indignation of her haughty companion, and burying herself still deeper amid her cushions; "those were happy days!"

"I am rejoiced to find that you, at least, admit that fact," pursued this relentless persecutor, "as it proves that you have little cause of complaint. Those days might have been renewed, had the same good understanding continued to exist between us; but that will be impossible when I have left you. *My* friends will, as a natural consequence, resent the affront which has been offered to me, nor will it be in my power to prevent it."

"I am sure that it was not my intention to offend you," sobbed out Mrs. Trevanion, whose unaccustomed excitement had terminated in tears; "you know, my dear Lady Mary, that I dare not do so, even if I wished it. Do not leave me alone with my husband; it is too late, too late—once, perhaps, I might have resented his harshness, but that time has gone by. I only wished—I only thought—that I might have been treated with more kindness, more consideration; that I might at least have had a voice in what concerned myself; but I will never indulge in such a hope again."

"And you will do well," said her companion, as she glanced with contempt upon the weak woman whose domestic wrongs should rather have excited her sympathy; "you have not to learn to-day the peculiar disposition of Mr. Trevanion; he is proud, very proud, and should he find himself coldly treated by those who have hitherto professed to be his friends, he would bitterly resent the insult. Should I withdraw myself from his house, this would undoubtedly be the case, nor could I conceal

from him that a puerile love of power on your own part had led to the annoyance.

"Decide, therefore, in how far you feel yourself able to resist his displeasure. If I go, it is because you have desired it; if I remain, it can and shall only be at your express request. That you have deeply wounded me, you must both see and feel, but for your own sake I will consent to pardon the affront, if by so doing you believe that I may avert from you the resentment of your husband."

"Oh, no, no; don't talk of leaving us," gasped out her victim; "whatever I may feel, whatever I may suffer, I will never offend you again even by a word, my dear Lady Mary."

"I will trust to that assurance; and now, listen to me a moment longer, Mrs. Trevanion. You know that your nephew is dead, and that his father will, in all probability, soon follow him to the grave. Now I appeal to your own good sense; if even here, in your Richmond Villa, you are unequal to the exigences of your position, how could you hope to acquit yourself of the more complicated and onerous duties which would await you at Trevanion Hall? And besides," she added with a smile full of blandishment and meaning, "as *Lady* Trevanion, you will have ample occupation in sustaining your rank, and receiving your guests. By the by, I find that the family diamonds are superb, and as Ida is unfortunately *hors de combat*, at least for the present, you will enjoy undisputed possession of these far-famed jewels. Is it then reasonable that you should indulge in idle repinings at imaginary wrongs, when so brilliant a destiny awaits you?"

Weak and vain, however, as the poor mother was, there was yet something in the words of her companion which jarred upon her feelings. She could not exult in any triumph which was obtained at the cost of her only child; and even the vision evoked by the artful Lddy Mary lost its charm, as she remembered how beautiful her banished Ida would have looked in the diamonds which were, as she was assured, to be her own.

Little, however, did Lady Mary Brooklands care to speculate upon the hidden feelings of a mother's heart. She had accomplished her purpose; she had silenced the justifiable murmurs of the ill used wife; she had crushed the germ of indignation in the spirit of the woman; she had, as she trusted, aroused her egotism, and dazzled her vanity, and, better still, she had secured herself against every chance of expulsion from a home, in which, without either outlay or responsibility, she lived a life of luxury and ease which formed a delicious contrast to the existence of privation and expedients to which she must have been reduced, if once more compelled to subsist upon her very insufficient jointure.

The conviction of her present and future security acted like magic on the mood and manner of the noble matron; she listened to the puerilities of her companion with unfailing patience; affected to sympathize in all her murmurs—for despite her promises, poor Mrs. Trevanion's existence was one long murmur, which appeared to possess for her a species of negative enjoyment; and, finally, she rose from her worsted-work to select from a box of books, just received from Churton's, 'a charming new novel,' which she recommended to her perusal.

No wonder that when Lady Mary considerately withdrew in order that she might enjoy it undisturbed. the guileless dupe felt self-convicted of injustice and want of courtesy toward the able tactitian who had so skillfully terminated an interview, which, from the instant that her own point was gained, had alike wearied and disgusted her.

In ten minutes more the family friend was closeted in the library with the master of the house.

CHAPTER XLV.

GREEK MEETS GREEK.

As had been constantly the case since his return to town, Mr. Trevanion was surrounded by papers and accounts, all relating to the affairs of his family, which now appeared to absorb the whole of his attention; for, although his first impulse had been one which did him honor, it must not be denied that after-reflection had induced him to regard himself if not actually as an ill-used, at least as a very unfortunate, individual.

Had Sir Jasper borne the shock of his son's death, as he had borne that of his daughter's desertion, and been still competent to fulfill the duties of his station, it is probable that his nephew would have awaited with patience and equanimity the period when he should himself become the representative of the family honors; but when he remembered that the baronet was, to all intents and purposes, dead to the world, though he might possibly continue for years to live on in the same imbecile and powerless condition, a feeling of irritation took possession of him which he made little or no effort to repress.

Every detail connected with the estate assumed, in his eyes, a separate importance, far greater than it in reality merited; the value of the ancient timber which rendered the extensive park the most picturesque and stately in the county, was calculated again and again; the massive plate, which had been the accumulation of centuries, and the Indian accessions by which it had been increased through the marriage of Sir Jasper with the nabob's widow, underwent a similar process; while not the least interesting subject of his ruminations was the banker's book, with its careful record of the heavy sums saved annually by the baronet, and destined to the establishment of his son.

Hitherto, Mr. Trevanion had looked upon money rather as a means than an end; though he had labored assiduously for wealth, he had regarded it rather as a slave than a master; he had valued the pomp, the luxury, and the consideration which it secured to him, and not the gold for its own sake; nay, throughout the whole of his career until the marriage of Ida, he had coveted its increase rather for her sake than for his own; and all his yearnings had been awakened by the sole ambition of achieving greatness without the aid of those who had despised him in his poverty.

Now, however, when the "bloody hand" appeared to be almost within his grasp, it was no longer the chief object of attraction, and had he been a needy man with whom the world had dealt grudgingly, he might well have been pardoned for such a feeling; while, as it was, it seemed suddenly to have changed his whole nature.

He had no sooner ascertained the enormous sum produced by his own already colossal wealth, when united to that of which he must necessarily become the owner on the demise of the baronet, than he suddenly forgot his ambition in his avarice. He even regretted the profuse expenditure in which he had for so many years indulged, as he reflected that, having failed in his darling project of securing a noble son-in-law, so much more would have been added to the heap; and there were moments when he almost resolved to curtail his establishment, in order to reduce the further inroads which it compelled him to make upon his treasured capital.

Never had the proud merchant been so restless and so ill at ease. Trevanion Hall on the one hand, and his counting-house in the city, on the other—his two mines of wealth—appeared to him so discordant and so incompatible that they almost, each in its turn, fretted him to fever.

He was now, actually if not legally, the head of his house; but while the old man lived, he must continue to be Mr. Trevanion, the merchant. His commercial affairs progressed as usual, but there was, nevertheless, a moral interregnum in his existence, during which he could not mentally define his real position.

To a haughty spirit like his the feeling that such was the case amounted to actual suffering; and at times he would have been thankful, had intelligence reached him that his uncle had been restored to the possession of his faculties, for then he could at least have reconciled himself to pursue the career which had already raised him to opulence and honor; but situated as he now was, it had become distasteful to him, while he had no equivalent to replace either its excitement or its advantages.

Haughty and stern as ever, he had less self-command; and where he would formerly have spurned support, he now yearned to secure it. He was no longer young; no longer sanguine; he could not look beyond the present hour without disturbing himself.

Nothing had come to pass as he had foreshadowed it. The nephew, whose very name had been obnoxious to him because he stood in the way of his own greatness, was in his grave; the daughter upon whom he had leaned with confidence as the sure agent of his ambition had failed him; the relative whom he sought to humble was beyond the reach of worldly mortification; and more bitter than all else, he must consent to forego his resentment, and to acknowledge the child of a penniless son-in-law as his heir, or be condemned to the exasperating consciousness that, resist as he might, he had no power to prevent that child from succeeding him as the heir of the Trevanions.

He had arrived at this phase of his reverie when Lady Mary Brooklands entered the library.

"Are you engaged, Mr. Trevanion?" she asked in her blandest tone; "if so, I will take some future opportunity of communicating what I have to say."

"My engagements at present," was the equally bland reply; "are by no means pressing;" and Mr. Trevanion, with his usual ceremonious politeness, rose from his seat to advance a chair for his visitor.

As he resumed his own, his eye fell on the formidable array of figures in which he had that morning inscribed his possessions *in esse* and *posse;* and it was with increased stateliness that he prepared to grant the audience solicited by his noble inmate.

Lady Mary was a peer's daughter, true; but she was as poor as she was proud; while he had wherewithal to buy up a store of peerages, should they come into the market. The time had passed when she was absolutely essential to him, but he well knew that he was as necessary to her as ever. He had purchased her services, and could still pay their price; there was no feeling of obligation on either side; while constant association had enabled them to comprehend each other perfectly.

Lady Mary inwardly sneered at the man of money who aspired at greatness; while the merchant, on his side, despised the great lady who sacrificed her dignity to her interests. Still, nothing could exceed the urbanity and good breeding with which both played their part in the domestic drama. If there was neither confidence, friendship, nor regard between them, there was the strong tie of mutual necessity. Each was essential to the other, and each was conscious that such was the case.

Thus, even when Mr. Trevanion, with a keenness of perception rendered still more acute by distrust—for, from the moment Ida became the wife of Sydney Elphinstone, he *had* distrusted Lady Mary—perceived, or fancied he perceived, that the tortuous talent of the titled widow was about to be exhibited in some new and skillful maneuver, not a look or a gesture was ever suffered to betray such a suspicion; nor did he, when he occasionally contrived, with apparent unconsciousness, to baffle her endeavor, permit her to imagine that he was aware of having done so.

Nevertheless, he was constantly upon his guard against a surprise; and it was, consequently, with a misgiving of some fresh design upon his purse or his pride that he, on the present occasion, assumed an attitude of profound and earnest attention.

Nor was he far wrong in his anticipations, for after having so cleverly protested against the indignant interference of the wife, the astute matron resolved to render her position equally secure with the husband.

Skillfully as she had striven to ascertain the intentions of Mr. Trevanion, on his accession to the baronetcy, she had been unable to effect her purpose. Had she succeeded in inducing him to confide to her his decision regarding his daughter, her own future fate would have been clearly mapped out before her; for should he resolve to recall his long-banished child, now a wife and a mother, Mrs. Elphinstone must necessarily do the honors of Trevanion Hall,

and, with her high spirit, would brook no interference from herself; in which case, she must either forego the well-appreciated advantages of her present home, or consent to subside into insignificance; whereas, should the offended father persevere in his resentment, her own reign was secured.

It was to satisfy herself of this important point that she now intruded on the solitude of the merchant, but she was by far too able a tactician to put the question directly.

"My reason for wishing to see you at this particular moment, Mr. Trevanion," she commenced; "was to inform you that I have just had a somewhat important conversation with your wife. As it is extremely probable that your uncle, Sir Jasper, can not long survive, and as his death will occasion great and extensive alterations in your domestic arrangements, I thought it desirable to ascertain the wishes and intentions of Mrs. Trevanion, when the event should occur—"

"A work of supererogation, madam, which could tend to no result."

"Perhaps so; but, aware as I am of the peculiar constitution of Mrs. Trevanion's mind, I thought it very possible that when once she had become Lady Trevanion, she would consider herself aggrieved should I continue to exercise the same authority under your roof as you have hitherto delegated to me; and, therefore, I resolved to have a clear and perfect understanding with herself upon the subject."

"And did you succeed?" inquired her listener, with a sneer.

"Perfectly."

"Then, my Lady Mary, you have worked a miracle which throughout the whole of my married life, I have been unable to accomplish."

"I was prepared," pursued his companion; "should my poor friend evince the slightest desire to assume her duties as mistress of the house in her new home, to abdicate my throne at once; and, with that view, I had already written to my cousin, the Dowager-Duchess of Clanmore, who is a widow like myself, to propose that we should combine our forces, and establish a joint household."

"And what did her grace reply?" inquired the merchant, with most alarming composure.

"I am still awaiting her answer," said the discomfited Lady Mary, striving to conceal her uneasiness; "but there can be little doubt as to its purport, since she made the same request to me before I became your guest."

"That arrangement then is still in abeyance; but you will, perhaps, be kind enough to acquaint me how Mrs. Trevanion received your proposition."

"She refused to hear of my leaving her—she even shed tears—and I assure you, my dear Mr. Trevanion, that I bitterly reproached myself for having occasionally imagined that she misinterpreted my feelings and intentions."

"Do not make yourself uneasy on the subject, Lady Mary: Mrs. Trevanion's imaginary annoyances may always be removed by a new dress or a new novel. For once, however, she acted with common sense; but you must pardon me if I venture to remark that it would have been more in accordance with your usual good judgment, had you consulted me rather than my wife. However, I have no doubt that you were impelled by a sense of delicacy to act as you did; and you are, at all events, a free agent. Thus, then, I am to understand, that, before you decide upon your future plans, you will await the reply of your cousin the duchess."

"Why, not precisely—" commenced the noble matron, with an eagerness which she immediately endeavored to restrain; "of course, so far as my residence with her is concerned, I shall be compelled to do so; but I am half inclined to visit Scotland under any circumstances."

"I had flattered myself that you would have felt some curiosity to see my ancestral home," remarked Mr Trevanion, with even more than his usual stateliness; "and, indeed, I looked forward to the advantage of your good taste and judgment in the alterations and improvements which I shall find it necessary to make there. My uncle has, since the death of his wife, lived a very retired life, and suffered the Hall to remain in precisely the same state in which I remember it in my boyhood; I discovered no symptom of decided neglect or decay on my late visit, certainly; but still much is required to render it what I should desire.

"Both the Hall and the adjacent estate have great capabilities, very great capabilities, and I have resolved, when they once come into my possession, to develop them to their utmost extent. Sir Jasper, as I soon ascertained, had been anxious rather to save money than to spend it; and he was right. He had a son to inherit the property; I am differently situated; and, moreover, while he was known to all the country, I shall enter it as a stranger, and must consequently be cautious not to allow the local dignity of the family to suffer in my hands.

"This place is, as you are aware, Mrs. Trevanion's jointure-house, and enough, more than enough, has already been expended upon it; indeed, to be candid with you, I almost repent that I have been tempted to do so much. However, when I establish myself at the Hall, it will probably let more advantageously in consequence, than it might otherwise have done.

"As to the house in town, for the present at least, it will answer every purpose, as I shall decidedly reside in the country until I have completed all my plans."

Lady Mary bowed and smiled, and tacitly signified her acquiescence in the propriety of these somewhat premature projects; but still, as she could not conceal from herself, she was no nearer her own point than ever.

"Mrs. Trevanion appears to be most anxious that you should consent to a reconciliation with your daughter at this particular crisis," she hazarded, in order to arrive at some conclusion.

"Mrs. Trevanion is very good; and she must surely have become aware long ere this, that as I can place no reliance on her judgment on any serious emergency, I can not be expected to suffer her wants or wishes to control me in

any way. 'This particular crisis' offers no reason that I can perceive, for a precipitate measure of the sort. Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone quitted my roof at her own good pleasure, but she must return to it only at mine; and when, if ever, I may decide on again receiving her, is entirely a matter for my own consideration."

"Yet surely," remarked the lady, making another desperate plunge to clutch the truth which lay deep beneath the waves of the merchant's resolute reserve; "it will be a most unpleasant thing for you to feel that your heir is a stranger to you! Of course, Ida must be naturally anxious that her boy should be reared and educated in such a manner as you would approve."

"I really do not see why Mrs. Elphinstone should be more punctilious with regard to her son's conduct than her own. On the contrary, she is, no doubt, perfectly aware that he will ultimately be more independent of my displeasure than she could ever be; and I feel no present inclination to interfere with her peculiar system of education."

"But you can not, nevertheless, shut your eyes to the fact, my good sir, that your daughter does not possess the means necessary to carry out any such system in an efficient manner; and surely—"

"You are a zealous friend, Lady Mary, and Mrs. Elphinstone will, beyond all doubt, be grateful for your good offices; but still, it appears to me, that you over-rate the privations to which she has thought proper to expose herself. You should remember that she possesses an income of three hundred a year (about as much as she expended upon her dress before her marriage), and that Mr. Sydney Elphinstone is declared to be a very rising young man; fame brings profit, my dear madam, in every profession; and thus you see that you alarm yourself unnecessarily, and that the young gentleman, regarding whose future career you express so very flattering an anxiety will need no patronage of mine."

"Still, as the heir to the Trevanion estates—"

"I yet stand in his way," said the merchant, dryly, "and may probably do so for many years to come; added to which, although Sir Jasper is *hors de combat* in all matters of business, he is nevertheless still alive; and for any reason which I can see to the contrary, now that his mind can no longer act upon his physical health, he may survive for twenty years to come."

"You can not be serious, Mr. Trevanion."

"I am perfectly so."

"I regret to hear it, as, according to my own view of the case, you would be wise in so ordering your arrangements as to be prepared at any moment to supply his place."

"I flatter myself, Lady Mary, that I should have been quite competent to do so at an hour's warning, at any period during the last thirty years. But, my dear madam, I have myself known invalids in his condition outlive their natural heirs; and who shall say that my uncle may not augment the number."

His listener was fairly baffled, but, indignant at the idea of defeat, she returned once more to the charge.

"I am to understand, then, Mr. Trevanion, that, in the remote contingency of Sir Jasper's death, you are anxious that I should accompany the family to Trevanion Hall?"

"Certainly, my dear Lady Mary. Can you doubt that you will ever be a welcome guest beneath my roof."

"I hope not," said the lady, beginning to chafe under the consciousness that she was check-mated at every move; "but my inquiry embraces a wider scope than you appear inclined to concede to it. As I have already stated, I have been entreated, even with tears, by Mrs. Trevanion, not to abandon her to the heavy and irksome responsibilities which must devolve upon the mistress of such an establishment as that which you contemplate in ——shire.

"Of course," she pursued with a significant smile, "I have not learned to-day that she can make no independent arrangement of so serious a nature without your sanction; and it is consequently to you that I appeal before I conclude my own plans."

"I trust, my dear madam, that you have not wearied of my house; I should indeed be sorry to find that such were the case."

"No, no; do not mistake me. The fact is, that, as I take a totally different view of the baronet's malady from yourself, I look daily for news of his death; and since you compel me to speak frankly, I should like to be informed whether, when it has taken place, you have any intention of recalling your daughter and establishing her at the head of your household; as, in the event of such an arrangement, I must of course decline a further residence beneath your roof. Ida is no longer a mere girl, and she would naturally—"

"When I have given Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone a right to dictate her own terms, I shall be prepared to consider them," was the imperturbable reply. "At present I am content to wait the demise of my uncle before I decide on my after-plans. Meanwhile, I feel much indebted to you, my dear Lady Mary, for the consideration which you have shown to the wishes of Mrs. Trevanion. No doubt she is appalled by the prospect before her; she would be equally so by a far less important event; and I shall feel still further obliged, if you will tranquilize her mind upon the subject, and assure her from me that, in any and every case, I shall be careful that she is not exposed to any extra care or exertion. I trouble you with this mission, because, after the interest which you have so kindly evinced in her very unnecessary anxiety, I feel satisfied that you will derive gratification from performing so friendly an office."

Lady Mary Brooklands rose; she could endure no more; the calm self-possession of her companion made the blood tingle in her veins; but she was one of those wary individuals who live not only *in* the world, but *on* it; she could not afford to be true to herself; and, accordingly, she repressed the haughty rejoinder which trembled upon her lips; and, after a few inconsequent remarks, left the library, as ignorant of the real intentions of its master as when she had entered it.

Nevertheless, when she once more found herself alone in her own pretty morning-room, with its costly store of rare china, buhl, marqueterie, and bronze, she soon succeeded in convincing herself that the designs of Mr. Trevanion were more transparent than he imagined; and that it behooved her to be careful of her own interests.

"Had he resolved"—thus she mentally argued—"to exclude Ida from her home during his life-time, he would have evinced more anxiety to prevent me from carrying out my assumed arrangement with the Duchess of Clanmore; as the idea of his placing at the head of his house in ——shire, a woman of whom he is ashamed even here, is preposterous. Crafty as he has been, he has not succeeded in deceiving me; and now my only chance of averting the mortifying change of fortune by which I am threatened, exists in an immediate reconciliation with Ida. How do I regret that, in obedience to her father's request, I did not reply to the letters which she addressed to me after her marriage! However, *le passé est passé*, and I must endeavor to retrieve my fault. I will write to her at once."

And, seating herself at the antique *secrétaire*, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and malachite, which occupied the bay of the window, twenty minutes had not elapsed before she had crossed the first page of her paper with expressions of affection, regret, and remorse, as intense as though she had been the cause of Mrs. Elphinstone's disgrace, and had been plotting to rob her son of his birthright.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AN EXPLANATION.

In compliance with the advice of Lady Malcolm, Elphinstone, on his return home, affecting to be blind to the coldness and indifference of his wife, resolutely commenced a conversation, to which she contributed nothing beyond an occasional monosyllable; nor could even his account of the trial, and the formidable ordeal through which he had so successfully passed, elicit from her any demonstration of excitement or gratified pride.

Nevertheless, he persisted in his ungracious task, until her suppressed emotion became too powerful for concealment, and the heart of Sydney began to swell with hope.

"You do feel for me, and with me, Ida," he said tenderly, as she turned away to hide the tears which had forced their way from her downcast eyes; "I am sure you do, although, for some inexplicable cause, you are anxious to suppress those feelings. Oh! do not at this moment, when I am harassed both in mind and body, deny to me the blessing of your sympathy."

"Why will you persist in urging me to feign what I can not feel?" asked his wife, struggling to regain her self-possession; "how can I sympathize in a triumph with which I am totally unconnected? It is for Lady Malcolm and her daughter, in whose cause you exerted the talents which, when their exhibition could only have profited your wife and child, you suffered to lie dormant, to congratulate you on their success."

"Ida!" exclaimed her husband, reproachfully; "you are unjust. You well know how long I had been yearning for an opportunity of usefulness, and that until the day when I was intrusted with this cause, which will, as I trust, prove the corner-stone of my professional reputation, I had been unable to secure one. Surely you would not visit it upon me as a crime that my first efforts were exerted in the behalf of my mother's dearest friend?"

"By no means; and in the acknowledgments of that friend you will have your best reward. It is the consciousness of that fact which closes my own lips."

"But can you imagine for a moment that any thing can compensate to me for your own cold indifference?"

"Do not deceive yourself, Sydney," was the measured reply; "for you can not deceive me. Had this famous trial, which has so suddenly lifted you from obscurity to fame, involved the interests of any other individual than Edith Malcolm, I consider it very problematical if you would have exhibited the same amount of energy."

"Again, Ada?"

"Can you deny the fact?"

"Yes, and no. In any and every case I should have felt it my duty to put forth all my strength; but I do not seek to deny that I should have felt much less anxiety as to the result."

"For once you are frank?"

"For once! Have you ever found me otherwise? Listen to me, Ida: high-minded, pure-hearted, and capable, as I well know, of any sacrifice for those you love, you are, nevertheless, destroying our mutual happiness by a phantom which you have yourself evoked. Once more, despite your pledge to the contrary, you are indulging in inferences as unjust to myself as they are injurious to the innocent girl, for whom I have never felt more than the regard and affection of a brother. Can you not rely upon my plighted word? And have you forgotten that she was the promised bride of your poor cousin?"

"A fable," said Mrs. Elphinstone, scornfully; "a bridegroom with the hand of death already pressing upon his heart!—a bride who scarcely vouchsafed to shed a tear over his untimely grave! The game was ill-played, and could not deceive the lookers-on."

"Can it be possible, Ida, that you still persist in so fatal a delusion? Have you no respect for the father of your child?—no regard for the honor of your own sex? If it indeed be so; if you blindly indulge in a weakness which neither assurances nor proofs can overcome, what a life of misery is before us both!"

"The assurances have not been wanting," said his wife, gloomily; "but where are the proofs?"

"They exist in the fact that, aware of your suspicions, I have not for months frequented the house of Lady Malcolm, save on professional business; and that I voluntarily offered to effect a total estrangement between the two families."

"By exposing me and my wretchedness to the contempt of those who had caused it."

"Ida, do not drive me to extremity!" exclaimed her husband; "from you I can bear, I have borne, much—but all endurance has its limits. I can not long support an existence so cruel as this to which you have condemned me. While I believed that your jealousy was the result of an affection which would not brook less than an adequate return, I strove by every means in my power to prove how much you wronged me; but now, when I see and feel that I am no longer the object of either love or confidence, I have not self-command enough to endure the daily and hourly trials to which I am subjected."

"And do I escape my share of suffering?"

"Unfortunately you do not. Would that it were otherwise!"

"We have committed a fatal error, Sydney," said Mrs. Elphinstone, suddenly; "or rather it is I who have been guilty of one. In my wretched egotism, believing that I could and should suffice to make your happiness, I urged you to abandon the world, that we might live only for each other. I overtaxed your affection; I calculated too blindly on your stability; putting firm faith in the assurances which you had given me that when once I became your wife your existence would be bound up in mine, I thought myself secure. What the result of my confidence has been, I need not say: suffice that we are both most wretched! You affirm that you can no longer support such an existence; judge, then, how little I shall be able to endure it. I never deceived you, Sydney; I warned you, when you sought my hand, that if ever I had *proof* of your falsehood, I should hate as deeply as I had ever loved. I say so still; but, until I have that proof, I will struggle on for my child's sake—ay, even for my own—for what have I now left on earth to cling to but yourself."

Exhausted by her own emotion, Ida sank back upon her chair, and buried her face in her hands, while hot tears forced their way through her trembling fingers. In an instant, Elphinstone was at her side.

"And I—I," he murmured convulsively; "I have none but you. Why will you close your heart against me?"

With a wild gesture, his wife flung her arms about his neck.

"Precisely as I anticipated!" said a voice, which proceeded from the unclosed door that opened upon the lawn, and Lady Malcolm, with a beaming smile and extended hand, advanced eagerly toward them.

In an instant, Mrs. Elphinstone stood erect; no trace of tears could be detected in her flashing eyes, although they still lingered on her cheeks: proudly, and even defyingly, she returned the animated glance which was fastened on her; and while Sydney grasped, with warmth and fervor, the proffered hand, his wife remained cold and motionless.

"Did I not tell you that one word would suffice to explain all?" asked their visitor, cheerfully; "and now that word has been spoken, you see the happy effect which it has produced."

"Will you do me the favor to interpret your meaning, Lady Malcolm?" asked Ida, haughtily; "for you must pardon me if I confess myself unable to comprehend either the purport of your words, or the reason of this somewhat extraordinary intrusion on the privacy of my home."

"Will you not excuse my want of ceremony in the earnestness of its motive, my dear Mrs. Elphinstone? With considerable difficulty I succeeded in convincing your husband that your late unhappiness had arisen solely from your uneasiness on the subject of a certain Lady Mary Maitland, and that, consequently, when he informed you that she was about to become Marchioness of Brentwood, you would at once appreciate at its real value the idle gossip of a few tattling women."

Mrs. Elphinstone glanced toward her husband for an instant, and a sarcastic expression passed over her features as she replied, "You are very kind, madam, to interest yourself so warmly in our domestic happiness, but, fortunately, I am too clear-sighted to become your dupe. Until this moment I never heard even the name of the lady to whom it would appear that Mr. Elphinstone was so much devoted, as to render it a matter of congratulation to me that she is about to become a wife. *This* was a piece of intelligence which I had yet to learn, and I thank you for the information, tardy as it is."

"Mrs. Elphinstone, what would your manner to me imply? You know how sincere an affection I feel, and have ever felt, for your husband, but even his wife may presume too far upon it."

"Oh, I can incur the threatened risk without shrinking;" said Ida, with a mocking laugh. "it is really time that we should understand each other; and I can but admire the frankness with which Lady Malcolm acknowledged an affection in which her daughter so cordially unites."

"Ida!" exclaimed her husband, imploringly.

"Suffer Mrs. Elphinstone to explain herself, Sydney," said their visitor, with calm dignity; "if I mistake not, there was an allusion made to Edith—to Miss Malcolm, which requires explanation, and I demand it here and now."

"You shall have it, madam;" said the infatuated woman, as she drew herself proudly up and confronted the pale and stately matron. "If I was not aware, until you obliged me by the information, that at the very time when Mr. Elphinstone (no doubt supposing that I must ultimately become the heiress of the wealthy Mr. Trevanion), induced me to believe that I was the only woman he had ever loved, he had so far committed himself in another quarter, as to have become the theme of idle tongues, and subjected a lady to the same mortification, I feel little disposed at the present day to resent the indignity which he then offered to me.

"I do not even seek or care to know whether on that occasion he played the flattering part of a rejected suitor; or, weighing the lady's reputed wealth with my own, conceived that the scale turned in my favor; if the former was the case, his own feelings must have been a sufficient punishment; if the latter, I am now taught to exult in a firmness on the part of

my father, which I had hitherto regarded as cruelty.

"Thus, then, I trust you will perceive that, although the knowledge of Mr. Elphinstone's former attachment by no means tends to exalt my opinion of either his stability or his good faith, it can not otherwise affect my happiness. I am no child to fight with shadows. And now, as you request it, I will explain my reference to Miss Malcolm. I confess, that to myself it appears wholly unnecessary that I should do so, but since you request it—"

"I do not request, I demand it."

"Ida!" once more exclaimed her husband, in violent agitation.

Mrs. Elphinstone disregarded an appeal, of which she even appeared to be unconscious; and coldly pursued:

"You found us happy, Lady Malcolm. When you first crossed our path we were, or I believed that we were, every thing to each other; not a cloud had come between us; and what has been the result of our acquaintance?"

With a groan wrung from his very heart, Sydney flung himself on the sofa, and buried his face among the cushions. He could not bear to meet the eyes of the admirable woman and unfailing friend, who was about for his sake to be subjected to the most cruel insult, that could be offered to a mother.

"The result!" echoed Lady Malcolm, in a tone of undisguised amazement.

"The result, madam: You have a daughter younger than myself, perhaps handsomer—I am too proud, or perhaps under existing circumstances, too careless, to contest that point. I welcomed her to my home, where she has gradually supplanted me. She has been my husband's chosen companion; she consoled him by her society when, by giving birth to his child, I was condemned to the irksomeness of a sick-room; her accomplishments have administered to his amusements; her attentions have soothed his vanity; and finally, when the welfare of those who were dependent on him failed to arouse him into energy and action, she discovered the secret of awakening both, by enlisting them in her service. And you demand to know my meaning, Lady Malcolm! You, who have looked calmly on, and suffered the affections of my husband to be wrenched from me, day by day, by the wiles of an artful girl."

"No more, Ida—no more!" exclaimed her husband, suddenly springing up. "You can not understand the bearing of your words; you can not mean to imply to the mother of Edith—"

"I imply nothing, Mr. Elphinstone, and I am fully and painfully aware of my own meaning. I have endured much, and long; but all human endurance has its limits."

Lady Malcolm had turned away, but the violence of her emotion could be detected in the convulsive shiver by which her whole frame was agitated. Twice she strove to speak, but the words died away upon her lips; and her heart throbbed visibly beneath the pressure of the hand with which she strove in vain to control its beatings.

"Sydney," she said, at length, in a hoarse whisper, "I forgive your wife for your mother's sake—I can do no more. My pure, innocent child! My poor Edith! Who shall escape the tongue of slander, the taint of suspicion, since she has become their victim. Farewell, Sydney, we must meet no more on this earth. Would that our final parting had been less bitter."

"Not so, Lady Malcolm, not so," said Elphinstone, sternly, as he retained his grasp of the hand which she had extended to him; "my wife has truly said that 'all human endurance has its limits,' and I have been forced beyond the boundary of mine. I will *not* consent that this meeting shall be our final one; I will *not* consent to be abandoned by my best and oldest friend, at the bidding of a woman, who, in the indulgence of a weak and vicious passion, has forfeited at once her own dignity and the respect of her husband. I thank you that you have not attempted to vindicate your pure and injured daughter, and by so doing, cast a doubt on my own honor. Mrs. Elphinstone is, happily for us both, possessed of an income which will enable her to quit a home in which she declares herself to have been deceived, neglected, and dishonored, nor shall I ever cease to remember that she is the mother of my child, should I have it in my power to add to her worldly comfort and respectability.

"In becoming my wife, she made great and undeniable sacrifices, which I have endeavored to repay by a forbearance that has at last rendered me contemptible in my own eyes. I have deserved the indignities which have been heaped upon me, but I will now assert myself.

"Violating, as Mrs. Elphinstone has done, every principle of delicacy, she shall not have cause to reproach me with a want of generosity in my turn. I am a father, and how I have loved our boy she well knows, but I will spare her the pang which I inflict upon myself; I will not rob her of her child. She will, at least, have one being left to love, while I—I—"

"Sydney!" gasped his wife, as she approached him. "Do I understand you rightly? Do you sacrifice me and your child to those who have brought this misery upon me?"

"I ask you to make no sacrifice," was the cold reply; "I leave you free, while securing my own immunity from further insult."

"Sydney," said Lady Malcom, in her turn; "beware of forming a rash and hasty resolution. That you have been wronged is true, but you love your wife, and must not, without mature reflection, destroy the happiness of two lives."

"Doubtlessly, madam," remarked Ida, bitterly, "what Mr. Elphinstone refuses to an injured wife, he would concede to your entreaties. I, however, decline to owe any thing to the intercession of the individual—"

"Ida," interposed her husband; "let it suffice that you have hitherto been enabled to insult me with impunity; I will not suffer you to carry your madness further. If the dignity and honor of your husband are of so little importance in your eyes, that you

can afford to sacrifice them to your insane and unfounded suspicions, I warn you that I shall not attempt to reciprocate the injury, but will part from you without noise or scandal; venture, however, to utter but one word affecting the reputation of those to whom you are indebted for a friendship which you have requited with the most gratuitous ingratitude, and I shall prove less forbearing. The law shall then separate us, and the world shall judge between us."

"Yet once more let me entreat—" commenced Lady Malcolm, earnestly.

"It is useless, madam," said Ida, with a calm more frightful than the wildest passion; "the question has been decided. I prefer the beggary to which Mr. Elphinstone has condemned me to any association with those whom I can neither regard nor respect, and whose very presence is irksome to me. Permit me, however, before you leave us, to assure you that I am not the victim you would fain have made me. I warned my husband before I gave him my hand, that mine was not a heart which could be trampled on with impunity. I warned him that mine was no cold and common nature, which could be stung, and requite the venom with a smile. Believe me when I say—for I say it advisedly—that I can hate as deeply as I have loved; that where I have been injured, I can requite. Do not picture me to yourself, or paint me to your daughter, as crushed by the fate to which you have mutually hurried me. The blow will fall more heavily upon my husband than upon myself. He abandons me to the comments of the world—I leave him to the reproaches of his own conscience."

Lady Malcolm offered no reply, but after wringing the hand of Sydney, walked slowly from the room, and the husband and wife were alone together.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A FIRST SEPARATION.

On the departure of Lady Malcolm, Mrs. Elphinstone had, in her turn, advanced to the door of the apartment, firmly and haughtily, but with a slow and measured step, which would, had he been inclined to do so, have afforded ample time to her husband to detain her.

Mr. Elphinstone, however, evinced no desire to control her movements. He was following Lady Malcolm with his eyes as she traversed the garden; nor did he move from the window until she had disappeared through the door of communication which opened upon her own grounds; and when he at length changed his position, his wife had left the room.

For a moment the young husband looked around him like one bewildered by a sudden blow. Even the accustomed objects by which he was surrounded appeared strange and unfamiliar. There was an expression of keen suffering upon his features, and a tremulousness in his manner, which betrayed how deeply he had been moved; but his eye was tearless as he raised his hat from the table, and, ringing for a servant, desired that Mrs. Elphinstone might be informed that he should not return home that night, and that, consequently, it would be unnecessary to detain the dinner.

Poor Sydney! The illusions of life were over for him; and he felt that henceforward he must pursue his path alone. For hours he wandered through the lanes where he had so often loitered with Ida; nor was it until the declining sun warned him that he had still to seek a home that he reluctantly turned once more into the busy thoroughfare which led toward town.

His reflections had been very bitter ones, but his conscience acquitted him of wrong; and while he remembered, with the sad yearning of regret, all that his wife had once been to him—his elegant, though modest home—his beautiful and only child—his very heart seemed bursting within him. But his resolution was not shaken even for an instant. His wounded affections might, and did, rebel; but the pride of outraged manhood gave him strength to resist their pleadings.

Still it was with a melancholy feeling of isolation that he at length reached the Temple, which he had resolved should be his future home, and gave the necessary instructions to his amazed but unquestioning clerk.

"My profession must henceforth be wife, and child, and world to me," he murmured to himself, as he sank into one of the unwieldy chairs by which his private office was encumbered. "I must forget the past, and strive to suffice to myself. I will endeavor to evoke ambition from the ashes of outraged affection. I can not be happy, but I may yet be true to myself."

It was a bold vaunt; but, even as he uttered it, he felt its emptiness, and, after a sharp struggle with feelings which he vainly stigmatized as weak and womanly, he bent his head upon the desk before him, and wept bitterly.

He was alone; and no prying eye could note his tears. For awhile this conviction gave him a sense of relief, which was almost happiness; but soon the consciousness returned to him that thus he must ever be; that, alike in grief or toil, he must remain companionless—uncheered by the sympathy of home; that, husband and father though he was, the tenderness of a wife, the love of a child, would no longer make his labor light, or his success a triumph.

And he was still so young! So full of the best and holiest impulses of life! To what long and weary years of existence might he not be condemned? The reflection startled him. No! the life of study and intellectual struggle upon which he had decided so prematurely, would not suffice to blot out the bitter memories of the past. He could not breathe the same air, or exist in the same hemisphere, with the woman he had so dearly loved—the child upon whom he had built up so many hopes.

"I will labor on until I have insured their

comfort and well-being," was his next resolve. "I will restore to her, by my exertions, the affluence which, for my sake, she abandoned; my boy shall cease to be a beggar; and then, when I have secured my name from reproach, the world will be before me, and I will hew out my own path unflinchingly."

The darkness grew dense about him; every object in the vast and dreary room became dim and indistinct; and the deep silence of the ancient pile was rendered still more oppressive by the hollow reverberations from the busy streets beyond.

The tide of feeling rushed back upon him. The past, with all its hopes and all its affections, rose on his memory with mocking brilliancy; and with lingering tenderness he lived over again the few brief months of happiness and love that he had passed with Ida.

"Is it firmness or cowardice which has impelled me to the extreme step that I have now taken?" he asked himself. "Is it not my duty to endure all, until I have secured the competence which is now mine only in perspective, and which may even fail me yet? Dare I abandon the woman who, in the unselfish confidence of a trusting heart, gave herself to me in my poverty and obscurity, when she might have become the wife of one who could have surrounded her with all the luxuries of life?

"In seeking to assert myself, I have been alike ungenerous and unjust; but it is not yet too late to repair my fault. She can not mistake my motive, if I tell her frankly the decision at which I have arrived. To-morrow, then—to-morrow I will once more return to that home which I believed that I had abandoned forever. I will strive to remember all that she once was to me, and forget that which she now is. I will support my wrongs in silence, until I can liberate both her and myself with honor.

"It is bitter, very bitter; but it must be borne. She does not comprehend how I have loved, how I still love her, and it is better so; she will have one regret the less when the hour of separation at length comes. Yes, I feel that I have decided rightly. She is too young, too beautiful, to be abandoned to a hollow and cold-hearted world until she possesses the means of compelling its respect. I have—I ought to have no alternative—and I will meet my fate courageously, cruel as it is."

As the unhappy young man arrived at this determination, he rang for lights, which were no sooner placed before him, than with nervous rapidity he unsealed and read the letters which lay upon his table; and for a brief moment a smile of exultation played about his lips. There was work before him; not assistance coldly and grudgingly tendered, but opportunities of usefulness pressed cordially and flatteringly upon him. His heart might be silenced forever, but his intellect was about to be called into full exercise; and henceforth he must live for fame, and forget his private sorrows in his public duties.

In the excitement of the moment he seized his pen, and far into the night, alone, fasting, and heart-crushed, he labored on.

His solitude was uninvaded, his wants unheeded. He was alone with his vanished visions, his blighted hopes, his withered trust; nor was it until the cold gray dawn stole with its dreary gleam into the room, that he at length flung himself upon a sofa, and fell into a deep and comfortless sleep.

And how had Ida—she who had wilfully wrecked her own happiness and that of a husband whom she loved with all the passionate ardor of her ill-governed nature—how had she passed the night in which she had become worse than widowed? At times on her knees beside the cradle of her child, weeping such tears as leave their trace forever upon the heart from which they flow—upbraiding herself, her destiny—regretting the past—shrinking from the future—and listening with a beating heart for the returning step of him whom she had outraged. At times pacing the room with rapid and unequal steps, braving the fate which her own folly had brought upon her, and striving to believe that she no longer loved him.

As the night wore on, and the clock of a neighboring church pealed out the hour of midnight, however, all the false energy by which she had hitherto been sustained, forsook her. Never, until the moment in which she at length despaired of his return, had she been fully conscious how necessary Sydney was to her existence. Even her child was forgotten in the utter despair which took possession of her. The very firmness with which he had brought this wretchedness upon her compelled her respect; and for awhile she cowered beneath the conviction of his unsuspected strength of character. This prostration of spirit was, however, only temporary.

"Be it so," she murmured to herself; "the contest will no longer be an unequal one: in bruising my heart, he will crush his own; for even while he betrayed me, I feel that he loved me still. I have no longer a home—scarcely a name—and yet I will defy the fate to which he has condemned me. Time will prove who can best bear up against the trial.

"But no, no; that seeming strength could have been but momentary. Sydney, you have deceived yourself; it is not I who am destined to be the victim: you can not, you dare not, abandon both wife and child, and brave the world without sympathy or support. No, I feel and know that you will yet return to my feet a suppliant; but it shall be too late, even did you sue to me this very hour. You abandon me to poverty; I accept it, for you will have condemned yourself to an existence far more wretched; and while the world may sympathize in my privations, you shall never know the keener pangs that you have inflicted on my heart.

"Ay," she pursued still more bitterly; "the moment in which you have thrust me forth to struggle with that world has been well chosen. Your path is smooth before you; you have felt the intoxicating consciousness of success—the future is bright in its promise; and it is now—now—that you assume the semblance of a power which I defy.

"Were I still the spoiled and pampered

heiress. I could forgive you; for then indeed I could, without humiliation, welcome you back to my heart, and struggle to forget the past—I shall be very wretched, but I, too, can be firm; here have been martyrs who have smiled at the stake; and I, like them, will endure my martyrdom without complaint, proudly conscious that I shall not suffer alone."

Day broke; the busy hum of men rose on the air; the sorrowing, who had for a few brief hours forgotten their cares in sleep, awoke to renewed grief; the happy sprang from their beds, exulting in a new season of enjoyment; and ere the sun had long been above the horizon, Sydney Elphinstone, true to his purpose of the previous night, was already on his way, self-accusing and self-rebuked, to his now cheerless home.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOME.

"At last!" murmured Ida to herself, as from the window of her dressing-room, which she had flung open in order to cool her aching brow in the fresh morning air, she saw her husband pass the gate of the lawn, and approach the house: "I knew that it must be so; a few short hours have sufficed to show him that he overrated his own strength; this is as I would have it;—I shall not be the forsaken wife, thrust forth from the hearth and heart of the man on whose truth and loyalty she had relied; but the indignant and self-avenging woman, who has energy enough to revenge her own wrongs!"

As she thus communed with her own thoughts, she hastily bound up her hair, bathed her swollen eyes with cold water, and arranged her dress, which, in the irritation of a long and sleepless night, had become disordered.

As the Indian suttee decorates herself with the most costly jewels ere she prepares to ascend the funeral-pyre of her husband, so did Mrs. Elphinstone, strong in her resolution to resist the pleadings of Sydney, and to inflict on him a pang which must, nevertheless, as she was painfully conscious, recoil upon herself, and calmly before her glass, and endeavor with fastidious care to obliterate every vestige of the suffering through which she had just passed, ere she doomed herself to life-long misery by rejecting all overtures to a reconciliation which might yet have saved them both.

Slowly, and with an unruffled brow, she ultimately descended to the breakfast-room; and there, as she had anticipated, she found her husband—not calm and collected like herself—but evidently laboring under an agitation by which he was thoroughly unnerved.

As she entered the apartment, he turned abruptly toward her, and extended his hand; but the action was unheeded by his wife, who, uttering a cold and brief "good morning," preferred to lay her own hand upon the bell.

"Hear me, Ida," he said eagerly, as he interrupted the movement; "before our solitude is invaded by the entrance of a servant, let me tell you that I have recognized my fault; wounded pride and the resentment of a heart smitten in its best affections hurried me into a harshness foreign to my nature, and unworthy of one whom, however lightly you may now regard his happiness, you once loved.

"Let us forget the past, at least until I can provide you with a home more congenial to your tastes and habits. We can never again be to each other what we once were; but we may still live under the shelter of the same roof, and, by mutual forbearance, replace our lost illusions by a calm and peaceful reality.

"Our position must be a painful and an onerous one, as I well know; but if we both strive to render it endurable, surely we may succeed."

"Mr. Elphinstone," was the cold reply, "the picture which you have sketched is by no means an attractive one. That you have, since you left your home, recognized the cowardice and selfishness of sacrificing your wife to the woman who has supplanted her in your affections, I am rejoiced to hear, as it proves that you are not as yet thoroughly forgetful of your responsibilities as a husband and a father; and for your own sake, I am glad of this, although the fact can not for a moment affect either my happiness or my determination.

"You are right, I did love you once—truly, deeply, fervently—but that time is past. Ida Trevanion confided in you—honored you—would have laid down her life to brighten yours—and clung to you through every change of fortune. Ida Elphinstone honors you no longer, confides in you no longer: her idol has been cast from its pedestal, and she has found it clay.

"Do not mistake yourself; it is no sublime and self-abnegating repentance which now leads you to confess and to deplore your injustice; it is simply a sense of the void which our separation will cause in your future existence. You still love me, in spite of yourself—in spite of the wrong that you have done me—the indignity to which you have exposed me—and you can not contemplate without terror the consequences of a final rupture between us. I am still, as ever, necessary to your happiness; and it is for your own sake, not for mine, that you are anxious to avert the evil."

"Ida, I swear to you, that were I at this moment possessed of the affluence to which I trust one day to attain—were I enabled to place you in the position from which I rashly hurled you down—believing, vain fool that I was! that my love would compensate to you for every sacrifice—I should not now be here, pleading to you to relieve me from self-rebuke.

"Even now, I do not ask of you to pardon any thing beyond the impetuous and unconsidered resolution which I yesterday expressed, for, save in that solitary instance, I have nothing to regret—nothing with which to reproach myself. All I entreat—and believe me when I say that I do it earnestly—is, that you will remain beneath my roof, and under my protection, until I am enabled to feel that my ill-omened love has not entailed upon you the misery and suffering of poverty.

"Like yourself, I was weak while I believed that I possessed your affection, but, like your-

self, I have acquired strength by trial. I *can* bear to live without you; I *can* dare to look forward to an existence unsolaced by affection; but I can not brook that the woman I have loved should be exposed to trials to which she could never have been subjected had she not become my wife."

"You talk bravely," said Ida, with a withering sneer; "the future will prove in how far you are justified in using such high-sounding words. Once more, I tell you that I am revenged; I will *not* remain another day beneath your roof.

"I express no gratitude for your assumed anxiety in my future welfare; for, specious as the argument might seem to one unacquainted with your nature, it can never mislead me. In your egotism, you dread the comments of the world; the contempt which must attach to a man who, after winning the heart of a trusting woman who had hitherto known nothing of life save its enjoyments, thrust her forth to poverty when she was bold enough to resent her wrongs.

"Well, sir, to these unsparing comments, to that withering contempt, you shall be subjected. I am no hireling, to await in humble submission the good pleasure of a master. I will owe you nothing—I will not even accept as a boon from your hand, the guardianship of my child, for you dare not wrest him from me. Unlike yourself, I *have* a regret—I *have* a reproach. I regret that the fortune of the heiress did not enable you to secure the affluence which, in all probability, invested me, in your eyes, with charms that faded under the disappointment which supervened; and I reproach, not you, but myself, that I was weak enough to be deluded into supposing that such must not inevitably have been the case."

"Ida," said Elphinstone, sadly, "passion has made you illogical. If it indeed be as you affirm, and that I am in truth guilty of the ungenerous weakness of which I am now accused; if your loss of fortune, forfeited as it was for my sake, has rendered you less dear to me; then why should I shrink from the destiny which you have hewn out for me? How can I love you still with a fervor which you have declared me unable to control or to subdue? By prophesying my life-long misery in resigning you, you still confess your faith in the stability of my affection, and tacitly admit the falsehood of your own accusations; by fastening upon me the vice of avarice, you divest me of those finer feelings which could alone render my future isolated existence a burden and a pang. The comments of a world, to which, for your sake, I shall offer no explanation, I shall know how to despise; its contempt I shall regard as little, until I have compelled its respect. Do not, therefore, delude yourself; but pause ere you suffer passion to overwhelm your reason. Once more, and for the last time, I entreat of you to have mercy upon us both."

"And once more, and for the last time, I refuse to comply with your entreaty," vehemently replied his wife; "my boy will suffice to me; and I trust that, for your own sake, you may be enabled to derive equal consolation in the smiles of your mother's friend and her inestimable daughter, or in those of the Lady Mary Maitland, who had the honor of preceding me in your affections, until, like a wayward child, you weary of the new toy as you wearied of the old one.

"The world is wide, Mr. Elphinstone, and you are becoming its favorite; I should be unwilling to cast one shadow upon the brightness of your path. You have assured me that the fame which you have lately acquired must bring fortune in its train; enjoy that fortune without scruple and without stint, for, from the hour in which I quit your house, I make no claim upon you; I reject all favors, all concessions; I came to you almost penniless, and almost penniless I am content to continue. Console yourself as I shall—if you can"

"And this is your final resolution?"

"It is."

"So be it, then," was the rejoinder of the young husband; "I had hoped that the memory of the past—the fate of our only child—might have weighed with you; but I have deceived myself, and will urge you no further. Only remember, Ida, that a few hours hence, should you repent your decision, it will already be too late. Since you refuse to accord to me even the right of contributing to your necessities, I shall feel little inclination to waste my life in profitless labor, nor shall the name of the man, toward whom you have evinced a hatred so unbounded and uncompromising, ever again be intruded upon you. You have nothing more to fear either from my affection or my enmity. As you have justly remarked, the world is wide; I will make my home beyond the reach of inquiry or pursuit. I am young and strong; strong in purpose as in frame. Wretched I may be, but I shall at least be a stranger to remorse. I have endeavored to fulfill my duty to the last; and, if I have failed, I am content to abide the consequences of my error."

For an instant the firmness of Mrs. Elphinstone forsook her; there was a depth of feeling in the accents of her husband that fell cold and heavy on her heart; but she would not yield; and she was about to utter some chilling rejoinder, when a servant entered, and placed a couple of letters on the table.

Without even glancing at the superscription, and anxious to impress upon her husband that at the very moment in which he was threatening to expatriate himself—thus rendering all possibility of their future reconciliation impossible—she was indifferent to a resolution beneath which she nevertheless quailed, she tore open that which lay nearest to her; and she was unable to suppress a start of surprise as she recognized, in the lengthy and highly-perfumed epistle, the handwriting of Lady Mary Brooklands. A blended feeling of astonishment and contempt impelled her to read it to the end.

Experience had taught her the hollowness of her former friend; and as this was the first communication which she had received from her since her marriage, a vague suspicion crossed her mind that her astute ladyship must have been impelled by some powerfu

motive to lavish upon her the laudatory endearments which formed the staple of the missive.

Suddenly, however, affecting to remember the presence of her husband, she held toward him the still open letter, saying, as she did so:

"A letter from your amiable aunt, Mr. Elphinstone. It may, perhaps, interest you to cast your eye over it."

Sydney received it with a silent bow, but it was merely to fold and replace it on the table; and he was just about to quit the room, when a wild cry from his wife arrested him. Ida sat motionless, with her eyes fixed in vacancy, and a bulky packet with a deep black border, of which she had just broken the seal, crushed convulsively in her hands.

"Read it, Sydney, if you would save my senses," she at length gasped out, in a shrill whisper; "read it, for I can not."

Elphinstone took the packet from her hands, and instantly detected the familiar characters of Mr. Trevanion. He, however, evinced no emotion; but the contents of the letter what they might, he imagined that they could in no way interest himself; but he erred in his judgment.

Thus while Ida, panting from agitation, listened with parted lips and starting eyes, he stood calm and unmoved; and his voice was as clear and steady, as its wont, as he prepared to obey her.

Thus ran the letter.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LETTER.

"TREVANION HALL, August, 184-.

"WHEN the daughter to whom I had intrusted alike my future happiness, and the realization of my most cherished hopes, left the shelter of my roof to throw herself into the arms of an obscure and needy lover, I believed that I had forever closed my heart against her.

"She well knew that through her, and by her, I would alone attain the object to which I had devoted the whole energies of a laborious life; that I had neither support nor sympathy to anticipate from the woman whom I had made my wife; that my path toward the goal to which I aspired was beset by mortification; that my position was a false one; and that the present was only rendered endurable to me by the probable results of the future.

"That daughter was my only child; and the disappointment inflicted upon me at her birth, might perhaps to have prepared me for the still keener mortification to which I was subjected by her marriage. It did not, however, even in the moment of painful excitement, when her sex was revealed to me. I at once felt that the infant, at least, was blameless—that it was an accident of fate; and I was no sooner satisfied that I had little prospect of gain becoming a father than I resolved to do for the girl, who was destined to be my heir-at-all that I would have done for the son who would have perpetuated my name.

"You best know, Mrs. Sydney Elphinstone, how I redeemed the pledge made to myself within a few years of your birth. You best know how care and gold were alike lavished on your infancy, your girlhood, and your maturity; but what you did not perhaps understand was this: that in administering with ready hand to your vanity, your luxury, and your egotism, in developing your talents, and in affording to you every opportunity of enhancing those personal qualities with which you had been gifted by nature—as if to convince me that the darling project of my life might yet be accomplished—I was actuated, less by a weak feeling of pride in your personal and mental endowments, than by a desire to accomplish my purpose.

"Had I left you to the sole guardianship of a fond and mindless mother, you would have grown to womanhood as obscure as herself, and as unworthy to co-operate in my own views; and thus, you would have had no right to aspire to a fate less mean than that to which you saw fit to condemn yourself.

"And now, for the last time—as henceforth the subject must never again be mooted between us—let me impress upon you—that you have deserved no forgiveness at my hands. I trusted in you, and you betrayed my trust. I had confided to you the irksomeness of my position—the humiliation which I had endured from my nearest relatives; I had poured out my heart before you, and made you feel how essential your obedience to my wishes must inevitably prove to my ultimate resumption of the social rank to which I was entitled by my birth; and you failed me.

"You fled from my house like a detected felon, and you have paid the penalty of your fault. With ostentatious pride, you left behind you every article of luxury to which the world could affix a price; but you strangely overlooked the fact that you carried away with you a father's hopes and a mother's peace of mind. Were you less culpable than if you had broken into my strong-box, or rifled your mother's jewel-case of its last diamond? I leave it to yourself to answer.

"You had wealth within your grasp; a coronet at your feet; cupidity and ambition might alike have been satisfied, and you rejected both—for what? To unite yourself to one who deprived you of every worldly advantage—to see your first-born son come into life a beggar—and to welcome the alms of an offended father as a boon from Heaven; while even for those, trifling as the gift would have appeared in the days when you had not a wish ungratified, you were indebted—not to any voluntary relenting on my part (for my experience has taught me that no human being exists upon the earth who might not be independent of the sordid wants of the world, did he not invite them either by imprudence or dishonor)—but to the intercession of your friend, Lady Malcolm.

"I am far from justifying the interference of a stranger in such delicate matters as those of family differences; and it is even probable that I might have resented her ladyship's intrusion on the occasion to which I have alluded, had I not been aware that she was

one of the most valued friends of Sir Jasper Trevanion, to whom I felt convinced that she would represent your necessities, should I fail to relieve them—a humiliation to which I would not have exposed myself for half my fortune. To her, therfore, and not to myself, you owe the temporary assistance, which I trust proved serviceable to you in your need.

"And now, as I presume that I have enabled you fully to comprehend the nature of our relative positions, I will proceed to explain my reasons for terminating the silence which has so long existed between us.

"You are a wife and a mother; in the first of these capacities I am not only willing, but even anxious, to ignore your pre-existenee as much as possible; nor, from all that has reached me, am I inclined to suppose that you are less desirous than myself, to render the chain as light as may be practicable, without exposing yourself to the idle gossiping of a censorious world.

"As a mother, however, the case should be, and *must* be, widely different. Circumstances have occurred, which tend to make the son of Mr. Sydney Elphinstone of considerable importance to the Trevanion family; and these I shall now communicate to you in detail, in order that you may decide upon your future line of action.

"About the period of your child's birth, and while my uncle, Sir Jasper, was engaged in preparing the settlements, resetting the family diamonds, and completing the equipages which he had been to town to superintend, previous to the marriage of his son with Miss Edith Malcolm, your cousin, Herbert Trevanion, whose health had long been visibly declining, became rapidly worse; and, with a want of moral courage which was, perhaps, fortunate for his successors—as he might (under the blind influence of a first passion, which you will in all probability not feel tempted, from your own experience, to doubt), have forced some imprudent concessions from his doating father—he never warned him of the fact of his approaching end, until it became too late for the baronet to divert any portion of the family possessions from their legitimato channel; and thus he ultimately died, without having effected the slightest alteration in the will which Sir Jasper had executed in favor of him and his heirs.

"Nor was this all; for the baronet, utterly prostrated by the suddenness of the bereavement which had rendered his old age desolate—and mark, Ida, that like you he had flung from him those who might have sustained and embellished his existence, had he done them justioo—fell powerless beneath the blow; physically he resisted the shock, but his mind was less energetic than his frame; from that hour in which his son ceased to exist, he became a puling idiot.

"You will think this shocking, Ida, but this is, nevertheless, what men call retribution. In his pride and strength he drove me from his roof; in his imbecility and weakness, I made it safe and firm above him; in my youth he cast me forth; in his age I had secured to him the legitimate shelter of his homo.

"I am told that, legally, he was dead, and that I could in my turn have lorded it over his helplessness. I need not say that I did not do so. My wrongs were sufficiently atoned, and I scorned the baseness of a vulgar vengeance.

"Thus far, nothing had occurred with which I could not grapple single-handed, without one feeling of misgiving as regarded my own strength; but more was still to follow, which forced upon me the recollection that I was still a father; and that, although sinned against almost beyond forgiveness, I was bound to pardon the child who had offended, as well as the relative who had injured me.

"Four days since, I received a hasty summons to this place. The physical strength of Sir Jasper Trevanion had failed, but his intellect had been restored to him. I found him on his death-bed, but I already knew that he had long repented his injustice toward me, and I abstained from all reproach.

"As I stood beside his pillow, old memories, indeed, revived, but I thrust them back; and it was with a true heart and a calm brow that I pressed the hand which he extended to me. But for me, the old man would have been childless and desolate; like me, he had been for a time proud and relentless; now he clung to me as the only being left to him on earth, to whom he could turn for comfort and support—who could save his death-bed from the intrusion of strangers and hirelings—who could close his eyes with the hand of affection, and follow him to the grave with the reverence of relationship; and, as I saw and felt all this, Ida, my heart, long closed against all such emotion, yearned toward you.

"As I forgave in that solemn hour the man who had marred my youth, so did I also forgive you, who had blighted my age.

"He died that night; and until dawn I watched beside him, alone; for he had read to me the one great lesson of my life: and while I gazed in silence upon his rigid brow and compressed lips, never again to be unsealed in this world, and which had closed in the utterance of a blessing upon myself for the generosity with which I had requited his injustice, I felt that I could afford to forget all the past. It therefore, remains for you to assist me in the effort

"I will not deceive you. The fact that you have a son, who must at my death succeed to the Trevanion estates, and bear the name of my ancestors, has not been without its effect in strengthening my resolution. It were idle to deny that such is the case; but here, in the house of death, where the light of day is replaced by the glare of waxen tapers, and the voices of my fellow-men by the low whispers which seem to be a foretaste of the hollow murmurs of the burial-vaults, where—after one gloomy pageant—all will relapse into silence until it again opens to receive my own corpse. I am startled by the consciousness that I no longer suffice to myself.

"I strive to conquer this weakness by dwelling upon the change that has come over my fortunes; by the reflection that I am now almost fabulously wealthy; by endeavoring to accustom my ear to the new titles by which I am addressed by those about me; and—shall I confess it?—I feel scorn of myself that I should

be so unmanned by events perfectly natural in themselves, and which others will regard as utterly common-place, or as mere matter of congratulation.

"Thus it is, however; and you will, consequently, understand that you have once more become essential to my happiness.

"Do not fail me a second time. These morbid feelings will pass away when I am once more involved in the cares and interests of life; and you are well aware that to you alone I can turn with confidence to assist me in the new duties which have devolved upon me.

"Your mother, Lady Trevanion, has no interests in common with myself, save such as affect her own comfort and convenience; no intellect on which I can repose, no judgment to which I can appeal; while, as regards Lady Mary Brooklands, you need only look back upon your own past career to feel that she is precisely the last person to whom I would intrust the care of either my dignity or my honor.

"Thus, Ida, a new career of triumph awaits you. Your former home, and the arms of your father, are open to you; the future existence of your son is defined, and beyond the reach of fate. So soon as the tomb has closed over my aged relative, I shall return to town, where I shall anxiously await you, trusting that your future affection and obedience will obliterate the past.

"You need fear no reproach, entertain no apprehension of my prolonged displeasure. Greatly as you have been to blame, your punishment has exceeded your fault. I am prepared alike to forgive and to forget.

"I forward to you, by this post, a letter from your husband's aunt, which, by some mistake, was sent here with others addressed to myself. If it be as I conjecture, that her sapient ladyship foresaw the probability of our reconciliation, and has written to reclaim her place in your affections—or, to speak more distinctly—to secure her own future interests, by affecting a sympathy in your trials which she has never felt, do not suffer yourself to be misled by her speciousness.

"She is heart and soul an egotist; she sacrificed you to the necessities of her nephew, and now she would be equally ready to sacrifice you to her own.

"Once more, Ida, be just to yourself, and hasten to resume your proper station in society. By this day week I shall be again established in that home to which I am prepared to welcome you back, and where I trust to see the hopes which you once blighted in your own person, either restored with increased brilliancy, or renewed and realized in that of your son.

"HUBERT TREVANION."

CHAPTER L.

CONCLUSION.

"SYDNEY!" exclaimed Mrs. Elphinstone, springing from her seat, and casting herself on her knees, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, "Sydney, we are saved!"

"We are!"

"The past has been a hideous dream; the future is bright before us."

Elphinstone was silent.

"Why do you not speak, Sydney," pursued his wife; "why do you not exult with me in the blessed prospect which has opened upon us?"

"I do indeed rejoice that my most ardent desire has been granted, Ida," said her husband, in the calm accents of deep and concentrated feeling, "that both you and our boy are now secured against all possibility of struggle and privation. My heart is relieved of a weight by which it was crushed to the very earth, and I am thankful, most thankful."

"And yourself, Sydney? What of yourself?"

"Myself," replied the young man, bitterly, "what should I say of myself, save that I exult in the reflection that Mr. Trevanion's daughter will no longer be sacrificed to my necessities."

"Mr. Trevanion's daughter!" echoed Ida, hoarsely, as she rose to her feet, and looked earnestly into his face; "Mr. Trevanion's daughter! Have I then ceased to be your wife?"

"Legally, no; but even that barrier to your future happiness may be removed, should you desire it."

"Sydney, do not torture me! Tell me what you mean."

"Simply that I have interpreted the true sense of your father's closing sentences. I am still too young to suppose that he can have speculated upon my death, when he expressed so ardent a hope that his dreams of ambition, as regarded yourself, might still be realized. Too young to die, as men commonly understand the term, but still old enough for that death of the soul—divorce."

A sharp scream burst from the lips of Ida.

"Why should you shrink from such a climax to our married life?" pursued Sydney, in the same unimpassioned tone. "Did you not willfully deny my claim upon your affections? Did you not, unauthorized and uninfluenced by the sanction of a parent, spurn my protection as an insult, and my roof as a disgrace? Did you not avow that I no longer possessed either your love or your respect? Have you so soon forgotten the contempt with which you rejected my offers of aid—my earnest entreaties that you would allow me to fulfill those duties toward you which I had vowed at the altar? Have we not, from that moment, been severed in heart and fact; and do you now quail before a mere form which would liberate you in the eyes of the world, and leave you free to make a nobler and a better choice?"

"Sydney!" gasped out his wife, vehemently clasping his arm, while her whole frame quivered with emotion; "Sydney, forgive me! Poor and helpless, I could have lived without you; or, if the effort had proved too mighty for my strength, I could have died without a murmur, for life would have been valueless without your love; but now—now—on my knees, I implore of you to pity and to pardon me."

"It is too late," said Elphinstone, as he turned gloomily away; "one of those tears,

one of those supplications, only an hour back, would have sufficed to restore pardon and peace between us; but the moment of reconciliation has now gone by forever. Even as you spurned my entreaties, Ida, do I now reject yours. Let it suffice, that one of my family has debased herself by accepting the benefits grudgingly doled out to her by the insolence of wealth; do not hope to force a similar concession from myself."

"Sydney, have you no mercy, no pity? I have deceived both you and myself. Never, never, did I love you more deeply, more devotedly, than when, in my mad folly, I accused and wronged you—yes, wronged you; I will even believe that I did you wrong, if you will only once more take me to your heart, and call me by the blessed name of wife."

"You deceive yourself still, Ida; if in the obscurity of our present home you placed no faith in an affection which was subjected only to one solitary trial; if you could not see me evince a brotherly interest in a young and fatherless girl, who had been the playmate of my boyhood, and who had been reared under the eyes of an anxious and high-principled mother—how can you hope to induce me to place any faith in a pledge wrung from you in a moment of strong excitement?

"Learn to know yourself better. The man who could not escape suspicion under such circumstances would be weak indeed to believe that he could be more secure, when the opportunities of misjudging him were multiplied a hundredfold. I can not take you to my heart, Ida, though I can not pluck you thence; though I do not hesitate to admit, should the admission still afford you one sensation of happiness or triumph, that you alone have ever, or can ever, possess it. I dare not call you wife, for you yourself have repudiated the title."

"For our child's sake—"

"Ida, in my turn I ask, have you no mercy? Am I not to be parted from my child? Have I not completed my sacrifice, and, in return for all that I have done and suffered, I ask but this.

"Let the world condemn me if it will, let your own heart accuse me if it can, but do not let my boy misjudge me: let me, at least, be blameless and honorable in his eyes. I claim, I demand, this justice; and it is the last appeal I shall make to your generosity. We may never meet again; in a few years I shall have faded from his memory, and—Ida, for the love which you once bore me, will you not promise me that he shall never learn to loathe or despise his father? He will not even bear my name—I know it, but I do not murmur; it is my fate to resign every claim, every tie, which once bound me to an existence of delusive promise, and I submit in silence; yet, still I can not forget that I have a child; that he is very dear to me, and that he is torn away from me forever."

"And your wife—your wife!" shrieked Ida.

Elphinstone turned toward her as she still knelt upon the floor, her hands tightly clinched together, her long and abundant hair, which had escaped the comb which should have confined it, half concealing her slight figure, and her livid features convulsed with agony; for a moment he stood gazing upon her as motionless as though he had been hewn in stone; then his breast heaved, a smothered sob escaped him, a few inarticulate words burst in a hollow murmur from his lips, and with frantic energy he bent down, raised her to his bosom, held her there for a few seconds, and, as he felt her weight grow heavy in his arms, he laid her softly upon a sofa, and rushed from his home.

A month afterward, Mrs. Elphinstone was the self-widowed inmate of her father's house; Lady Mary Brooklands was in modest lodgings in a West-End street; and no trace could be discovered of the young, heart-broken exile, who had abandoned his native land forever.

THE END.

THE RIVAL BEAUTIES.

CHAPTER. I.

On the southern outskirt of a pleasant town in the west of England, which I shall here call Westrum, stood an antique-looking house, evidently never originally intended to suffer such close contact with the mercantile street from which it was distant little more than a hundred yards. A lofty wall, of dull red brick, divided into equal lengths by a richly decorated gate of wrought iron, supported by pillars of coarse granite, each surmounted by a rudely-sculptured griffin with its dexter claw resting upon a dagger, skirted the high road for a considerable distance on either hand; overtopped here and there by the stately crest of a pine, or the spreading branches of an aged oak; while from the gate itself, a straight avenue of limes, whose dense foliage almost shut out the sunlight, extended to the house-door, which was approached by a stately flight of broad stone steps. The dwelling was vast, plain in its appearance, and evidently constructed rather for comfort than for show. From the road it presented simply a solid square of brick-work, with its regularly-pierced windows encased in that peculiarly wrought stone which looks as though it had been subjected to the action of a strong rippling tide; but on the side which faced the extensive grounds the uniformity was broken up by a boldly-projecting bay, where large glass doors, opening upon a lawn, afforded an unimpeded view into the vast saloon beyond them.

A spacious conservatory, rich in rare and exotic plants, abutted upon this summer apartment, whence it was approached by a lateral door; and when this was flung back, flooded the room with perfume; while the eye was equally entranced by the lovely home-view presented by the luxuriant shrubberies, the glittering little stream that terminated the descent of the sloping lawn, and the gambols of a couple of tame deer, which browsed or sported confidingly under the shadows of the tall trees, among whose leafy branches roosted a stately peacock.

The whole appearance of such an establishment in such a position was an anachronism. The venerable building was vast enough to have shown to advantage, as regarded its capabilities, in the midst of a park of some hundred acres, whereas it was seated on the verge of a property scarcely exceeding six; while the undeniable marks of antiquity which it bore about it, were sufficient to satisfy the mind of a stranger, that the little town, by which it was now elbowed, had grown up to it, after the fashion of the continental villages, which spring like fungi about a wealthy monastic house.

In the centre saloon to which we have referred, were seated, on a glorious autumnal noon, two ladies in deep mourning dresses. The close cap, concealed hair, and long crape weepers of the elder, at once betrayed her recent widowhood; even had not the hatchment which surmounted the principal entrance already convinced those who looked upon it, that sorrow and bereavement had lately visited this placid dwelling. She sat, or rather reclined, in a large chair, with her eyes fixed on vacancy, and evidently buried in thought; but that her reflections were not altogether painful was evident, from the faint smile which at intervals played about her faded lips. She was still handsome, although no longer young; and her countenance beamed with that graciousness which so attractively succeeds the bloom of youth in certain well-constituted natures. Time had touched her lightly; and it was easy to see that she had not cared to rebel against his advances. Tall, and finely formed, the elasticity of her movements almost belied the matronly years which had passed over her; for Mrs. Mortimer had lately suffered the first deep sorrow of a calm and happy life, while she had still many blessings to compensate for her one heavy loss; and thus her heart had not grown old with time, but had remained pure, and warm, and generous, and shed its genial influence over her whole person.

There is something very beautiful in such an autumn-tide of life as this. Something almost holy, which affords a moral homily that all would do well to read. Not a line had yet furrowed the high pale brow of Mrs. Mortimer; the finger of passion; the seal of vanity vexed into asperity by trampling upon its own ruin; the withering regret which lingers bitterly over the past that it lacks power to recall, had left no token of their passage on that placid countenance. All there was love and peace; and few would have wished the clear soft eye more dazzling, or the benignant smile more gay.

Her companion was a fair girl, who could have numbered but sixteen or seventeen summers. She too, as we have said, was attired in close and deep mourning; relieved, however, by a broad falling collar and wristbands of white crape; and still more by a profusion of light auburn hair, which flowed in redundant masses over her shoulders. Nothing could be more faultless than the pure Grecian outline of that young face and form; nor more angelic than the expression of the speaking features, even tempered as it was by a shade of sadness, which appeared rather habitual to them than the mere effect of circumstances.

She was seated before an embroidery-frame; and save when she occasionally glanced anxiously towards the elder lady, as if to convince herself that the protracted reverie into which she had fallen was not one calculated to increase her melancholy, she plied her needle busily and mechanically; although from the varying ex-

pression of her face, it might be readily surmised that the elaborate undertaking in which she was engaged employed her fingers far more than her thoughts.

"Gertrude," murmured Mrs. Mortimer suddenly, as withdrawing her eyes from the unseen object on which they had so long been fixed, she turned them upon her companion; "I am beginning to weary for the return of Frederic. And you, my dear girl, shall you not, like me, be rejoiced to welcome him once more to his home, even bereaved as it is?"

A deep and burning blush was the only reply elicited by the question; but as if unconscious of the fact, Mrs. Mortimer pursued in an accent of tenderness.

"Poor dear Frederic! How devotedly he loved his father; and how little did he apprehend, when he hung upon his neck so fondly on his departure for this long and adventurous journey, that he looked on him for the last time!"

"My dear aunt!" sobbed out a low soft voice.

"Forgive me, my beloved child!" said Mrs. Mortimer, as she extended her arms, into which the fair girl flung herself with a passionate burst of tears; "I distress you as well as myself, by these incautious repinings; and I have still so much for which to be grateful! But when I think of my noble-hearted boy, and of the fresh trial which awaits us on our meeting, I can scarcely sustain the prospect, even while I pine to have him once more beside me. You too, Gertrude—you, upon whom I have built up such bright dreams of happiness to come; you can understand the struggle, can you not? You love your cousin; you know all his worth, his manliness, his high and well-grounded principle. You love the bold and gallant boy who was the playmate of your infancy; the bright-eyed and warm-hearted youth who was the associate of your girlhood; you share with me in all my hopes and fears. Tell me frankly, Gertrude, do you not love him?"

A second blush, which almost dried the tears that rested upon her cheeks, was a more definite answer than the few inarticulate words by which it was accompanied.

"And now, Gertrude," pursued Mrs. Mortimer with a fond smile; "draw forward that stool, and seat yourself at my feet, for I have much to say to you; much on which not only your own happiness depends, but mine, and, I trust and believe, that of Frederic also. Nay, silly child, why do you tremble? Surely your busy little heart must already have warned you of what is to come; for I have long given you cause to feel convinced that you are as dear to me as my own child; and that it was in the hope you would one day become such, that I have cherished you, and bestowed upon you a place in my heart whence nothing can cast you out. You know, Gertrude, that when, on the death of your poor father, (whose heart was broken by the loss of his young and amiable wife,) who survived your birth only a few short weeks, his brother brought you home, and placed you in my arms as a trust from Heaven, you were far too young to have any consciousness of your bereavement: and the smiling infant grew into the laughing child beneath this roof, without a care or a regret. You have been a blessing to me, my sweet girl; and could I dare to do so without sin, I should thank the dispensation which gave me so loving and so loved a daughter. Nor was the affection of your departed uncle less perfect; but you have yet to learn that, on his death-bed, his last prayer was for you and Frederick. For his *children*. Do you understand that prayer, my child? He has made no provision for you in his will; for he has bequeathed to you something more worthy of the tenderness he felt for the daughter of his adoption, the pride of his latter years; and this bequest is the hand of his only son."

"Of Frederic!" gasped out her breathless listener.

"Even so: Frederic loves you. He *must* love you. Were you not the companions, the friends of long and happy years? How can it be otherwise? You will soon meet again. Five years of absence have changed you strangely, Gertrude—changed you from a pretty child into a graceful woman: and this change cannot but delight Frederic; while, on his side, the handsome youth of twenty is about to return to us an accomplished and travelled man of twenty-five; and surely you will find no fault with such an alteration? And now kiss me, my own love, and tell me that you shall be happy to become indeed my daughter!"

"Aunt!" exclaimed Gertrude, as she freed herself from the embrace of her smiling relative, and cast herself upon her knees before her: "a grateful heart has few words. You know how I have ever loved you; how I loved him for whom we mourn; forgive me, then, if I declare that I dare not be happy as you would have me—my dear, dear aunt, I *dare* not. Oh, I beseech you, do not withdraw your hand! Do not misunderstand me, or you will break my heart! Indeed, indeed, you little know all that I feel; all that I would hope, did I dare to do so. Remember, my best, my only friend, that when Frederic—when Mr. Mortimer—left England, I was a mere girl of twelve years old, to whose childish fancies he granted an indulgence attributable at once to his own generous nature and to his desire to act in all things according to the pleasure of his parents. Remember, too, that five long years have since elapsed; that Frederic—that Mr. Mortimer—has grown to manhood; that he has visited many countries; seen many, many women more worthy of his love than your poor Gertrude; and that I could not, even orphan and penniless as I am, that I could not throw myself on the mercy of a reluctant heart."

The brow of Mrs. Mortimer darkened for an instant, but the shadow passed away as rapidly as it had gathered; and it was with a playful smile that she smoothed down the long silken curls which streamed over her knees, as she asked cheerfully: But is this all, my penniless and desolate young lady? Does the reluctance only exist in a want of faith in the continued affection of Frederic; or has it also some hidden source into which my maternal eyes are not permitted to intrude? Answer me honest

ly, as becomes your nature, and as you hope for my love and confidence."

"What can I say, dear aunt? Remember the days of my happy childhood. Was not your son, my dear, dear cousin, my constant, and almost my sole companion? Did he not forego even the sports he loved, to share in mine? Did he not quell the wild and bold spirit of his age to sympathize with my more timid and shrinking nature? Did we not part with tears, such as, thanks to your fond affection! I have shed but once? And then—forgive me, my best friend—has he not, since he left us, been the one subject of all our thoughts, all our speculations, and all our hopes? Of myself, then, how dare I speak? But Frederic! Oh, believe me, believe me; although his thoughts and his affections may, and must have, turned to home fondly and frequently, still even that home has not, cannot have been all to him; a thousand other circumstances and persons have crossed his path; a host of other interests have risen up about him. He is young, enthusiastic, and full of talent. What, and who, may he not have seen since he left us? Can you not understand and appreciate all I mean?"

"I understand that you have evoked a spectre which I must exorcise," replied Mrs. Mortimer with a placid smile. "You, at least, can appreciate the merits of that home to which our dear truant is about to return; while I can, on my side, decide upon the value of the fair face which you estimate so lightly. No, Gertrude, you do yourself less than justice. Frederic may have seen, and been struck for a moment, by prouder beauty than your own; but when he seeks a wife, believe *me*, my child, he will ask nothing beyond the bride whom his father's dying wishes have selected for him. Only be true to yourself; let him comprehend your nature in all its loving purity, and he will not resist its influence even before he learns that a will and a voice, doubly sacred because they reach him from the grave, had already decided on your union."

Silenced, but not convinced, Miss Mortimer could only raise the hand of her fond and indulgent relative to her lips with a thrill of silent gratitude far more eloquent than words. Young as she was, and reared as she had been in a retirement which almost amounted to seclusion, she at once felt all the delicacy and peculiarity of her position. The child of a younger brother who died ere his speculations had produced their anticipated results, and bequeathed her to the affectionate charity of the head of his house, she now, for the first time, became painfully conscious of her dependent situation; and of the thousand restraints which it imposed upon the dignity of her sex, when she should be thrown into constant contact with her wealthy and envied cousin; and thus not all the caresses of her aunt, whose imagination was busy with a bright and beaming future, could remove the sudden weight which had fallen upon her heart, and rested there.

Cheerful as she was constitutionally, the solitude of her girlhood, relieved only by the attendance of her masters, the indulgence of her relatives, and the society of the few mature friends of Mrs. Mortimer, had afforded her ample time for reflection and self-questioning; and although until this day she had never suspected that she loved the generous boy who had for long years been to her more than a brother, there had nevertheless occurred moments, in which her cheek had crimsoned, although there were none near to mark it, as she detected herself referring every little success in her studies, and every slight improvement in her person, to *his* approval, and to *his* praise. Now, however, her eyes were opened, and she trembled as she reflected how entirely she had suffered herself to be engrossed by his well-remembered image; and how eagerly she had wept and waited for each anxiously expected letter, when by some accident it was delayed; and with what impatience she had watched for the paragraph which was dedicated to herself.

As she grew from girlhood she had taught herself to forget that she was a mere child when they parted; although not a feature, not an outline had changed in her tenacious memory in either the face or form of her absent cousin. The high, pale brow circled by its dark and clustering curls; the proud lip, with its half tender and half scornful smile; the tall, slight, graceful figure, with its haughty carriage and promise of future strength; all were before her as though they had been limned in never-changing colors upon her heart and brain; and despite the calm confidence and security of her aunt, the trembling girl shuddered as she reflected upon the possibility that five long years, with their vicissitudes and chances, might have taught the man to overcome and to despise all the feelings and follies, and even the affections and preferences, of the youth; while she had idly and wilfully brooded over the past until it had tinged with its own hues, not only the feelings of the present hour, but even the happiness of her whole future life.

The young, the giddy, and the unthinking may smile at such a conviction in the breast of a girl of seventeen; but let them remember that circumstances form the character, and that nothing matures so early in woman as her heart.

Gertrude did not deceive herself. A grateful and loving nature had first prompted her to regard her cousin as the epitome of all human perfection, while he was present; and the continual and incantious panegyrics of her aunt, since his departure, had not only fostered, but even increased her mental enthusiasm. That Frederic, her own Frederic, should select any other wife than her gentle and beautiful Gertrude, never for an instant occurred to Mrs. Mortimer. That he should prefer any woman, however lovely and distinguished, to his fair and orphan cousin, none could have made her suspect, even for a moment; and thus she did not hesitate to pour forth all her heart, and all her hopes, into the very ear which should, for its own peace, have been deaf to such a theme.

The arrival of Frederic was every day expected; urgent letters having been dispatched to Egypt, where he was then travelling with a friend, to apprise him of his father's danger, from the moment when the attendant physicians had forbidden all further hope; but the tale which we are now telling is not of recent date, and the means of transport from so far distant a

land were at that period widely opposed to those of the present day. Thus three months had already elapsed since the grave had claimed its tenant; and the first rush of grief had partially subsided, to give place in the heart of Mrs. Mortimer to the anxious desire of once more embracing her long-absent son. With her, sorrow had not exhausted itself in those wild, and phrensied, and ungoverned paroxysms which neeessarily induce their own remedy: it was rather a deep, and settled, and unfading regret; which, even while it admitted other affections and other hopes to their place in her bosom, was destined to end only with her life, and to become thenceforward a portion of her existence.

Her husband had left behind him an unsullied and honorable name, and she could dwell upon his memory with a well-grounded pride; while no portion of her wedded existence offered an occasion of remorse or of regret: and thus, even while her heart wept in secret over her bereavement, she had still a smile for other joys, and a sympathy for other interests.

"My boy will find but one sad change awaiting him," she resumed, after a long and meditative pause; "little has transpired in our quiet neighborhood to jar upon his early memories. The young have sprung up in strength, and the aged have declined in like manner; but he will be prepared by the alteration which he sees in himself for these trifling differences. Alas! it is at home—in the home he loved so well—that he must look for the one great and painful change; and that one we must endeavor to lighten as best we may, my child. After five long years of vicissitude and excitement, it will require all our exertions to counteract the monotony of a retreat like this; but we will not again suffer him to escape us; and nothing save this consideration could have induced me, at this early stage of my widowhood, to yield even to the representations of our good vicar, by making the acquaintance of the strangers at The Grange."

"It must, indeed, have been an effort"—murmured Gertrude, still thinking of her absent cousin.

"And one which was ill repaid," acquiesced Mrs. Mortimer; "for I know not why, but I am not prepossessed by either mother or daughter, although their reception was most gracious."

"And yet Mrs. Delamere has the appearance of a kind-hearted, although indolent woman; while her daughter is decidedly a beauty."

"A beauty!" echoed Mrs. Mortimer half indignantly, as her eyes rested upon the lovely face of her niece: "You have strange notions of beauty, my poor child. What! would you persuade me that you admire those bold black eyes, which seem to pierce to your very soul one moment, only to be lost the next beneath their long, thick lashes, as though they shrank before your answering gaze.—That haughty lip, which seems to smile reluctantly, and as if it would rather writhe with a sarcasm? No, no, Gertrude; showy she may be, and is; but Miss Delamere has no pretensions to be called a beauty. And then her manner—so self-centred, so decided, so essentially unwomanly, would counteract any loveliness, however striking. That she is clever, I do not doubt; but still not wise enough to forbear the exhibition of her powers, and to compel you to *feel* their extent; a most grievous error in woman, be her talent what it may; and one that unsexes her as much as a dereliction from propriety. Could you fail to remark that the pale, sickly-looking Mrs. Delamere was but the echo of her radiant and self-appreciating daughter? In one short half hour I fear that I have read her character. Would that The Grange had still remained untenanted; for, believe me, its present inmates will ill replace its former owner. The one is a cypher, and the other has no heart."

"Can this, indeed, be you, dear aunt?" asked Gertrude, looking up in wonder.

Mrs. Mortimer smiled. "I appear bitter and ungenerous, my dear child, and perhaps I am so; but that visit has left an uneasy impression on my mind. I foresee little gratification in such an acquaintance."

"And yet the dear old vicar says that they have already done so much good," said the fair girl persuasively; "that they have subscribed largely to the schools, made a donation to the almshouses, and desired him to furnish them with a list of the most deserving of the poor. Surely in this, at least, they have acted rightly. And then, think what a boon it will be to many industrious families who cannot readily obtain work in the winter season, to be secure of employment for several months, while the extensive improvements contemplated by Miss Delamere are carried out!"

"I admit all this, and cordially rejoice at it," replied the elderly lady; "and yet I cannot like this brilliant stranger. That she is a spoiled child of fortune is evident, and as regards that fact she is perhaps entitled to indulgence; but she presumes too much upon her individuality; and—to come back once more to my original declaration—I am convinced that she has no heart."

"Shall I not win you to think otherwise," asked Gertrude playfully; "when I tell you, that while I accompanied her to the spot upon which the new succession-houses are to be erected, she spoke most warmly of her sympathy in the delight that you would soon experience from the return of your son; and asked me a thousand friendly questions relating to him, which I answered with equal frankness? Tears started to her eyes as I told her of all the grief that you had suffered on his departure; while it was beautiful to see the smile with which she listened to my assurance that ere long your heart would be at peace, and all your anxiety upon his account terminated by his return. Indeed, dear aunt, at that moment she was very beautiful."

"You cannot, even thus, make a convert of me," was the reply of Mrs. Mortimer; "I feel that I shall never like Miss Delamere."

CHAPTER II.

And who was Miss Delamere? Who was this dark-eyed stranger, whose attractions Gertrude Mortimer strove to increase in her own eyes, simply, although unconsciously, that she might hear herself accused of exaggeration by her

aunt! While the aunt, on her side, did not dare to admit them to her own reason, as though some evil were foreshadowed to her mind, as vivid as it was untangible, connected with an individual of whom she as yet knew nothing.

Upon this point, we have little to tell. The Grange, rendered vacant by the pecuniary embarrassment of its former proprietor, had been advertised for sale in the public prints; and after having been visited by an agent, had finally been purchased at a liberal price by its present owners: but of the antecedents of these ladies no one in the neighborhood knew anything. They had arrived, taken possession, applied for a pew in the parish church, and, as a natural consequence, been waited upon by the vicar; who, delighted at the interest evinced by Miss Delamere, in his schools, his almshouses, and his poor, had entreated Mrs. Mortimer to accompany his own wife in her introductory visit.

That the strangers were affluent was sufficiently apparent; for, even while commencing the costly improvements upon which they had decided, the well-organized establishment already formed at The Grange prevented every appearance of discomfort or disorder; and the superb furniture and articles of *virtá* scattered through the apartments, betokened long habits of elegance and even profusion.

The elder lady was, indeed, as Mrs. Mortimer had declared, a mere cypher. A little, withered, peevish, faded woman of fashion, for whom it was always too hot, or too cold; too early, or too late. Who constantly kept a bottle of ether upon her reading-table; enhanced, as far as was yet in her power, the ruins of her former beauty by the use of rouge, and the adoption of capborder of costly mechlin; could only exist in the twilight of a well-curtained room; and willingly displayed her still faultless foot to the admiration of her visitors. She said little; and that little in a low, drawling, monotonous, and unmusical voice, which did not invite conversation; while on no single occasion did she ever exert herself to emit an opinion upon any subject whatever; contenting herself, in reply to every question or appeal, by languidly closing her eyes as she answered,—"I really do not know; you had better inquire of Sybil."

And Sybil was never at fault. Let the theme be what it might, it failed to produce the hesitation of an instant. With a well-stored mind, great self-possession, and a full estimate of her moral and mental powers, as well as of her personal fascinations, she lost no single advantage with which she had been gifted by nature; but decided plans, purposes, and perplexities, with a quiet and unostentatious composure which no one ever appeared disposed to question or to disturb.

It must not, however, be supposed that Miss Delamere assumed the attitude of an oracle; or exhibited towards her indolent parent the slightest tinge of disrespect or neglect. On the contrary, although she never appealed to her tastes, being an enemy to all works of supererogation, she never failed to consult her wishes, and to receive in reply the languid, "Pray don't disturb me, Sybil; I care nothing about it. Only please yourself." And in obedience to this injunction, Sybil never hesitated to please herself; and frequently succeeded by the same means in pleasing others.

The evident affluence and high-breeding of the strangers; the unembarrassed deportment of Miss Delamere; her indifference to all those inconvenient conventionalities by which unmarried females are generally fettered; her unlimited command of money; and her universal acquaintance with all popular and even abstruse subjects, rendered their past existence a problem to all the gentry of the neighborhood, whose inferences and surmises were alike industrious and absurd.

Thus much, however, was evident. Mrs. Delamere was a woman thoroughly habituated to luxury, and that *dolce far niente* which can only be commanded by wealth; while the younger lady, whose dark, rich beauty was almost dazzling, was highly accomplished, occasionally even profound in her remarks, with great knowledge of the world, and specious and winning manners; she was always cheerful, witty, and at times slightly sarcastic; with moreover, that affected indifference to her own attractions which is the most ineradicable and refined vanity; and which can never be successfully attained until a matured experience has enabled its possessor to check all impulsive demonstrations, and to let the head lead, where in youth it is the heart that plays the pioneer.

Such was Miss Delamere at eight-and-twenty; and such an apparition in a quiet country town was well calculated to excite alike curiosity and surprise. The splendor of her toilette, remarkable, however, only for the material, and never for the exaggeration of its fashion—the perfect ease with which she drove her ponies through the crowded streets on market days, or galloped over the heights on her thorough-bred horse, followed only by a groom—or argued architectural details with the professional man employed to enlarge and embellish The Grange—or discussed points of logic, and even theology with the vicar, or medicine and metaphysics with the elderly and respectable physician of Westrum, were all alike subject of marvel; but never, even in her most enthusiastic moments, did Miss Delamere throw a single light upon the past.

Her communications were all in generalities; and while the usually taciturn mother occasionally alluded with evident unconsciousness to a Lady Anne So-and-so, and a Lord Such-an-one, never did the name of an individual, save as it might be connected with a political question, or a current rumor, pass the lips of the daughter; who appeared, on arriving at Westrum, to have virtually passed a sponge over her previous existence.

It is true, that with the past her new associates might, stringently speaking, have nothing whatever to do; but it is no less a fact that metropolitan circles will more readily admit strangers who present themselves among them rich in the positive advantages of wealth and fashion, than the old and self-appreciating families of the provinces, who, having grown ancient with the timber upon their estates, look upon

the time-worn monuments of their race as a patent of local nobility, and dread all intrusion into their charmed, if not always charming set, with misgiving and jealousy.

Moreover, the Delameres established themselves at The Grange without a single introduction; and it was only the fact of their having, courteously enough, but very decidedly, caused it to be understood that they declined all acquaintance with the notabilities of the town, with the exception only of the incumbent and the physician, that inspired the "neighborhood" with any confidence in their real grade in society.

In accordanee with the request of the vicar, whose parochial interests were, as we have seen, involved in the concession, Mrs. Mortimer had consented to accompany his amiable and timid wife to The Grange; but, nevertheless, although the general respect and regard which was felt for the gentle widow made her example powerful, it was still a moot question with the owners of this "Hall" and that "House" if they should venture to commit themselves by too ready an exhibition of goodwill towards persons of whose actual identity they were altogether uninformed.

This irresolution, however, in no degree affected either the feelings or the energies of Miss Delamere. Her workmen toiled, her undertaking progressed, her conservatories were lined with the most costly plants; her fountains threw up their silver threads in the sunshine; her neat but exquisitely appointed chariot bore her periodically to her comfortably-curtained pew in the parish church; the London coach duly arrived, laden with boxes and packing-cases for her wardrobe; and she rode and drove, walked, and executed the most elaborate compositions upon her harp, as tranquilly, and with as much enjoyment, as though all the magnates of the country had left their visiting tickets at the porter's lodge.

It was evident that she could do without them; and this conviction ere long appeared all-sufficient as regarded her *right* to their civilities; and accordingly, after a lapse of time, having satisfied themselves that the current exponses at The Grange were duly met, that the religious tenets of its new owners were orthodox, and that, come what might, Mrs. Mortimer would necessarily incur all the responsibility of the result, one by one the neighboring families left their names at the door; not sorry to satisfy at once their curiosity, and the tardily performed duty of courtesy.

Nor could even the most fastidious indulge in a sneer or a doubt as regarded the taste of their new neighbors; for as they drove through the grounds, every modification bore testimony to the refinement and resources of the strangers. In no direction was an attempt at show or ostentation visible: the old timber—and where is the great landed proprietor who does not found his judgment upon both the feeling and the "ways and means" of a neighbor upon his respect for this venerable and venerated adjunct to a country place?—had been carefully preserved; and the new points of view which had been secured from the house, had simply caused the sacrifice of a few half-grown trees, or clumps of flowering shrubs. Not a bay or a garble of the fine old structure had suffered mutilation; but on either hand were rapidly rising commodious and handsome additions, in perfect keeping with the style and order of the orginial edifice, with which they were so skilfully combined, that it was easy to detect at a glance, how very soon time would, by blending the tints of the several structures, render it impossible to discover the boundary of each.

This fact had considerable weight with the squirearchy, who, whether priding themselves upon their ancient descent or their present wealth, had, ere they ventured upon their visit, already heard, and even seen so much of the young lady of The Grange, that they had become jealous, and anxious upon the subject of their own consequence; and trembled in secret lest they should see their antique glories crushed beneath the ostentatious profusion of "persons of whom they knew nothing."

One glance at the arrangements sufficed to convince them, however, that everything had been ordered rather with a view to personal gratification than idle or presumptuous display; and, costly as all the accessories of the place undoubtedly were, they became reconciled to the innovation when their self-love was satisfied that no attack had been premeditatedly made upon it; while the quiet and undemonstrative manners of Mrs. Delamere reassured all the local fashionables among the matrons that they need not fear for themselves. It is true that the rouge was admirably laid on, and the shawls and mechlins of the lady almost unapproachable in value; but she wore both the one and the other with such unmistakable indifference that it was at once evident they never occupied her thoughts.

The only stumbling block was Sybil. The methodical and somewhat straight-laced dames of the county could not decide what to make of her. She was so perfectly at her ease; so apparently unconscious that she differed in any respect from themselves; while she was, at the very instant, bewildering them with her acquirements, and astonishing them with her opinions; so cheerfully frank, while she evaded all their covert investigations; so full of the present, while she never adverted to the past; that they could not come to any decision as regarded her. It was true that nothing could exceed her courtesy; but still it was not the courtesy of an obliged person, but rather the desire to please of one who was quite conscious that she could afford gratification whenever it was her will to do so, and who was happy to oblige.

This was vexatious; for when people have compelled themselves, as they believe, to confer an obligation, they are not easily induced to submit to a reverse of the medal; and to see their intentions altogether misunderstood, or unappreciated. Still they could find no tangible fault with Miss Delamere: her extreme beauty and her perfect good breeding were admitted on all sides; and as no particular individual had the moral courage to allow that this very excess of good breeding had been a source of personal mortification, the result of the visit was

declared to be satisfactory, although there was everywhere a mental reservation.

In the thronged circles of London life it is an every-day occurrence for beauty, talent, and fashion, to find themselves eclipsed by greater beauty, higher talent, or more decided fashion: the wheel of society is forever revolving, and its votaries soon become habituated and reconciled to the rotary movement which elevates and depresses each in turn; but the aristocracy of a country neighborhood stand still like their own oaks and elms, and do not so patiently endure the infliction of any rivalry.

Thus, although every one praised the beauty and the deportment of Miss Delamere, she did not impress them favorably: fathers trembled for their sons, mothers for their daughters, young ladies for their lovers, and expectant heirs for their college recollections and forgotten studies.

In short, the ladies decided that the handsome stranger was a flirt, and empty-headed squirelings that she was a blue-stocking.

CHAPTER III.

Meanwhile Frederic Mortimer was hastily traversing Italy, on his way to England. Italy, the land of his predilection, where, on his outward route, he had lingered over every natural or artistic beauty with almost a lover's tenderness; where he had each day discovered some new delight; whose skies and groves had filled his mental visions even in strange countries; and where he had resolved to rest awhile ere he finally returned to his home, in order that he might store his memory with a rich gallery of life-enduring pictures. The alarming letter, however, which was put into his hands at Cairo, reversed in a single instant all his plans; and it was with a throbbing and a trembling heart, that he found, on arriving at Alexandria, only a single vessel lying in the harbor bound for Europe; and which, moreover, was not to sail for several days.

Those days were torture to the affectionate heart of Frederic; for although the expressions of his careful mother had been measured, and she had abstained from informing him that all hope was over, still he read the truth in the constrained anguish which breathed throughout the whole letter; for there are certain misfortunes which we feel at once, without needing that they should be formally set forth in order to convince us of their existence.

At length the anchor of the small schooner was weighed; and with a fair breeze, she scudded in the direction of Trieste, her solitary passenger being Frederic; who, after having taken leave of his travelling companion, then preparing for an expedition to the Pyramids, had become totally absorbed by the one mingled hope and fear which pointed towards his home.

Once again on *terra firma*, he lost no time in prosecuting his journey; but not as he had formerly done, did he now traverse Italy. All which had before engrossed his attention and delighted his fancy, seemed to have disappeared; a gloomy veil hung over the whole landscape, and blotted out the sunshine: no longer eager to visit and to investigate every object of interest, he remained buried in a corner of the vehicle, absorbed in his own painful forebodings, and indifferent to all external objects. The most renowned cities, and the most picturesque points of view, were alike unable to arouse him from his abstraction: the affection of the son had overcome the impulses of the artist and the man of taste; and a cold dew stood at times upon his forehead, as he pictured to himself that his father might at that precise instant be breathing his last sigh, and looking in vain around the death room for the absent one who should have been there to receive it.

Frederic Mortimer, accustomed from his earliest youth to make his own tastes and pleasures subservient to those of others; not by compulsion, but from the imperative promptings of his own warm and unselfish heart, had not belied in manhood the promise of his youth. Calm, selfcentred, and somewhat grave, he was indeed; and altogether not divested of a certain pride which rendered him jealous of any want of affection or regard in those about him; but this frequent failing of silent and shy men was compensated by the outgushing tenderness of a nature ever prompt to bestow even more than it exacted in return.

Still this was Mortimer's leading defect; this anxious yearning to be loved, which rendered him exacting even with those who were nearest and dearest to him, while it exposed him to the risk of imposition in his general commerce with the world; and amiable as the failing might be in its origin, it nevertheless exerted an unhealthy influence upon his general character. Few, however, suspected the extent of this weakness; while all with whom he came into contact could appreciate his high and noble qualities, and the graceful gentleness by which he was distinguished.

Young, wealthy, strikingly handsome, and gifted with no ordinary powers of the mind, the son of Mrs. Mortimer fully justified her tenderness, of which he felt so perfectly secure, that no cloud had ever passed over his spirit as his thoughts dwelt upon his mother's love. To his father he had been equally devoted; and he had cherished his girl-cousin with a fond feeling of mingled admiration and proud support. Beyond these boundaries his heart had not yet progressed. Absorbed before his departure from England, by his studies; and during the college vacations, by those home duties which are so pleasurable in youth, he had never wasted a thought upon other and more precarious affections; while, throughout his wanderings in foreign countries, he had devoted himself rather to places than to persons; and seen, in the fair faces which flitted before him, merely suitable accessories to the various scenes on which he looked.

Such was Frederic Mortimer when he once more set foot upon English ground. Rich in affection; ardent in temperament, although grave in manner; thirsting to be loved as he felt that he could himself love; full of hope for the future, even although the present was clouded by a heavy sorrow; generous; high-

hearted; ever ready to enhance the happiness of others by the sacrifice of his own wishes, where that sacrifice did not involve the one leading weakness; a devoted son, a frank and fearless friend, and an upright man.

A fortnight had elapsed since the bright noon upon which we introduced Mrs. Mortimer and her orphan niece to our readers; and the shades of evening were rapidly invading the glorious vapors which had marshalled the sun to its gorgeous setting, and which flooded the lawn with a golden light, as if reluctant to fade from the face of the fair earth so soon.

Gertrude stood in the bay of the summer saloon already mentioned, looking herself like the spirit of the hour, and fixing the gaze of her fond and admiring aunt by the exquisite glow of her beauty, as her rich hair was touched by the radiant beams; when she murmured as if unconsciously: "It must be so! That golden arch, shedding its dazzling reflection on all around it, and tinging the growing vapors with a thousand prismatic hues, must be the open portal of Eternity; through which the wonderful shadow of the Creator makes itself for a brief space visible to man, as if to invite him to win his entrance into the more solemn and perfect glories beyond! And do you know, dear Aunt?" she continued, turning with an enthusiastic smile to her wondering relative; "I have often imagined, despite the science of the learned, that the lovely stars, which we are taught to look upon as worlds, may in reality be nothing save the dust of heaven flung from the feet of the Eternal, as he moves in His majesty above the clouds of night!"

"These are strange wild fancies, Gertrude!" remarked Mrs. Mortimer somewhat gravely: "Our retired life has made a day-dreamer of you; but you must struggle against such unbridled imaginations as these. You are no longer a child; and the realities of the world will more than suffice to occupy your mind."

"Yet, surely, dear aunt, there should be *some* poetry in life? It is so disheartening to cast away all the bright visions of a wayward fancy. But hark! I hear the gate bell—the hour is too far advanced for casual visitors!—Aunt, dear aunt, I have a presentiment—nay, I feel convinced, that Frederic has arrived!"

Mrs. Mortimer sank back, half fainting, in her chair; and waving her hand impatiently, in a hurried and failing voice desired the fair girl to hasten and ascertain if her conjecture were indeed correct; an exertion which her sudden emotion rendered impossible to herself.

The heart of Gertrude had not deceived her. As she reached the hall, a tall slight figure alighted from a travelling carriage, and hastily murmuring, "My dear cousin, I am rejoiced to see you once again!—Where is my mother?" passed her without a second glance; and in the next instant had crossed her threshold of the saloon.

Saddened and disappointed, although trembling with a sensation of indescribable happiness, Gertrude retired to her own room, unwilling to intrude her presence until the first burst of maternal and filial affection had passed by; for she instinctively felt that there is a holiness in sorrow such as theirs, which should be looked on by no other eye, however dear.

The partial obscurity of the hall, combined with her own agitation, had rendered it impossible for her to distinguish the features of her long absent cousin; while it was equally evident that he had at once comprehended the extent of his misfortune by the mourning dress in which she met him; and engrossed by that solitary idea, had given no thought to herself. In vain did she argue to her own reason that nothing could be more natural than what had occurred; her heart was unsatisfied—that heart which had yearned towards him even from her girlhood. Had he merely touched her hand as he passed beside her, she would have asked no more, for she would then have felt that she had a place in his remembrance; but their first meeting had been a perfect blank, and this conviction chilled her to the soul.

Meanwhile Frederic had flung himself upon the neck of his widowed mother, and for a few seconds was totally incapable of utterance. Throughout his whole journey he had hoped even against hope; and he felt this truth bitterly as the extent of his misfortune was instantly revealed to him by the mourning dresses which now saddened his once cheerful home.

Fortunately for both parties, Mrs. Mortimer had already had time to look upon her bereavement with more resignation; and the presence of her son seemed for a while to restore to her all the happiness that she had irrecoverably lost. At one moment she thrust him from her, that she might admire his noble features and his manly form; and in the next, she drew him once more to her bosom, and covered his pale brow and cheeks with kisses, as fondly as she had formerly done when it was the face of a laughing boy which rested on her shoulder; and clasped him closer in her arms, as though she feared that he would again escape her; for the loss of one beloved object always endears us the more to those who are spared to us; and we instinctively lavish upon the living all the tenderness and affection which we once bestowed upon the dead.

Two long hours had elapsed ere either Mrs. Mortimer or her son remembered or remarked the absence of Gertrude; and the warm-hearted matron had no sooner done so, than with her hand locked in that of Frederic, and her mild eyes earnestly fixed upon him, she began to dilate, in terms of the most grateful affection upon the care and tenderness she had experienced from her niece throughout, not only his late heavy trial, but all the long years of his absence. Mortimer welcomed the subject gladly, for it at once afforded a relief to his thoughts, and enabled him to dwell, without self-reproach, or disrespect to the memory of his father, upon less gloomy images than those by which he had latterly been engrossed; and Mrs. Mortimer, with her heart and mind full of one absorbing idea, heard in every low-breathed exclamation of approval or affection uttered by her son, a realization of her hopes.

She said little of the beauty of her niece, for she was conscious that no eye could rest upon it with indifference; but she expatiated upon

her high qualities of heart and mind, upon her enthusiastic and self neglecting affection, and upon her artless frankness.

The eye of Frederic beamed with delight as he listened. It was even thus that his memory had pictured her; and he could not forbear the recollection as his mother spoke, that such anticipations are but too frequently disappointed.

"This is, indeed, a sincere joy to me;" he said affectionately: "I have always dearly loved my pretty cousin, and I dreaded at times that on my return, I might find her changed by time into one of those cold automata so common in our correct, and somewhat frigid England. Nay, do not look reprovingly, my dear mother; for remember that I have been long unaccustomed to the cold conventionalities which chill so many warm young hearts in our own country, where formality is often mistaken for propriety, and the best years of life saddened by mere forms. I rejoice that this mortification is spared to me; and that I shall indeed meet once more the artless and frank playmate of my boyhood, changed only in person, but unbiached in heart."

Mrs. Mortimer became radiant with happiness; and the very excess of her satisfaction determined the worthy lady for once in her life to enact the diplomatist, and to withhold from her son the dying wishes of his father until the beauty and virtues of Gertrude had produced their effect; for single hearted as she was, she nevertheless knew enough of the waywardness of human nature to feel that it invariably shrinks from all that bears the appearance of compulsion; while the circumstances under which they now met were a sufficient excuse for the omission. If the first shock of Frederick's grief there would have been an indelicacy in calling upon him to strew the grave of his father with the roses of his own happiness.

No more time was lost in summoning Gertrude; but, alas! that which had already elapsed more than sufficed to convince the orphan-girl of all the difficulties and all the dangers by which she was surrounded. Mrs. Mortimer had willed taught herself mentally to overleap the years of separation which had rendered the cousins almost strangers—to forget the change which had necessarily taken place in both, and the peculiar delicacy of her niece's position; but the more Gertrude reflected in the solitude of her own chamber, the more appallingly they rose up before her.

Had her fond but ill-judging aunt withheld from her, as she had now done from Frederic, the dying injunction of Mr. Mortimer, she believed that she could once more have met her cousin with comparative composure and unconcealed delight; but that fatal confidence had raised up a barrier between them which the shrinking and womanly pride of her nature forbade her to overpass. Could she thus, she asked herself, suffer Frederic to read her heart; and to discover how tenaciously she had clung to the power over his affections, conscious that the dying breath of his father had given her a claim to them? Who could tell what attachment, with hopes, he might have left behind him in some one of the distant countries he had so lately traversed; and whence he had had even now returned compulsively long ere he had purposed to do so?

The more she reflected upon the personal and moral merits of her cousin, the more she satisfied herself that it was impossible for him to have passed unloved, and consequently unloving, throughout five long and adventurous years; and her repugnance to force herself upon his, perhaps reluctant, affections, became doubled by the conviction. No—come what might, though her heart might break, her youth be withered, and her life, so happy hitherto, be changed into a mere dreary and weary waste of feeling and existence, she would at least retain both her own respect and his; she would love him still and for ever—she could no longer withhold from him all the tenderness of her naturally fond and confiding nature; but she would love him in secret; she would not force upon him any demonstrations of an attachment which other ties and circumstances might have tended to render burdensome; she would forget the hateful secret so lately and so unfortunately confided to her by her aunt; and she would resolutely school herself into an external indifference which should leave her cousin free—free to misunderstand her motives—free to undervalue her feelings—free, in short, to love elsewhere, and to forget her.

To enable her to do this, she had, however, still to undertake another task, which, although light in comparison with that of controlling—she knew not for how great a length of time—her most hidden feelings, was nevertheless at once painful and invidious. She did not for an instant apprehend that in the first rush of sorrowful tenderness, her partial aunt, (anxious as she was to secure her happiness by what she considered as the most simple and facile means,) would find a moment to confide to Frederic the secret which had been made known to herself; and she instinctively felt that, in order to work out her noble-minded and dignified purpose, not a moment must be lost in securing the silence of Mrs. Mortimer.

This was the last struggle; for Gertrude at once became conscious, as she formed the resolution, that in thus flinging from her the only positive link between herself and her worshipped cousin, she was indeed leaving every thing to chance; while, unaccustomed to form even a fair estimate of her own attractions, she wept bitterly as she contrasted her probable influence over his affections with that of fifty other women whom he must have encountered abroad. Bitter indeed were her tears as she contemplated her voluntary self-abnegation; but never theless they were not all bitterness, for she reflected also upon the extreme attachment of Mrs. Mortimer for her son, and pleased herself with the belief that in immolating her own happiness to that of Frederic, should her forebodings prove correct, she should in some small degree compensate to her indulgent relative for the hoard of affection poured out upon herself, even at the cost of much present displeasure, and perhaps suspicion of her real motives.

Long and very painful were those two hours of vigil to Gertrude; and it was full of the re-

solutions which she had formed with a strong conviction of right, and a firm determination to adhere to them, that she at length obeyed the summons of her aunt, after having bathed her eyes to hide all evidence of her tears, and smoothed down the disordered ringlets which fell ovr her pale cheeks.

When she entered the saloon she almost shrank as the bright light of the lamp, which had just been carried in, threw its broad glare upon her countenance; but in the next instant her cousin sprang towards her, and eagerly clasping her hands within his own, poured forth his thanks and his greeting.

As he drew her towards him, evidently with the intention of pressing his lips to hers, she instinctively felt that the moment was already come in which she must commence the exercise of her self-control: and even as she replied to his ardent words, she turned aside her face, and the offered lips fell coldly on her cheek.

In his turn, Frederic felt his kindly impulses checked; and flung back upon him; "Pardon me," he said, as he released her haud; "I had forgotten for a moment, my dear cousin, that you are no longer a child. The heart is so apt to cling to the past; but you must forgive me." And as he looked earnestly at the beautiful girl who stood trembling and blushing before him, his voice became more tremulous as he added, "Indeed you must forgive me; I would not wilfully have offended you."

Mrs. Mortimer only smiled, for she saw in the assumed coldness of Gertrude simply the confusion natural to a young and timid woman suddenly brought into contact with a reeognized lover; while in the expressive eyes of her son she read at once his surprise and his admiration; and this was precisely what she had hoped and expected. Her satisfaction visibly diminished, however, as the evening wore on, and she discovered that, courteously, and even kindly, as her niece received all the attentions of Frederic, she betrayed no single symptom of affection. When he spoke she listened intently; when he addressed himself directly to her, she replied without trepidation or embarrassment: but her words were measured, and the faint smile which played about her lips, was evidently forced.

In this frame of mind her beauty, even faultless as it was, lost half its charm; there was no light in her eye, no bloom upon her cheek, her very movements were constrained; and Mrs. Mortimer, grieved and disappointed, sought in vain for the solution of what to her was a painful mystery. Fortunately for all parties—for Frederic himself, after the glowing panegyries lavished upon the fair automaton before him by his mother, was vsibly mortified and disconcerted in his turn—the fatigue of the traveller formed a natural pretext for his retiring early to rest; and, impossible as she would only on the previous day have believed such a thing to be, the disappearance of her cousin was a relief to the overcharged heart of Gertrude, which bled in secret at the restraint self-imposed upon ts best and holiest impulses.

CHAPTER IV.

Mortimer had no sooner left the room, accompanied by his mother, than Gertrude hastily seized her night-light, hurried in her turn to her chamber, totally forgetful of the fact that, for the first time in her life, she had omitted to claim the fond kiss of her aunt; nor did she recall the circumstance even after she had closed the door behind her, and flung herself into a chair to weep in secret over her coming trial. With the magnificent person of Frederic still before her eyes, with his low melodious voice still stealing upon her ear, with the touch of his lips still thrilling upon her cheek, she asked herself if she indeed had strength to fling from her the hope of one day being his wife; and the tears fell in torrents on her bosom, as she shrank from returning an answer even to her own heart.

She was still weeping and struggling against what, even amid her anguish, she considered as an unworthy weakness and infirmity of purpose, when her door softly opened, and Mrs. Mortimer entered. In an instant Gertrude dashed away her tears, and rose to meet her; but the affection of her fond relative was not to be so readily deceived; and taking the hand of the agitated girl, she drew her to the sofa, and seating herself beside her, looked steadily, almost sternly, into her face for a moment in silence. The heart of the conscious Gertrude throbbed convulsively, but she neither shrank from that searching gaze, nor made any attempt to commence a conversation which she felt convinced would to her be fraught with vital importance; she only suffered the tears which she had striven to restrain, again to flow free, and compressed the slender fingers which were clasped about her own.

"What means this emotion, Gertrude?" length demanded Mrs. Mortimer, more gently than her look had seemed to promise: "This sudden, and most unlooked-for change in all your mood and manner? In what, or how, can my son, my Frederic, have offended you, that you should treat him as one whose return was the most unwelcome in his mother's house—in his own home? What am I to understand? Already have you frozen him into indifference, a reception very different from that which he had anticipated for the companion of his youth, and the bride of his father's choice!"

"It was that very choice, that very conscientiousness, my dear, dear aunt," hurriedly interposed her listener, as intelligibly as her deep and sobbing respiration would permit her to articulate, "which compelled me to the coldness I have assumed. Oh! promise me at least one thing, I implore you—promise that you will conceal from Mr. Mortimer the expressed desire of his father. Let me not constantly be compelled to appear before him as the spectre of some earlier and dearer hope—as the wife forced upon him by a sense of filial duty—as an evil which I am unable to escape. Promise me that you will keep this unhappy secret; and leave the rest to fate. Then, indeed, I may venture not only to look at, and to listen to him, but also to a-

sider him as a friend, and to strive to secure his esteem and affection: while, fettered as I am, I dare not—I ought not—to act otherwise than I am now doing."

"Gertrude," said Mrs. Mortimer with a regretful gesture, "your request comes too late. Startled as I was by your extraordinary conduct, I still hoped that it had been less conspicuous to your cousin than to myself; and anxious to learn the impression produced by your appearance, we were no sooner alone together than I hastened to dispel the regrets renewed by his first entrance into the chamber in which he had been so often visited by his father, by desiring to know what he thought of the little cousin whom he had left a mere child, and now met once more, almost a woman—"

"And what did he answer?" asked her listener eagerly.

"But a few words, Gertrude, and those few called the tears into my eyes. He admitted your beauty—he avowed that it far surpassed his expectations; and he declared that he never should cease to feel grateful for your affection to his widowed mother; nevertheless, my child, he said that your cold formality had cut him to the soul, when he entered his father's home, wearied in body, and stricken in heart, pining for the affection and tenderness of all by whom he had formerly been loved. Oh! Gertrude, my own adopted child, how cruelly have you disappointed both mother and son!"

"Aunt," exclaimed Miss Mortimer in an accent of acute anguish, "do not reproach me, or you will drive me mad. I *must* follow the path of duty. I should be unworthy of you, of myself, could I for an instant forget what is due to all of us. But surely, surely," she added deprecatingly; "you did me the justice to declare that I am not an ingrate; that my every effort, my every care, are for the happiness and peace of those to whom I am so deeply, so fearfully indebted? You did not suffer him to believe that I was an heartless egotist, incapable of sharing alike the joys and the sorrows of those about me?"

"You know my nature too well, my child, to suspect me of such deception. On the contrary, I assured him that he had altogether mistaken you; and that the coldness of which he complained was nothing more than the natural restraint produced by your knowledge of the will and wishes of your uncle."

Gertrude buried her crimson forehead in her hands as she gasped out; "And once more, what was his reply?"

"The only one which I could have anticipated from him. He instantly said that the wishes of his father should be obeyed."

The agonized girl groaned aloud.

"You are, in truth, inexplicable," pursued Mrs. Mortimer; "I had looked forward to the return of Frederic for the renewal of that happiness to which this roof has been so long a stranger, and to yourself as one of its chief promoters; and at the very moment when I anticipated the reward of all my care and all my anxiety, you wilfully and capriciously renew my sorrows, and teach me the utter unreasonableness of my hopes."

"He knows, then, that it was my uncle's *will* that I should be his wife?"

"He does; and he is ready to fulfil the wishes of a father who was to him alike a parent and a friend; for he is conscious that he could not confide his happiness to better hands. Seek, therefore, my dear girl, to overcome the puerile and unworthy fancy by which you have suffered yourself to be misled, and let him see you as you are, frank, joyous, and affectionate. And now, good night. You had forgotten me, Gertrude, when you retired to your room, but my heart cannot so easily be cheated of its dues.—Heaven bless you, my dear girl; may you awaken to-morrow with healthier feelings, and do yourself better justice."

And after a mutual embrace Mrs. Mortimer and her neice parted for the night; the one to reason herself into a belief that ere the morrow the mere girlish caprice of the evening would have yielded to a sense of coming happiness: and the other to pass the weary hours of darkness in a rigid examination of her own impulses and motives, and in a firm resolution to abstain from every action or word which might be misconstrued by her cousin into a desire to remind him of the *claim* which the mistaken affection of her deceased relative had given her over his fate.

Convinced, however, by the rebuke of her indulgent aunt, that she had overacted her difficult and painful part, she determined heneeforward to unbend just sufficiently, to prove to Mortimer that she was desirous to extend to him the same family affection which she had felt for his parents, but without exceeding by the merest detail her self-allotted task. Poor Gertrude! How little did she comprehend that she was, by these means, undermining her own peace. Her high-minded but mistaken policy produced its result. From day to day Frederic saw additional reason more highly to admire and esteem his gentle cousin, but nothing to engage his affections. Always placid, willing, and even eager to conduee to his comfort and convenience, Gertrude was ice itself as regarded his feelings; her very smiles were chilling, and effectually checked his enthusiasm; and when her aunt compelled her to display her talents, and thus to enforce the praises of her cousin, she received them with an apparent apathy that sealed his lips, at the very instant in which he would fain have poured out his whole soul into her ear.

And yet, how deeply, how devotedly did she dwell upon those half-uttered plaudits! How did she lie for hours upon her sleepless pillow, engaged in recalling every inflection of his voice, every expression of his speaking countenance! How often did she ask herself if it were indeed possible that he should ever love her! But as her breast began to heave beneath the welcome hope, the intrusive memory forced itself upon her mind, that all this fair-seeming was in probability the mere result of duty, the mere struggle to conceal a reluctanee which he was too generous to betray.

For a brief while Frederic did indeed struggle, but it was simply to recover the beloved companion of his youth; to awaken in the

beautiful creature whom he felt that, would she permit it, he could worship with his whole heart, one spark of the hallowed fire which had been kindled in their early years; but after a time he began to accuse himself of vanity and cowardice, in thus seeking to compel an affection which shrank before his efforts. It is true that, in her unselfish heroism, Gertrude was too obtuse to distinguish the efforts of her cousin's heart from the mere common-places of a man resolved to immolate his own feelings to the will of a cherished father; and consequently she repelled the covert, and, as she imagined, languid advances of an honest passion, believing that Frederic only sought, with his natural generosity, to conceal from her the real indifference which he felt for the wife who had been chosen for him, but whom his own preference had not elected.

Wearied at length by a pertinacity which at once discouraged his hopes and wounded his self-love, Mortimer resolved to leave the issue of his fate to time, and applied himself diligently to the business considerations entailed upon him by his succession to the family property. But even here he found little to occupy his thoughts. His accession to the estates of his father was a mere matter of legal form; his mother's jointure was amply secured; there were no debts, no difficulties; his income greatly exceeded his anticipations, and his position in the county was at once insured and unexceptionable. His farms were flourishing, his tenants satisfied, no single cause for anxiety made a demand upon his mind; his home was the abode of peace, his mother devoted and affectionate, and still he was not happy; and perhaps the less so that he could not dwell upon one tangible annoyance.

The very calm of his existence was a trial, succeeding as it did, in the very bloom and buoyancy of his manhood, to the scenes of privation and excitement to which he had been for years habituated. The oil of peace had been poured too suddenly and too lavishly upon the troubled waters of his life, and with a nature eminently greedy of excitement and emotion, he withered under the peaceful monotony of an existence which left nothing either to apprehend or to hope.

His hurried and engrossing foreign experience, while it had engaged and satisfied his mind, had left his heart unoccupied; and that heart, in the calm interregnum afforded by his present mode of existence, put forth its claim in turn; the temple was prepared, the altar raised, but the divinity was still wanting.

How often did Mortimer feel inclined almost to curse the affluence which had descended upon him in a Danaën shower. How often did he detest himself; envying the fate of those who were called upon to wrestle with the world, and to exert all their moral and physical energies to secure one footing upon the slippery ladder where he saw himself enthroned midway without a single effort of his own. They, at least, had something to hope, something for which to strive; an aim, an end to their being; while he was a mere unit in the great sum total of the world, to whom a fixed position had been assigned, and who had no share in the common task that was going on about him.

Thus spoke his sense of fitness; but his pride hissed yet more loudly in his ear. What did his worldly advantages avail? He was young, wealthy, and handsome; his social position was undeniable; and, nevertheless, the fair girl whom he could have loved so well—the orphan to whom he would fain have restored a hundred-fold all the blessings of which she had been despoiled by fortune; the bride whose beauty would have been his pride, and whose love would have been his boast—poor, parentless, and dependent as she was,—scorned the passion which he had been ready to lavish upon her: and had shown him, gently and kindly, it is true, but firmly and undisguisedly, that even these worldly advantages could not command affection.

On the part of Mortimer, this mistake was however, rational enough; for the principle of action adopted by Gertrude was well calculated to mislead him. Like all young, ardent, and inexperienced persons, she exaggerated at once her difficulties and her duties; and while she increased in tenderness and attention to her aunt, she steadfastly maintained her coldness towards her cousin; who nevertheless became only more dear to her from day to day. A conviction which, far from inducing her to relax her studied demeanor, only determined her, by exhibiting her increasing danger, to persist in her original purpose. Did he enter the family sitting-room while she was reading aloud, her voice instantly ceased; were she at her piano when his step resounded in the hall, she immediately closed the instrument; although at his express request she opened it mechanically, and went through the task allotted to her with gentleness and care; but it always sufficed to her to know that her cousin was present, to check her enthusiasm, and to depress her energies.

It was impossible that Mortimer should long continue blind to a fact like this; but instead of looking upon it in its true light as an overstrained feeling of maidenly delicacy, he read it every action of the unhappy girl only a tacit demonstration of her unwillingness to fetter herself, and a desire to make him comprehend without the aid of words, which must have been painful to both parties, her reluctance to fulfil the contract which had been made without her sanction. The natural consequence ensued. Frederic became ere long ill at ease with his beautiful cousin, in whom he could not recognize the frank and free-hearted playmate of his earlier age, and forgot to make allowance for the change which a few years never fail to operate in a girl approaching to womanhood.

Nothing is so easily wounded as self-love, and, unconsciously to himself, Mortimer had depended upon the affection of his cousin. He remembered how often they had sat side by side under the same tree, engaged upon the same book, warmed by the same sunbeam; and his heart had yearned in absence to renew those innocent and happy hours. It was to Gertrude that he had looked to relate to him in detail the last incidents of his father's life: he could not enter upon such a subject with his widowed

mother, and even the old and faithful servants of the family could give him but imperfect accounts of all that he pined to hear. It was also from Gertrude that he had anticipated the enthusiastic inquiries which travellers so love to answer: but although she listened eagerly to the anecdotes elicited by the questions of her aunt, she had never once propounded one of her own. Beautiful as she was, he soon taught himself to believe that, despite his mother's encomiums, she had no soul; and that the lovely face before him was a mere mask, behind which all was void. Piqued far beyond what he suspected, he became cool and reserved in his turn. Unable to comprehend or suspect the extreme delicacy which had dictated her reserve, he comforted himself with the belief that where all was pure and estimable there could be nothing to conceal; and that, consequently, the conduct of Gertrude was either the result of a coquettish affectation which it would be alike weak and unmanly to gratify, or, as we have already stated, a decided indifference, if not repugnance, to himself, which, much as it wounded his self-love, he was too proud to make one effort to overcome.

It is saddening to reflect how very seldom, when personal vanity is engaged in the analysis of the feelings of another, we are competent judges of what is beneath our eyes; how prone we are to misinterpret the most trifling actions and the most simple words; how the error deepens from day to day; and how we base convictions upon false premises, and cling to them the more pertinaciously from their very want of consistency and foundation.

Had Frederic been more just to himself, he might soon have probed the innocent heart of his cousin to its very centre; for there were moments when, with her whole soul hanging upon his words and yearning for his sympathy, she would have willingly forgotten the barrier which he had herself raised between them, and flung herself upon his bosom, ready to pour out before him all the treasure of her long-hoarded affection; but he did not look beyond the surface, he did not appreciate her timid apprehensions, and misjudged her nature.

Coupled with an ingenuousness as rare as it is beautiful, Gertrude possessed great firmness of purpose; and although she might err in judgment, her principles were faultless, and her generosity of heart unimpeachable. How many women are fated to become the sacrifice of their own virtues; and how seldom do they reap even a tardy reward for all the sufferings which they endure for conscience sake! Gertrude was one of these self-constituted victims; and it was her aunt alone who could appreciate the loveliness of her real character. And that Mrs. Mortimer did appreciate it in its fullest extent was proved by the fact that she could not bring herself for a moment to doubt, that, despite the mortifying coolness and distance of her nieece, she needed only time to convince Frederic of her excellence; and that the constant contact in which he was unavoidably thrown with one of the most lovely and amiable of her sex, must ultimately compel him to love his cousin with all the devotedness she so well deserved.

Of their union she never doubted; for where could he find a wife so thoroughly constituted, not only to promote, but to ensure his happiness? The mind and heart of Gertrude were pure as in her girlhood, her intellect well cultivated, and her disposition admirable.—Ergo Fredric *must* love her; and beyond this faith Mrs. Mortimer never looked: she forgot that her son had no opportunity of seeing his cousin as she saw her, and of appreciating her many excellencies. Hers was the experience of long years—the test of trial and sorrow, where she had found at once support and consolation; and, above all, a companionship which Gertrude resolutely refused to concede to her less favored son, who, wearied by the void produced by inaction after a long period of excitement, soon began to pine for change, and to believe that the monotony of his home would ere long prove unendurable.

That change, however, was not so distant as he apprehended.

CHAPTER V.

The Grange was a fine old place, with its sharp gables, and pointed windows, and shady recesses, and deep shadowy arches, telling of centuries passed away, when architects cared little to calculate the surface that they covered, and indulged themselves freely in the fantasies of wide and winding passages, strange, shapeless nooks, and staircases sufficiently ample to afford ingress to the baronial coach, as well as its occupant. None of the apartments were shaped like those of modern days; in each and all there was a niche or a bay; the one to hold a statue, and the other to admit a group of flowering plants, or a musical instrument, or an easel; and the Delameres had not long been its tenants ere these recesses found their appropriate ornaments. Costly bronzes, rare works in alabaster or marble, a library of choice books, valuable rather from their nature than their number; a harp, a guitar (at that period a scarce instrument in England), tapestry-frames, drawing tables, and all the elegant necessities of refined female existence, were lavishly but unobtrusively scattered over the reception rooms.

The result was admirable, and yet there was no appearance of vulgar stage-effect: the effect of a master-hand was every where visible, and each article seemed indispensable where all was in harmony. The morning room was a triumph of taste, with its rich draperies of sea-green damask, and clouds of transparent white muslin, its Venetian carpet and mirrors, and its solitary statue of Parian marble, the production of a classic chisel; its luxurious couches, and cushioned lounges; all only half revealed in the twilight which was permitted to invade the apartment, proteeted from the glare without by Italian jalousies and garlands of creeping shrubs.

The deity of this fair shrine was Sybil. It was here that she had placed her harp, her work-table, her writing-stand, and all the objects which conduced to her daily occupations;

and it is here that we shall once more introduce her to our reader.

The morning was sultry; one of those languid and lovely days which, at the close of autumn, seem to condense within themselves all the glories of the past summer; when the gorgeous flowers that have withheld their blossoming during the fluctuating temperament of the preceding months, put forth all their brightness, as if to force a more powerful contrast with the coming winter; when the air, heavy with perfume, breathes voluptuously upon the leaves which it scarcely stirs; and the whole expanse of the clear sky spreads like a veil of azure, unflecked by a single vapor, above the green earth, which takes a richer tint from the light about it.

Miss Delamere was seated at her harp, but her fingers wandered listlessly among the chords. Her brows were slightly drawn together, as if by intense, and, it might be, anxious thought; but this rapt expression did not tend to decrease her extraordinary beauty. Her raven-black hair; reflecting, as the light touched it, that matchless purple tint so rarely seen, was banded smoothly from her lofty forehead low upon her cheeks, and drawn into a luxuriant knot on the summit of her small and finely-shaped head. Her magnificent arms were revealed in all their beauty beneath the folds of soft muslin by which they were covered, and her small foot moved like a fairy thing among the pedals.

Half buried in a lounging chair, Mrs. Delamere had placed herself at the other extremity of the apartment, in deep shadow, with her ether-bottle, her fan, and a volume of the last new novel beside her. She was not, however, either reading or thinking: Mrs. Delamere seldom read, and never thought. Both fatigued her; and Sybil read and thought enough, as she would have declared, had she possessed energy to do so, to exempt her from any such necessity.

They had been silent for a considerable time, when Miss Delamere suddenly raised her head; and throwing off, by an effort of will, every trace of the care which her features had worn only a moment back, asked, with a sunny smile, "And what thought you, Mamma, of our new acquaintance, Mrs. Mortimer, and her niece?"

"I have never thought about them."

"Then, do so now, I pray you. Is not the younger lady very beautiful?"

"Oh, yes; a blue-eyed girl—Was she pretty?"

"Very," said Sybil, with strong, and somewhat bitter emphasis. "She has one of those faces which Guido would have loved to paint, when he cinctured the brow of the Virgin with an aureole of angels."

"Ha!"

"There was soul in her eyes, too; and they were so intensely blue and limpid! They have haunted me ever since."

"Haunted you?"

"Yes; but in an evil spirit. I only love blue eyes on canvass. There is no strength of purpose in them. They were made merely to look upon summer sunshine,—storm and tempest would pale them. And yet—well, well! Perhaps it is better so: men regard women simply as toys; and toys should break, or the grown children would weary of them; they were meant to make this old earth look new, and we must change our suits, or they would become threadbare."

"And is all this *à propos* of Miss—What is her name, did you say?"

"Mortimer."

"Oh, yes. Is all this *à propos* of Miss Mortimer's eyes?"

"Yes, and no; but she is certainly very beautiful."

"I am glad you think so."

There was another tinge of bitterness in the light laugh with which Sybil greeted the congratulation; and it was somewhat impatiently that she thrust her harp from her as she rose, and approaching her mother, said softly, "You will be able soon to test my taste, Mamma, for we must return the visit to-day. We have already delayed the courtesy too long. Shall I order the baroueche, or will you trust yourself to my ponies?"

"Sybil!" exclaimed Mrs. Delamere with momentary energy, as she half rose from among her cushions, and raised her eyes to those of her daughter; "you know best, and I have no wish to interfere; but it seems to me that—Do you not know what I mean?—that we are spending a great deal of money."

"We are so."

"But really, my dear, can we do it?"

"We are doing it every day."

"Yes, yes; I see—I know—However, it is your affair, not mine; only, perhaps—"

"There must be no perhaps," interposed Miss Delamere, and again the finely-pencilled brows were slightly contracted. "The season of 'perhaps' is past. Will you decide, my dear Mother, in favor of the barouche, or the ponies?"

"Please yourself."

"The ponies, then, assuredly," said Sybil, she approached the bell; "and their toilette will be accomplished as expeditiously as yours or mine. Shall I ring for your maid?"

"Do so."

And the bell was rung; and while Sybil resumed seated herself at the harp, the Abigail assisted the reluctant Mrs. Delamere to rise from her chair, folded her shawl more conveniently about her, collected the fan, the novel, and the ether-bottle, and finally followed her languid mistress from the room.

The door had no sooner closed behind them than the head of the brilliant beauty fell heavily upon the instrument, her fingers forsook the chords, and she became plunged in a deep and gloomy train of thought. Once or twice she turned her large eyes searchingly on every side, and on every side they rested upon some object of luxury or beauty; but there was no reflected happiness in their expression; the brow was smooth, but the crumpled rose-leaf had marred the repose of the spirit.

With Sybil, however, such a mood of mind could be but of short continuance. After a time she rose and walked calmly and slowly to a mirror, where she gazed earnestly at the reflection of her own beauty, until a haughty smile played about her lip, and the light returned to her eyes. There was resolute triumph in the whole expression of her face and attitude.

At that moment she felt no regret that she had thrown down the gauntlet to fate, but was ready for the combat.

Sooth to say, she was no mean antagonist!

When the beautiful little pony carriage stopped at the gate of Mrs. Mortimer, the ladies were strolling about the grounds, and their visitors had already taken possession of the saloon, ere the bell recalled them to the house. Mrs. Delamere was, as usual, almost swathed in shawls; for although she never ventured to declare so much, she detested an open carriage, and fancied that she was perished with cold even in the hottest season of the year, whenever she risked her health in so hazardous a manner. Her wraps were, nevertheless, upon this occasion trifling beside those of those of her daughter; who, in addition to a mantle so disguising that it might have served as a domino, had flung over her close bonnet a voluminous black veil which completely concealed her countenance. Nothing, in fact, save her height, and the peculiarly graceful nature of her movements, could have distinguished her from the veriest dowdy of the neighborhood; nor, when Mrs. Mortimer and her niece, closely followed by Frederic, entered the apartment, did she raise the cloud of lace beneath which she was literally in eclipse.

Mrs. Delamere soon sank, in a state of semi-exhaustion, into a chair; and her hostess, as a matter of course, established herself at her side. But even after the presentation of Mortimer, the three younger members of the party remained standing in the full glow of the mid-day sun, before the open doors of the verandah; and only a few moments had elapsed, ere, at the suggestion of Sybil, they wandered out into the open air.

"You have a true English home here, Miss Mortimer," she said caressingly, as she passed her arm through that of Gertrude; "such a home as I should value beyond all the pomp on earth. There is no trace of yesterday in these fine old trees, nor in the time-tint of the venerable house they so nobly overshadow. I have a horror of the architectural mushrooms which seem to be scarcely of an hour's growth; there is no repose in them; nothing of the past; and where there is so little in the present to compensate for such a want, we may, and ought to be forgiven for loving to look back upon earlier times."

"Yes," said Gertrude fondly; "it is a dear old place; and although our neighbors occasionally endeavor to alarm my aunt by adverting to the presumption of the little post-town which has all but invaded her territory, I believe that she estimates it at its full value."

"And she is right," replied Sybil. "Proudly, indeed, may she ask, 'What's Hecuba to me, or I Hecuba?' What has this peaceful retreat in common with the busy, bustling, vulgar turmoil of third-rate provincial congregation of traders and gossips? I appeal to Mr. Mortimer," she added, turning her graceful head abruptly towards Frederic, who was walking at her side; "he has travelled, and must feel and appreciate all the charm of such a home as this."

"I trust that I am not insensible to its value, nor to that of its inmates," said the young man, with a slight bow; "and still less should I feel inclined to question its merits, did we often receive such guests as Miss Delamere; but I nevertheless confess that there are moments when I should scarcely regret to feel it placed somewhat nearer to the centre of mind and movement. The bee itself is at times cloyed with honey."

The expression of Sybil's countenance was invisible beneath her veil, but she *felt* the sigh of the fair girl upon whose arm she leant; and she had already seized the text of a long and earnest chapter, which no stranger had a right to read.

"How well I recognize the spirit of your exacting sex in that measured answer!" she said playfully. "The poet has assured us that 'man never is, but always to be blessed;' how much happier are we humble-minded women! Is it not so, Miss Mortimer? We who make our moral garment to the very measure of our means, and seldom look beyond the circle in which we are condemned to move."

"This from you!" exclaimed Gertrude with unfeigned surprise: "You, who appear to rule circumstances with a wand of ivory, and to make all obey your bidding?"

"You do not speak in epigrams, I trust," was the retort of Sybil: "Reassure me on the instant, or you will frighten me. My rule, believe me, does not extend beyond builders and gardeners, and I find even these difficult to govern. I will not have you look upon me as a *maitress femme;* I detest everything which unsexes a woman. Remember that my mother is out of health, that her energies are ruined, and that she requires one who can think and act for her; and that one must and should be her own child."

"My dear Miss Delamere—"

"Do not mistake me once more," pursued Sybil, as she clasped the slender fingers of her companion in her own: "You did not intend to wound me, nor have you done so; but I feel that I shall greatly prize your friendship, and I am anxious to put forth my claim frankly. The power which is wielded at the Grange is not mine; it has, if you will permit me so to say, a more vulgar origin; it is the mere power of gold, and I am simply the 'slave of the lamp;' a little vain, perhaps, occasionally, of the results of my agency, but scarcely to be considered as their author. All this is sad egotism, however, and will but increase the threatened tedium of Mr. Mortimer, who has so lately been conversant only with the grand and the beautiful; let us rather delude him into some bright memories of the past, and throw him back for a brief interval into the world of wonders and adventure."

"I begin to believe that it exists everywhere," said Frederic, fascinated, he scarcely knew wherefore, by the perfect self-possession and candor of the visitor.

"No doubt it does," acquiesced Miss Delamere; while Gertrude was fairly silenced, alike by the stream of words which she had encountered on the one hand, and by the effect which they evidently produced upon the other: "We only require eyes to see, and a mind to comprehend; but, as the Musselmaun never ven-

tures to enter his mosque until he has performed his purifying ablutions, so neither can we estimate what is really passing about us before we have prepared our intelligence to receive the amount of marvel which has been prepared for the gratification of our moral sense. I fear that we are all sad spendthrifts of happiness; and, like the defrauded miser, never know the intrinsic value of our accumulated treasures until we are cheated of them. But let us talk of Italy, Mr. Mortimer; beautiful Italy! where I once spent two happy years. What a spell exists in the very name of Italy! It is a dream for the dying."

And they spoke of Italy, long and earnestly; but Frederic soon unconsciously felt his self-love somewhat piqued by the discovery that he had much to learn, and nothing to teach to his companion upon his favorite subject. She had seen all, had appreciated all, and had judged all. Perhaps had he suffered himself to reflect at such a moment, he would readily have found a key to the enigma, and have discovered that where he had only felt, Miss Delamere had studied and reasoned; that he had been the mere pilgrim of imagination and enthusiasm, where she had been the observant and calculating woman of the world; but he was in no mood for such an analysis; he was anxious to shine, to produce an effect, and he found himself worsted upon every point. He saw this, and after a time he became mortified and discouraged. The soft eyes of Gertrude were upon him, but their admiring gaze was wasted. It was not upon his cold and reserved cousin that he had been anxious to make a favorable impression; he had aimed at interesting, and perhaps attracting, Miss Delamere, and he began to believe that he had failed.

Sybil, however, read the expression of his speaking features as readily as she would have perused the pages of a printed volume; and by an easy transition she led the conversation to the marvels and monuments of Egypt, a land which she had never visited; and having once more succeeded in arousing the enthusiasm of Frederic, she immediately became all ear; encouraged his narrative by eager and well-placed inquiries; and made him, with consummate tact, the hero of the hour. To Mortimer she had appeared delightful when she talked; no wonder, then, that when she hung upon his words like one entranced, he should consider her tenfold more charming; and that as they moved slowly forward, and he remarked the finished and yet unstudied grace of all her movements, and the high-bred dignity of her gestures, he should put forth all his powers of mind and manner to secure her favor, and to enhance his merits in her eyes.

There was a tormenting mystery, too, in the thick and heavy veil which added to the charm of the interview. He could only imagine the play of the intelligent features that it concealed; and he felt like one under the influence of a wild and delicious dream.

When they re-entered the saloon, they found Mrs. Delamere languidly admiring a magnificent piece of unfinished tapestry-work which her hostess was courteously exhibiting with the amiable hope of amusing her unamuseable guest and the animated and judicious admiration o Sybil, who instantly joined their party, soo made ample amends for the languid and ev dently extorted encomiums of her half-sleep mother. Her knowledge of the different effec of startling contrasts, and delicate gradation tints, was not less astonishing to Frederic thr the intimate acquaintance which she had b trayed in their previous conversation with t merits of different schools of art, and works science; and a feeling of sincere gratificati took possession of his mind as he noticed t sudden animation of delight which lighted the fair face of Gertrude, as she saw the labo ous industry and taste of her aunt thus estim ed at its real value. Nor was he less pleas and surprised at the promptitude with whi Sybil, even interested as she was by the soci of her new friends, obeyed the signal of h mother, and prepared to take her leave.

No gesture of annoyance escaped her, though it was evident that she by no mea participated in the impatience to be gone ma fested by Mrs. Delamere; but as Frederic ru to order the carriage, she busily and judicio arranged the eternal shawls which had b partially flung off, and made her parting co pliments with grace and self-possession.

Hands were shaken and courteous words changed; and when the languid valetudinari had at length succeeded in reaching the h door, leaning listlessly upon the arm of Mo mer, Sybil sprang lightly into the fairy vehi possessed herself of the reins, and then, hav almost succeeded in convincing her compan that she was comfortably established am her wraps, threw back her heavy veil for an stant, and turned her dark and splendid full upon Frederic with an expression of inter and acknowledgment which for an instant ly dazzled him. The next moment, howe the jealous cloud of lace fell back; a gra bend intimated a final leave-taking, and beautiful ponies were in motion towards Grange.

They were fairly out of sight ere Mort changed his position; and even when h at length did so, instead of returning to the h he descended the steps and wandered once into the grounds. He had ample food for re tion. On his arrival at home he had been whole, and prepared to extend all his affec upon its beloved inhabitants. The convers on of his mother on the very evening of his ar had strengthened him in this purpose, for had held out the promise of the precise de which he had for several years vaguely pic to himself; but what was the result? Sh his period of sojourn beneath his ancestr roof had been, he had become wearied of its no tony, and discouraged by the indifference the very being whose memory he had che the most fondly; and yet, he remembered that this cold beauty was to be his wife. Suc was the will of a father whom he had never op ed during his life; and whom he believed it be still more impossible to disobey after his ath, when his every wish was doubly hallow by the fact, that it could no longer be enforc

Only on the previous day—nay, even an hour ack—he felt that he could have submitted to is fate without a murmur; for of escaping it e did not, and had never dreamed. He knew nough of the gratitude and veneration of Ger- rude for her benefactors to be convinced that, t whatever cost of feeling to herself, should he ffer her the alternative of declining his hand, ie would resolutely and conscientiously insist pon fulfilling the will of her uncle; and he as consequently prepared to make her his ride, and to trust to time and his own tender- ess to win from her the love without which he ould not disguise from himself that he must be retched.

The last hour had, however, worked a strange evolution in his whole nature. He had, at last, en the very being form whom his soul had ned, in moments of reflection; the very being hom he had hoped to find in his orphan-cousin; creature not only beautiful, but beaming with tellect; eager and enthusiastic in feeling; full that light of the soul which diffuses its own diance over all around it; charming without y visible effort to attract, fascinating without fectation, and graceful without mannerism; th a mind richly stored, and a gentleness es- ntially feminine.

What evil star, he asked himself, had brought e radiant Sybil across his path? What wretch- chance had induced her to immure her mental d personal loveliness in that retired spot, as to plunge him into a trial, perchance too ghty for his strength? Why were they ever led to meet, when he was fettered by an ob- lation through which it was impossible to eak? And then another thought, scarcely s painful to his mind, and still more so to his ide, beset him. He had not failed to gain the ections of his less gifted cousin? And was it refore probable that the dazzling being who w occupied his thoughts, would prove more ilulgent than one who had known and loved h in former years?

The doubt was rational enough; and yet, strange to say, Frederic, in his inmost soul, scarcely doubted; he felt that Sybil at least uld understand him—her many words, and h one look, had convinced him that she did s and he clung to the conviction despite his ter reason. He could only resolve to avoid h, and thus to weaken her spell; but he got that this was by no means easy in a ighborhood limited in its society, and depend- e upon its own resources.

Nevertheless, such was his determination; and the, as a commencement of his task, he compel- h himself to dwell upon the image of Gertrude —f his destined wife—and he recalled, with se thing approaching to happiness, her beam- in look when she saw the pleasure evinced by h aunt at the encomiums lavished by Miss Lamere upon her tapestry. But alas! even th slight gratification brought with it the image of Sybil; and he felt that hers was, indeed, no m n praise, and that his mother might well be exsed for appreciating such testimony to her tue.

No marvel was it, therefore, that Mortimer finally returned to the house even more dispir- ited than he had left it.

CHAPTER VI.

There are few more serious and real misfor- tunes for a man of active and enthusiastic dis- position, than to be entirely independent of personal exertion. When the necessaries of life compel the exercise of the mental and moral energies, every struggle, exclusively of feeling, becomes to a certain degree weakened and con- trolled by more immediate and sordid duties. Expediency whispers him to be up and doing; and he is compelled to give ear to the admoni- tion, if he would maintain his position in socie- ty. Thus his cares, divided, and subdivided by conflicting impulses, create a re-action by which each is in turn subjected to the domination of the other, and all are finally brought under the dominion of reason. But where no such necessi- ty for energy exists; where the position is de- fined, and the fate assured; where the purple and fine linen are independent of all personal exertion, the mind, free to enforce its full claim, seldom fails to revenge itself upon the pam- pered body, and to magnify its own trials. Ev- ery thing in creation requires extraneous ali- ment; and the spirit cannot constantly feed upon itself without becoming extenuated by the perpetual demand upon its resources.

And thus it was with Mortimer. How many envied him! What had he to wish for? Was he not an only son?—his own master?—rich enough to indulge in every caprice, however unreasonable? What more *could* he desire? And, in turn, he might have answered—"What? Not the indulgence of unreasonable extrava- gance; not the power of vain and foolish fol- lies; but peace—peace of heart; the peace which makes home a heaven, and life a boon; the peace which gold cannot purchase; and oft-entimes, God be thanked, even poverty can- not take away!" And from day to day, with no other and more immediate care to distract his thoughts, he felt that this peace was wanting.

He sat beside his fond and gentle mother; and there, indeed, had Heaven gifted him with the power of controlling all within his reach, he would not have sought for change; but as he dwelt upon the beautiful creature near her, who was fated to be his second self, another and a brighter vision interposed: and even while his brow was calm, his spirit writhed within him.

No, never—so he argued—never could they understand each other: the frigid temperament of Gertrude, which led her almost to consider as a crime every manifestation of feeling how- ever natural and innocent, could never assimi- late with his own ardent and exacting nature. She was pure, amiable, and good; it was im- possible to live under the same roof with her, and not to admit this; but we have already ex- plained the morbid craving of Mortimer for deep and excessive affection towards himself; and this he had failed to detect in the only be-

ing who was, perhaps, fated to love him better than all else on earth.

As time wore on, and the natural grief of Mrs. Mortimer grew less acute, her desire to see her son the husband of his cousin became more importunate. He had attained the age at which she believed that men are calculated to make at once the most happy and the most prudent of husbands. At five-and-twenty her own lamented partner had led her to the altar, and her whole life, until she became a widow, had been one interval of happiness; a fact which had alone been sufficient to convince her guileless and unsuspicious mind of a truth which she never sought to question. Perfectly unconscious, therefore, that she was driving the iron still deeper into his heart, she never found herself alone with Frederic, but, by some exertion of feminine tact, she led the conversation, whatever might be its original purport, to the subject of marriage; and even became eloquent as she enlarged upon it.

"In a life of celibacy," she said upon one occasion, when her patient but dispirited listener was seated placidly at her side; "when too long protracted, a man contracts habits and prejudices fearfully detrimental to all subsequent home-happiness. He fritters away his best and holiest feelings in idle and profitless dissipation, or in paltry and puerile follies; he accustoms himself to selfish and sordid indulgences; and becomes either minutely and contemptibly exacting with regard to certain trivial conventionalities, to which he attaches a fictitious importance that excites the pity, if not the ridicule of his associates, or, 'unstable as the wind,' he suffers himself to be made the sport of every caprice of chance, or, worse still, of momentary egotism, and sacrifices to the passing instant all the interests of the future. The glow of youth, and the bloom of manhood, have alike escaped him unheeded; and it is only when the fingers of Time have begun to weave threads of silver among the rapidly-thinning locks which formerly clustered in profusion about his brow, and when certain spasmodic twinges seize upon his burning foot or his swelling hand, that he compels himself at last to think of marriage, which has probably been from an early age the subject of his sarcasm.

"And then, how humiliating is it to reflect, that when the unmistakable commencement of decay at last works this mental revolution, the prudent and fastidious commentator upon other men's follies almost universally leads to the altar, and ties to himself for life, either a young and inexperienced girl, more fitted to stand in the relationship of his grand-daughter—a toy to fondle and to neglect at will—or a favorite female servant, famous for her culinary ability, or talent as a nurse. The latter alternative, degrading though it may be, is nevertheless the best, as it scarcely entails martyrdom upon either party; for the selfish sensualist, as he gloats over his gastronomic luxuries, forgets, at least for a time, amid his egotistical indulgences, the price at which they have been purchased; and probably cares little that the hand which smoothes the cushions of the gouty chair is as red as the leather with which it is covered. In the other case, however, the reflection is fearful! It is a realization of the German legend of the living body attached to the senseless corpse. Believe me, the superannuated bridegroom indulges in a fallacy when he imagines that he can *educate* the young wife whose personal qualifications have induced him to encourage the delusion that he can still repay her affection, or imbue her with his peculiar habits and feelings. The mind may indeed be tutored, but the heart is beyond the schooling of egotism.

"And, meanwhile, what is the fate of the poor victim of expediency? Either she sets at naught the tastes and wishes of her ill-assorted husband, plunges into dissipation, and revenges herself upon the world for the emptiness and joylessness of home; or she withers beneath the chilling conviction that her moral existence must be a blank. I am far from justifying either result; for, in this blessed country no woman can be *compelled* to such an union; but still we have the every-day experience that much may be done by a treaty, by expostulation, and by holding out brilliant, and, too often, fallacious prospects, calculated to operate powerfully and viciously upon an inexperienced imagination.

"It is only after the step is irrevocably taken that the truth, in all its terrors, becomes manifest to the victim; and that the young heart, frozen by its contact with one on which all the softer and more attaching sympathies have long been extinguished, shrinks appalled at the prospect of its own isolation, and rushes into the world in search of that companionship which cannot exist at its own hearth.

"It would be alike useless to trace, and painful to contemplate, the probable close of such a career; nor is its wretchedness lessened by the fact that the first, and deepest blame is attributable to the cupidity of parents and guardians, and the egotism of self-love. To be alike happy and honorable, marriage should never be allowed to present any marked and startling contrast either in age or station; for the balance of individual advantages is no sooner lost, than the charm, and even the holiness, of such a bond is gone."

"There are, moreover, other perils, my dear mother, scarcely less dangerous," observed Mortimer upon one occasion, "less visible, perhaps, but equally to be avoided; such, for instance, as incompatibility of tastes, habits, and dispositions," and he sighed as he ventured the remark.

"Undoubtedly," acquiesced his mother; "but, in assuming these, both parties must be careful not to nourish a morbid and unreasonable feeling. So much may be done where the heart is right, and the mind pure. The great point is to contract marriage before selfish tastes, habits, and dispositions are too deeply rooted. In your own case you have nothing to apprehend; for Gertrude has not a thought or a feeling which angels might not share."

Frederic sighed again; he did not doubt the truth of the assertion, but he would fain have seen more of the fond and devoted woman in the wife who was to share his fortunes; and then his importunate fancy turned back to Sybil, and he dwelt upon her remembrances of

iat of a "bright and particular star," far better ilited to shine upon the horizon of his own eart, than the cold and insensible girl to whom had been offered through the volition of nother.

He marvelled if Miss Delamere had ever ved; but he soon succeeded in convincing mself that had she indeed so done, she would ot still have been Miss Delamere; for who ould have resisted her fascinations? Of her e he never thought, for Sybil was one of ose bright creatures who seem to control time, id to create about them a perpetual spring. et what could they ever be to each other? as not his destiny fixed and irrevocable? e might secure her friendship, but he dared t aspire to her love.

And, meanwhile, the intercourse of the two milies insensibly increased, and grew to intiacy. Mrs. Mortimer was half won over to e Sybil by the admiration and affection which e evinced for Gertrude; while Frederic only preciated the more highly a character so suerior as to place her above common and wonish rivalry, as she expatiated to himself on the perfections of his cousin.

"You are, indeed, an enviable person, Mr. ortimer," she said with a sweet smile, as they ere one day professing to make a survey of e improvements at The Grange; "nothing n be more faultless than the beauty of that vely girl; no cameo ever presented a more rfect outline than her exquisite features, and e is so gentle, so essentially feminine, her disition is so placid, and her manners are so ld, that it will in truth be a privilege to lead ch a being in safety and happiness through life."

"Her empire will be home," said Frederic, mpelling himself to reply.

"And where should it be?" asked Miss Delare earnestly. "What should a woman asre to beyond that? All else, believe me, is re delusion for our sex. Where the heart is, ere alone should the energies be exerted, and the home a palace or a cottage, it will suf-e. We are not, as you are, the slaves of amtion, of wealth, of power; our dominion is of me growth, and like the ivy, clings ever shly and closely to the same prop. Men will ver understand us; they think us light, trig and capricious; they cannot sound the pth of a true woman's heart."

"And yet," remarked Mortimer, as for an inant he glanced into the beaming countenance fore him, "you have not ventured beyond re theory in your own person."

"Oh, I!" said Miss Delamere, with a forced ugh; "I am altogether *horse-de-combat*. I am tented with my fate, and satisfied to remain spectator of the events which progress around Persons attract me occasionally, and I am nkful for the variety which such pre-possions afford, but I have learned to estimate preferences at their true value, and am quite are that what appears very desirable and deghtful to-day, incurs a great risk of proving lious a year hence. How few among us rely understand our true interests! But this is, rhaps, as it should be; for a perpetual change sentiment and feeling lends a constant charm to life, and destroys its monotony. We can afford to *like*, for a rational regard helps us delightfully over the rough paths of our pilgrimage; but we must be careful how we permit ourselves to *love*, for the error, once committed, is never to be repaired."

"You argue with the coolness of a philosopher."

"And you, like all your sex, have a contempt for petticoat philosophy, is it not so? Nevertheless, you may be forgiven. *Your* happiness is assured, and you are not called upon to resist."

"If you assume such a position I cannot discuss the point."

"Why should you seek to do so? Where no struggle is required, no victory is needed. I look upon you as the most enviable man I know: your station in society is exalted enough to satisfy any healthy ambition; you have a mother who is a model for her sex, and by whom you are adored. It is, perchance, scarcely delicate in me to push my definition closer, and yet you surely must forgive me if I again advert to your lovely cousin—what more can you ask of fate? May I not say of you what was said of the favored ones of old, that 'the gods have you in their keeping?'"

"And your own star?" asked Frederic in a tone of slight pique.

"Mine!" replied Sybil, with another of those ambiguous laughs which from her lips were always musical, even while it was not easy to detect their actual inspiration; "I doubt if any one of the luminous bodies has condescended to adopt the care of my destiny, it has been so essentially common-place. I am, however, fortunately satisfied, as I have already told you, to be a looker-on."

"And you have never loved; you, who could, and should, love well and deeply?"

Sybil turned aside for an instant in silence, and wrenched away the branch of a flowering shrub near which they were passing, as if by this action to throw off some painful and powerful feeling; apparently she succeeded, for in the next instant her voice was almost steady as she replied,—

"I may have done so; and now, like a wrecked merchant, only cling the closer to the security of land. None can warn more fittingly than those who have suffered."

Mortimer breathed quickly. She had loved then, and she was still Miss Delamere; although, from the very self-possession which she had so nobly assumed, it was evident that she had not escaped unscathed. He forgot Gertrude—he forgot his father's dying request—he forgot, in short, all save the radiant creature beside him, as he asked impetuously,—

"And having loved once, although unhappily, can you be now contented to live on like the crowd about you? Do you not—"

"No," said Sybil, laying her hand lightly upon his arm, and glancing with an arch smile into his face; "No, for trust me, I know well what you would ask. Even as the Spartans were accustomed to intoxicate their slaves in order that their children might see the vice of drunkenness in all its abhorrent coarseness, and

so learn to avoid it, are women of my stamp permitted *once* to prostrate their best feelings before those of another; but, like the Spartan boys, they generally profit by the experience, and obtain a firmer power over their own susceptibilities; and this done, even if they do not secure happiness, they at least exhibit a counterfeit, which passes current as readily in the world."

"I do not comprehend such a compromise," said Frederic, somewhat coldly; "I have a different notion of 'the uses of adversity.'"

"Would you, then, trail your crape over the kennels of the world?" asked Miss Delamere, with a slight accent of scorn; "believe me, the dear friends about us have little real sympathy with any sorrow which leaves themselves unscathed; nor do I see the wisdom of nursing regret, where we have only to reassert our dignity, and to profit by our experience. We may occasionally feel the wound open afresh, but we can always conceal it; nor are we called upon to present our breast to a second stab. We learn a great lesson when we are first taught to accept life upon its own terms; and to gather the wheat and the tares together without murmuring."

"And am I to understand that you have attained to this privilege?" asked Mortimer, with growing uneasiness.

"I hope so; but, as this species of philosophy is not, as I am well aware, to be acquired at once, I do not expect to make you a convert. Nevertheless, I cannot afford to allow you to quarrel with my tenets, because you are the pupil of a more romantic school. They are the result of long and close observation, for I have never been accustomed to move over the rough paths of the world with my eyes shut; and since I have, by some strange chance, elected you into a temporary father-confessor, I will even confide to you thus much more—that I have seen so many fair promises turn out signal failures; so many charming buds of hope only produce a blight; that I have endeavored to profit by the examples which have been afforded me. I know one sweet girl especially, who resisted all warning, and who spurned at all opposition, in order to fulfil the dream of her young heart; but alas! she only sowed in faith to reap in bitterness. So much is required on both sides to render a married life really happy, that it is almost presumptuous to seek an exception in one's own particular case there should be such perfect conformity of tastes, feelings, and principles, such power of self-abnegation, such entire and absolute devotion to another; and above all, such a faculty of loving through weal and woe, that I have renounced all hope of ever meeting one who would care to incur so great a risk for my sake."

"*You* despair of such a result?"

"Even so, and am I so much to blame?" she asked with a winning smile; "and may I not trust that you will acquit me of cold-heartedness and egotism if I have taught myself to appreciate the world as it is, and to receive with gratitude the calmer enjoyments which it tenders to me, without exacting more? Because I will not be a voluntary martyr, must I submit to be thought an egotistical coquette? or to have it believed that I love pleasure and display, simply from the fact that I am incapable of all higher and holier affection? In short, will you still apply to me in your heart all those injurious epithets with which your sex generally overwhelm a woman, who, having attained years of discretion and reflection, still remains free, and declares her resolution to continue so?"

"No," murmured Frederic, nevertheless only half convinced; "but I hold that the man who is able to induce you to recant that resolution will be the happiest of mortals."

Sybil laughed, and placing her slender finger upon her lip, archly shook her head. "And now, reverend father," she said sportively, "we must never again recur to this subject. You are affianced to your cousin morally, therefore a married man—and I to my principles. Let us rather talk of your sweet bride-elect, who needs but your guiding and supporting hand to become all that you can desire to see her. Were she nothing better than a beauty, it is a theme which, conversant as I have now become with your ardent nature, I should dread to touch upon; but such is far from being the case; she is full of pleasant womanly feelings and acquirements, and altogether qualified to make your home happy."

"You have studied her merits deeply," said Mortimer, somewhat sarcastically.

"Was it not natural that I should do so? Mrs Mortimer was the first of our county neighbors who ventured within our anchorage without demanding a clean bill of health—You were yourself the first individual with whom I was brought into contact after my arrival, and with whom I had a taste, a pursuit, or a study in common—while Gertrude was pointed out to me as your destined wife. Do you wonder that I looked somewhat closely into her character, when I felt that it involved your happiness? But no—no—" she pursued hurriedly as she averted her head, and quickened her pace; "I have expressed myself ill, unfortunately—I should have said—"

"Nothing save the very words you uttered," exclaimed Frederic breathlessly. "You have admitted that you honor me with some portion of your interest, and believe me that I will study to deserve it."

From that moment, however, Miss Delamere resolutely turned the subject of discourse, nor could all the artifices of Frederic induce her to resume it. Enough had nevertheless passed between them to convince Sybil that Mortimer was utterly indifferent to his cousin, and by no means equally so to herself; while Frederic quitted her presence with the proud conviction that although Miss Delamere had resolved never to give away her heart, she had at least bestowed her regard upon himself. The conviction came at a fortunate period to heal the wounds of his self-love; and he ingenuously believed that his own feeling towards the beautiful Sybil was of a similar nature; but he did not estimate the perils of the trial to which he thus recklessly abandoned his peace of mind.

An individual of winning manners and acco

lished intellect, whose habits and sentiments ssimilate with our own, makes great, although nperceptible progress in our affections before 've become cognizant of the fact. We imagine iat we are only gratified, interested, and un- erstood, while in truth we have in some degree eased to understand ourselves; and where we elieved that we were merely encouraging an ntercourse tending to make the hours pass less eavily, and with more profit to our personal eelings, we have unconsciously created a moral liment necessary to our after-existence; and ome morning we awaken with our brain and ur heart alike replete with new impulses, new houghts, and new sensations, of which we had ot even dreamed when we retired to rest upon ie previous night. We had lain down, like ulliver, in all the pride of our strength, only) find after our slumber that we are bound by thousand Lilliputian bonds, each a mere hair i itself, but collectively forming a net-work om which we cannot free ourselves.

The society of Sybil became daily more necessary to Mortimer. He no longer looked upon er as a mere acquaintance, with whom it was ccasionally pleasant to while away an idle our; but even in her absence he constantly eferred to her tastes and opinions, and coupled er image with all his pursuits. When he accientally recalled to recollection an unusually nteresting incident of travel, he reverted to it until he could relate it to Miss Delamere; and , in the course of his reading, he was struck y an able passage, or a quaint conceit, it was rthwith marked, in order that it might be subnitted to her judgment, or made conducive to er amusement; while she no sooner appeared an he instantly roused himself from the languor hich was rapidly becoming habitual to him, nd exerted himself to do justice to his natural nd acquired powers of mind.

And day by day, meanwhile, one sat beside im who was equally able to appreciate these fforts, but who felt that they were made for nother. Delighted to see her son gratified and mused, Mrs. Mortimer increased in courtesy nd attention to the inmates of The Grange, ever dreaming that the matured and decided eauty of Sybil could bear comparison with the nobtrusive loveliness of her gentle niece, and onsequently far from suspecting that she was iding and abetting in the downfall of her own isious; but Gertrude was more clear sighted

Inexperienced as she was in the ways of the vorld and in the caprices of passion, she soon iscovered that Frederic saw and spoke only vith the eyes and lips of Sybil; and with a bitter joy did she congratulate herself from hour o hour, that she had voluntarily withdrawn rom a contest by which her pride must have been wounded, and her independence compromised. How often, entirely forgotten or overlooked by her cousin and his brilliant guest, did she continue riveted to her work-table by he spell which his presence never failed to exercise over her, listening to arguments in which he could well have sustained her part; and interpreting a thousand words and inferences which each party conceived to be sacred to themselves; how often did she catch the beam in the eye of Frederic as it rested on his beautiful companion, and feel the icebolt upon her heart!

Vainly, however, did she watch for any answering demonstrations from Miss Delamere. Sybil remembered her conversation with Mortimer; and although fully conscious of the empire which she had attained over his mind and heart, she never permitted its repetition. To all appearance she had, indeed, forgotten the circumstance, for she did not shun the intimacy which Frederic was so anxious to establish, but rather assumed towards him the bearing of an elder sister, desirous to enlarge his tastes, and to diminish his enthusiasm. Nevertheless, it was certain that although she might succeed in the former attempt, she produced no effect in the latter; for Mortimer was not the pupil calculated to grow calmer under the teaching of such a preceptress; and thus Gertrude remained a melancholy spectator of gaiety in which she was not called upon to share; and an attachment which she was not supposed to comprehend.

And yet—what would she not have given for one of those ardent looks, one of those heart-inspired tones! A year of life? Pshaw! what was a year of life to her, who, young as she was, had already begun to feel how dreary a boon existence may become when coupled with disappointment? At times, she asked herself what she had done to merit such a fate; but although she felt tempted to reproach her cousin for having so thoroughly misjudged her, never for an instant did her generous nature include in its transient bitterness the syren who had beguiled his affections. All that had taken place appeared, on the contrary, so natural, that as she gazed in admiring sadness upon the radiant woman with whom she had thus unfortunately been brought into collision, she felt at once humbled and disheartened; and, although she believed that she could love—that she *did* love—as well as Sybil, she shrank from every other comparison between them.

"Hers is the affection of a day," would she murmur in her solitude, "fed by his presence, and strengthened by his praise; while mine has been the silent worship of years, indulged in absence, alimented by hope, and encouraged by reason. But he has no faith in such a feeling—my secret is my own, and it is my sole heritage. The delusion is at length over; and the orphan girl is alone with her sorrow."

CHAPTER VII.

And, meanwhile, the passion of Frederic for Miss Delamere increased hourly; and scarcely a day passed in which he did not find or invent some pretext for a visit to The Grange. He was himself unconscious of the extent to which he had become enthralled. Never once had the idea of declining the hand of his cousin crossed his imagination; in fact, he rarely thought upon the subject; and when he chanced to do so, it was calmly and without repugnance, as an arrangement sufficiently remote to present no im-

mediate impediment to his tastes and pursuits. Fully impressed with the conviction, that the event was one of at least equal indifference to Gertrude, he regarded it simply as he did every other question of duty and expediency; determined to act correctly and uprightly when the time should come, without troubling himself by speculating upon its probable consequences, either to his own happiness or that of his cousin. Doing full justice to the virtues and amiability of his future wife, he was satisfied that his married existence would be at least calm and honorable; and he believed that he should be able to render hers equally so; but beyond this faith he did not venture to trust himself. He felt convinced that they should never understand each other; and he endeavored to forget a necessity from which he made no effort to escape.

Nowhere could he so effectually do this as in the society of Sybil, the infinite variety of whose character continually invested her with a new charm; even the mystery by which she had surrounded herself was not without its attraction, for it altogether destroyed the common-place of ordinary friendship. To imply any secret involving her honor or truth, Mortimer felt to be utterly impossible; and often as he bewildered himself by conjectures on her previous existence, it never occurred to him that it could comprise any episode unfavorable to her dignity.

Moreover, Miss Delamere had frankly declared her resolution never to marry; and consequently their familiar intercourse was equally unimportant on both sides, while it was a perpetual source of gratification to each party.

Fascinated as he was, Frederic no longer possessed a sufficiently unbiased judgment to reflect upon the extreme singularity, if not indelicacy, of the convert confidence made to him by Sybil. He did not pause to remember that such intimate disclosures are very rarely volunteered by an unmarried woman to an acquaintance of the opposite sex; and never until long and tried friendship has removed the indelicacy of such a communication.

He saw in it only what Sybil had been anxious that he *should* see; an intention on her part to remove all feeling of restraint, and all tinge of imprudence from their constant and increasing companionship; and he was the more strengthened in this conviction by the fact, that she rarely lost an opportunity of impressing upon him the attractions and virtues of his cousin.

Several months passed on thus; and each succeeding week Mortimer spent less and less time at home; while he generally so contrived that when he was himself there Mrs. and Miss Delamere should also be its inmates. No party of pleasure was complete without them: no evening circle brilliant in which they were not included; and while he found a particular *fauteuil*, in which the languid mother was brought to confess that she was really as comfortably established as in her own, the tables of Mrs. Mortimer were constantly decorated with clusters of beautiful exotics gracefully presented by the attentive daughter.

Frederic was tenderly attached to his mother, and these delicate courtesies were therefore duly appreciated by him. But at length they awakened the anxiety of the very mind which they were intended to tranquillize; and even when Sybil relieved her at her tapestry-frame, and with marvellous skill wrought out the most charming and complicated fancies, investing the very labors of the needle with the poetry which she dispensed over all she touched, Mrs. Mortimer began to ask herself if these unwearied endeavors to please and to oblige, were really exerted solely for her own sake; and ere long, she felt the answer to be doubtful and unsatisfactory.

She remarked too, that when, on rare occasions, Gertrude made an attempt to conquer her depression, and to put forth her innate powers of conversation, although Sybil might have been pensive and absorbed a moment previously, she immediately threw off her momentary reserve; and with a wit which, like Aaron's rod, absorbed that of all around her, speedily repossessed herself of the attention of the whole circle.

From day to day Mrs. Mortimer reflected more seriously upon all these circumstances; and the result of her cogitations was a determination to lose no more time in recalling to the memory of Frederic his actual position as regarded his cousin. Satisfied that Gertrude, whom she loved as a daughter, was strongly attached to her son, she felt that she could not suffer her happiness to be made the sport of one whom she began to suspect of an unworthy but not the less dangerous coquetry; and, believing that the evil had as yet made too little progress to render her task one of much difficulty, she consequently felt less repugnance than she otherwise would have done in representing to Frederic the painful results which might ultimately accrue from his present unguarded system of conduct.

Accordingly as he one morning entered the library where she was engaged in writing, with his hat and gloves in his hand, and evidently about to leave the house, she looked up from her desk, and inquired with a forced smile, if he were again about to absent himself for the day?

"I think not, my dear mother," he replied somewhat confusedly, and with evident anxiety to escape; "I am only going to canter over to The Grange to inquire for Mrs. Delamere, who was somewhat indisposed when I returned last night; and should she not feel better to-day, is improbable that she will wish for visitors."

"In which case shall we really see you again in an hour or two, my dear boy? Gertrude and I promised ourselves such delightful morning when you should be restored to us, that we are almost inclined to feel mortified by your continual desertion."

"Do you indeed miss me so much, then?" asked Frederic affectionately, as he laid down his hat, and drew a chair to the side of his mother: "As to my cousin, I have long had proof that neither my presence nor my absence can affect her equanimity, and consequently deems no apology necessary in her case; but to yourself, my dear mother, if indeed my wandering tend to diminish your happiness, I cannot offer too many."

"Of late, my dear boy," said Mrs. Mortimer, with something which sounded like a sign; "I have had so few opportunities of conversing confidentially with you, that if you can indeed spare me half an hour, I would ask you to defer your visit until I have spoken to you upon a subject in which all my best feelings are interested. You consent? Then, Frederic, I will venture to remind you that you are now more than five-and-twenty, and that it is my dearest wish to see you married, and to find myself surrounded by new and and attaching ties before I am called upon to leave this world. I have, as you may remember, already spoken to you upon the same subject, but I now repeat my entreaty most earnestly; nor do I fear that I shall do so in vain."

She paused, but Mortimer continued silent.

"You have assured me," she pursued, after a time, "that you formed no attachment while abroad, but that you brought back to us the same pure and affectionate heart with which you departed; and I believed you, for you had never deceived me. You may, therefore, judge of my joy upon receiving this assurance, for your happiness has ever been the chief aim of my existence. You returned all that my prayers had asked—all that could satisfy the exactions even of a mother's affection; and on my side I rejoice to prove to you that throughout the whole of your absence, I had been unwearidly occupied in securing to you a wife worthy of your noble virtues. You loved your cousin, young as you were, even before your departure; while to Gertrude you were already more dear than any one else on earth. I took care, my dear boy, to foster and encourage that affection; for I knew your nature too well to fear either caprice or fickleness on your part. My efforts were, however, unnecessary. Her love for you grew with her growth; she has sat for hours at my feet, listening to my speculations and hopes, and mingling her old memories with mine. Let our conversations commence as they might, you were always their closing theme. When I hinted at the dangers to which you were exposed, she stopped me with her tears; and when I talked of the blessedness of your return, she was radiant with delight. Trust me, a woman can always read a woman's heart; while the task was doubly easy to one who, like myself, felt a twofold interest in the investigation."

Still Mortimer listened in silence.

"I was aware, however," continued his mother, resolutely, "that even the love of such a heart as hers would not suffice alone to married happiness. For your sake, therefore, my dear boy, as well as for her own, I studied to make her all that was estimable, both in mind and heart, and richly have I succeeded; the beauty of her person, faultless as it is, does not exceed that of her character. She is portionless, it is true, but she is your uncle's child, and you do not, happily, require any increase of fortune; while it is certain that you can nowhere find a wife more richly endowed with personal charms, mental qualities, or moral virtues."

"I admit the fact willingly," said Frederic with a pale lip, and an uncertain tremor in his voice, for the words and manner of his mother had enabled him, in a few seconds, to see further into the real depths of his heart than he had ever before done, and convinced him that he had been indulging a wilful and dangerous self-delusion; "far be it from me to depreciate in the slightest degree the merits and virtues of my cousin; and yet I fear that I could never secure her happiness; our dispositions and habits are utterly incompatible. She is too meek, too retiring; and you must forgive me if I say also, too unimpassioned to satisfy my exacting tastes. I can quite comprehend that her affection for yourself led her to feel an unaffected interest in all your anxieties upon my account; but, believe me, it was far more for your sake than for mine. My impetuosity would scare her—my enthusiasm irritate her feelings—my defects become insupportable to her. In fact, my dear mother, Gertrude is too perfect; her very placidity would chill me into stone; and thus we should become a perpetual torment to each other."

"You do not judge your cousin fairly, Frederic," said Mrs. Mortimer with increased seriousness, more and more convinced that her suspicions had not misled her: "you make no allowance for the peculiarity of her position; and you fail to recollect that you have made no effort to diminish its difficulty. It is true that she has not attempted to compel your affection, deeply as she would have prized it, for Gertrude is incapable of every thing unwomanly; but surely you would not construe her delicacy into a crime?—Are her meekness and retiring modesty, indeed, defects in your eyes? The objection is a novelty under such circumstances. It is true that others my be more brilliant in conversation, more showy in manner, more coquettish in disposition, and, consequently, more attractive for an hour; but these are mere drawing-room accomplishments, which have little, indeed, to do with home-happiness, and are a most fallacious foundation for married peace. Gertrude has not, I admit, been educated for the world, but—as I fondly hoped—for a better and a purer destiny."

"And I trust that she will yet fulfil her fate," said Frederic with a sigh. "There are many far worthier than myself, who will and must appreciate her many estimable qualities, and whom she may perhaps love: while I repeat my conviction that she feels nothing more than a sisterly affection for myself; and I confess that I have an utter abhorrence of all marriages of expediency."

Poor Mrs. Mortimer, exhausted by an effort at opposition so contrary to her nature, and depressed by a disappointment for which she had been totally unprepared, could no longer restrain her tears, they fell fast in silence until they were remarked by her son; who, instantly subdued by the sight of a sorrow of which he was himself the cause, hastened to entreat her, for his sake, to compose herself, declaring that he was ready to obey her wishes in all things.

As he uttered this assurance, however, the heart of Frederic sank within him, and he felt as though a cloud had settled upon the future. Now, indeed, he became aware of the empire which Sybil had acquired over his whole being.

She never might have consented to rescind her resolution, and to become his wife; but he could at least have lived on in hope—lived on, as he in truth had done for the last few months, scarcely caring to ask anything of to-morrow, but rich in all the happiness of to-day.

"It never could be my wish to urge you to any act repulsive to your own feelings, my dear boy," said Mrs. Mortimer, as she wiped away the large drops which were still coursing each other down her cheeks; "but for many reasons I felt it my duty to be frank with you, and even to press you upon this subject. Your father's dying entreaty, your cousin's devoted affection, and the perseverance with which I myself nourished that girlish love until I felt that it had become a principle of her existence, all determined me to the course I have pursued; but compulsion in such a case is, of course, unnatural and impossible. You are free to act as you see fit; only I beseech you to divest yourself of the erroneous belief that your own indifference to your cousin is returned by her. Would that it indeed were so! You have now only to express your will, and, should you desire it, the subject shall never again be named between us; and you, at least, shall not be made the victim of a fatal mistake."

"I will not disappoint your affection, my beloved mother," said Frederic, as he rose. "In obtaining the hand of a woman like my cousin, I ought to feel happy; and when you inform her that I will make it my study to deserve her affection, she will perhaps not scruple to admit it, since you assure me that such a feeling indeed exists." And pressing his lips to the forehead of his agitated companion, he hastily left the room.

Mrs. Mortimer no sooner found herself alone than she gave free vent to the grief which she had hitherto vainly endeavored to suppress. She could not conceal from her own heart that the concession of her son had been wrung from him entirely by his affection for herself; and she began to doubt in how far she would be justified in accepting it. She trembled, not only for his happiness, but for that of Gertrude; for what could be anticipated from an union formed under such circumstances? Then, however, the vision of Sybil rose before her, and she almost shuddered as she thought of the power which this showy and mysterious stranger had acquired over the mind and feelings of Frederic.

The more she reflected, the less did she find herself able to bring any definite or tangible accusation against her; but nevertheless there was a vague and undefined feeling of her unworthiness and craft which would obtrude itself, and a thousand petty circumstances flashed upon her memory, all tending to strengthen the impression; while, as she recurred to the original distaste which she had experienced towards Miss Delamere from the very moment of their introduction she became almost superstitious in her belief that it had been a warning to avoid her acquaintance, and she felt tempted to visit upon herself all the blame of her present trial.

That her idolized son should become the husband of a heartless manœuvrer was a dread so bitter that she could not reflect upon it without the keenest suffering; and that this would inevitably be the case should she reject the promise which she had so lately and with so much difficulty extorted from him, she felt fatally convinced.

Mrs. Mortimer affected no overstrained and narrow-minded bigotry of birth, or pride of purse; but she could not calmly brook the idea of seeing her only son married to a woman who found it expedient to conceal her previous history, and to live as though the present were all in all to her. Frederic owed much to himself and still more to the memory of his father, for although no aristocrat by descent, his family was ennobled by its honor and fair fame, while he himself was, as she well knew, ill constructed to bear disgrace, come in what shape it might. Yet here he was willing, and even eager, to in cur a risk upon whose amount he could not cal culate, and to entrust alike his respectability and his happiness to a woman whose fair fac and brilliant fascinations had undermined hi reason and hoodwinked his prudence.

The anxious mother felt that his peril must b overcome at once; she reflected also that Frede ric was incapable of forfeiting his word, an that consequently, the more time she suffered t elapse before his marriage with Gertrude, th longer she should subject him to a strugg which was evidently too painful to be born calmly; while once united to his amiable an adoring cousin, she could not entertain a dou that he would soon appreciate her endearin and attaching qualities, and repay her affecti with all the energy of his nature.

Thus reassured, Mrs. Mortimer became grad ally consoled; and, convinced that she was i suring at once the happiness of her son and th of his cousin, she closed her desk, and proce ed to the morning-room, where Gertrude w busily engaged in arranging fresh flowers upo stand near the window, in order to communic to her the message of her now declared lover.

Perhaps the gentle girl intuitively felt th such a tale would have been more fitly told Frederic himself. Certain it is that, for all ply, she only murmured, as she flung herself i passion of tears, into the arms of Mrs. Mortim "But, my dear, dear aunt, do you think that *really* loves me?"

CHAPTER VIII.

Meanwhile Frederic, dissatisfied with himse and conscious of the unmanly fickleness wh he had betrayed, forgot for a brief time e a the bitterness of his disappointment in the e milliation of his self-accusations. Aware t when the subject of his marriage with his co n was first broached by his mother, he had it least tacitly consented to the arrangement, d thus misled her into a belief that it was con ent with his own wishes, he felt that from t moment he should in honor have ceased to n sider himself free; and that not even he coldness of Gertrude should have induced m to treat her with the neglect and avoid ce which he had exhibited, until he had ascertained

from her own lips that his suit was distasteful to her.

The reflection came, however, too late; for if she had indeed loved him, her heart must have been too deeply wounded long to retain a passion which his whole conduct had tended to discourage; while, should his suspicion that he was indifferent to her prove correct, and that he nevertheless determined to become his wife merely in obedience to the wishes of his parents, his prospect of happiness was even less promising. Where the self-love of each party had been mortified there could be little hope of a perfect intelligence at any period, however remote; and Mortimer, although unconscious of the extent of his moral infirmity, was prepared to believe that he could never experience a sincere attachment for any woman who had evinced towards him the coldness of his cousin.

How different had been the whole bearing and manner of Sybil! Bound to him by no ties of either memory or kindred, she had nevertheless met his advances towards a friendship, which now appeared doubly precious, with a warmth and frankness which to him were inappreciable. As the one repelled, so had the other encouraged him; and on the part of Miss Delamere, resolved, as she had declared herself to be, never to hazard her happiness to the keeping of another, there was, consequently, a beautiful disinterestedness which proved that she valued him for himself, without one ulterior project. The reflection crossed his mind at an unlucky moment; for, as he mentally argued, although he had been rash enough to love her, even forewarned by an assurance which should have proved an efficient safeguard against so profitless a passion, she was guiltless of all that had occurred; and it behoved him to act at once with a sincerity worthy of her own, by acquainting her, without loss of time, with the purport of his recent interview with his mother; and assuring her that any apparent change in his feelings of regard must be attributed to his compelled position, rather than to any actual diminution in that friendship and respect which would endure to the end of his existence.

The human heart is ever ingenious in its sophistry; and thus Mortimer, whose daily yearning for the society of Sybil was urging him to her presence, even while writhing under the effects of his past vaccillation, had little difficulty in convincing himself that he was bound to exonerate his conduct from the danger of misconception, by immediately pouring forth all the anguish of his spirit before the very woman from whom it should have been sacredly concealed.

Full of this one absorbing idea, he forgot that, at the most eventful moment of her life, his better feelings should have led him to the side of Gertrude; and that it was to her alone that he was bound to confess his error, and frankly to declare his real sentiments.

But the whole nature of Frederic had become changed since his acquaintance with Sybil. The indignant blood would have rushed to his brow, had the thirst of vengeance to his heart, had any help breathed an insinuation against his honor; and yet he was about to commit the twofold treachery of offering his hand to a woman whom he did not love, and of confessing his repugnance to this union to another whom he felt to be, in point of fact, her rival. Even his once devoted affection for his mother had been weakened by a more engrossing attachment. He no longer made her happiness his first and dearest care; there was but one bright point in the horizon of his existence, and all around it had become dimmed and faint.

And thus he slowly rode away from that home which had ceased to be to him what it once was; and from the two beings who loved him better than aught else on earth, heedless of the new wound which this untimely desertion must inflict on both, and intent only upon justifying himself in the eyes of one who had suddenly superseded them in his affections.

Never had the road between the town and The Grange appeared so long or so gloomy; for, as though haunted by a compunction which he could not resist, he traversed it almost at a foot's pace, dreading, nearly as much as he desired, the coming interview.

When he at length reached the lodge, the first object which met his eyes was Sybil; Sybil, in all her beauty, lingering upon a spot whence she could command the road by which he must arrive, and evidently awaiting his appearance. Never had she looked more radiant; a light danced in her deep eyes as she detected his presence, a slight flush rose to her cheek, and there was an earnest welcome in the gesture with which she invited him to alight and join her. In an instant Frederic sprang to the ground, flung the bridle-rein to his groom, and, drawing the arm of his fair hostess through his own, was hidden with her in the leafy depths of the shrubbery. The indisposition of Mrs. Delamere was alike forgotten by both; Sybil was full of reproaches on his unwonted tardiness, which had, as she declared, interfered most disagreeably with her day's arrangements, in which she had very inconsiderately, as it had now proved, done him the honor to include him; while Mortimer was oppressed by a remembrance of the communication which he was about to make.

It was strange that, with a perfect faith in the sincerity of Miss Delamere's declaration, that he could never be to her more than a valued friend, he should nevertheless find a difficulty in entering upon his task; but the human mind is a complicated machine, over which its owner sometimes lacks control; and thus Frederic strove to smile at the sallies, and to appear interested in the sportive rebukes, of his beautiful companion.

"Nevertheless," continued Miss Delamere, when she at length saw fit to conclude her smiling reproaches, "the lost time may yet be redeemed in this instance—a rare case, you must admit, Mr. Mortimer; and one which seldom occurs in life, where a past folly can hope no better result than a long repentance,—and therefore I will inform you, without further delay, that mamma—who, *par parenthèse*, is much better this morning—has consented to accompany me to the Hartwell ruins. How say you?

Will you be our escort, or rather, I should have said, our cicerone, for, to you they must be old acquaintance? We are, as you know, mere novices in the neighborhood, and need a guiding hand; therefore it will be an act and office of courteous charity for which we shall individually and collectively, be duly grateful."

"You are aware that I am only too happy to obey your orders, be they what they may," said Frederic with unaccustomed gravity.

"Yes, yes, *chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*," laughed Miss Delamere; "I well know that you are a very model of knightly virtue; but still I may be permitted to suggest that you might have accepted this challenge with somewhat less of the 'woful countenance.' Believe me, that its result will be even more innoxious than that of the windmills."

"Would that I shared the conviction!" said Frederic with increased melancholy; "but, listen to me for one moment, while I tell you that my appearance here to-day is less a pleasure than a duty; and believe, in your turn that there is no discourtesy in such an admission. You know but too well, that for months past my only hours of perfect happiness have been those for which I have been indebted to your friendship, those which I have spent in your society: you may therefore easily conceive that I must have a powerful and a fatal reason for approaching you with any other feeling than one of unmitigated delight; and yet such is the fact."

An expression almost of alarm passed over the speaking features of Sybil, as she compelled herself to ask an explanation of his meaning.

"Miss Delamere," said Mortimer, struggling with his emotion, "you have often congratulated me upon my probable union with my cousin, and I have been accustomed to receive your congratulations as calmly as they were offered; for I merely regarded the event after the fashion that all men regard death, as that which must one day happen, but of which the period is at once distant and indefinite. To day, however, I can do so no longer; for I have been forcibly reminded of my engagement, and urged to fulfil it. In short, I am no longer my own master; but am called upon to devote myself to my affianced bride. Do you now understand the reason of a gloom so foreign to my nature in your society?"

"Scarcely," replied his companion, with a forced composure which lent a strange coldness to her manner: "Miss Mortimer is so very beautiful—so very faultless—that you can have no excuse for such a caprice. But it is the privilege of your sex to disappoint all ordinary calculations; and doubtlessly the shadow will pass as speedily as it has gathered."

"This from you, Sybil!" said Frederic reproachfully.

"Is not the inference a friendly one? And are we not—have we not been—friends?"

"Such was my belief," muttered Mortimer.

"So much, at least, you may concede with safety," said Sybil somewhat haughtily; "I seek not, I have never sought, for more; nor do I comprehend why your approaching union with Miss Mortimer should degrade what was once a pleasure, as you have just confessed, into a duty. I have been frank with you, Mr. Mortimer, very frank. You will do me the justice to admit that I have never willingly interfered with the happiness or claims of your cousin. I explained to you without reserve, my feelings and my determination; nor have I seen any reason to alter or to recant either. That your absence will create a sensible blank in my every-day existence, I avow without hesitation; but I have neither right nor desire to repine at so inevitable a deprivation. We never could have become more to each other than we have been, and I cannot consequently marvel that we must now become less. To a being isolated like myself, the possession of congenial companionship is undoubtedly a great boon; but I advance no pretensions to retain it when it militates against the higher and dearer claims of another."

"Enough," said Frederic almost fiercely. "Enough! You know your power, Sybil, and you are merciless. I tell you, with a freedom equal to your own, that no such resolution as you have formed will ever resist the real impulse of a true woman-heart; and that, had I possessed the qualities which should have won you despite all your pride and all your philosophy, you would have responded to my affection. And oh! had it indeed been so," he added passionately, as he possessed himself of the small and trembling hand that still rested upon his arm, "I would have braved even my mother's tears and my cousin's scorn, to make you mine. No consideration upon this earth should have parted us. But I was not worthy of you; I am the victim of my own frantic self-delusion and must abide my fate. You, at least, are spared the pang of self-reproach; from the first you spurned and discouraged a passion to which you found no answer in your own breast, and you have acted generously and nobly. The fault and folly have been all my own; and I must endeavor to expiate them with what courage I can command. All that I venture to ask is, that you will not withdraw your esteem from one to whom it has become indeed precious, but to whom you have resolutely refused the dearer privilege of living for your happiness. The doom is now sealed; in a few months, probably a few weeks,—for I care not how nor when the destiny may be accomplished,—I shall become the husband of my cousin—of a woman who, however, beautiful and gifted, has never loved me, and whom I can never love. To friends I only must I look, therefore, for that remnant of happiness which will be requisite to render my future existence endurable; and where can I seek it so effectually as at your hands?"

"I am no changeling in either heart or feeling, Mr. Mortimer," said Sybil, slowly and affectedly disengaging her hand from his clasp. "So long as we continue at the Grange, so long will you be a welcome guest beneath its roof. I should have rejoiced to see you with more of the elected bridegroom in your mood and manner, but I suppose that I must accept you upon your own terms. And now let us part; we shall be wise not to discuss this subject more at length, for it is one which is in some degree painful to us both. Your groom is probably awaiting you long ere this, at the house."

"And our expedition to the ruins?" asked Frederic with sudden eagerness.

"Must be deferred," said Sybil, pressing her forehead with her hand. "I do not feel quite well, and fancy that I have already over-walked myself. We will throw that project, along with many others, into the casket of the future."

"Suffer me at least to pay my respects to Mrs. Delamere," persisted Mortimer, who could not conceal his mortification at this unexpected dismissal, and who was anxious before his departure from The Grange to overcome the sudden, and to him unaccountable reserve of Sybil.

"My mother has not, in all probability, left her room," was the discouraging rejoinder; "and is still languid from the indisposition of yesterday. I will faithfully convey your remembrances and good wishes. And here, most opportunely, is your gallant bay! He is, in truth, a noble creature: and were I addicted to the somewhat paltry vice of envy, I should be perhaps inclined to covet the possession of so fine an animal. As it is, I congratulate him upon having fallen into the hand of one who can alike appreciate and enhance his merits. Do not fail to offer my sincere regards to Mrs. Mortimer and her niece, and give Surrey his head if you would reach home in time for luncheon."

And with a graceful and calm bow, Miss Delamere turned away, and disappeared within the portico.

CHAPTER IX.

The reflections of Mortimer during his homeward ride were of strangely conflicting nature; for, while the extraordinary and sudden coldness of Sybil pained his heart, it nevertheless, by a singular antithesis, flattered his vanity. There was only one way of accounting for conduct so wayward and unexpected; and he felt satisfied, that even while she rejected his love, she could not endure the idea that he should become engrossed by another. And if this were indeed true, what did it prove? Assuredly that Miss Delamere had permitted herself unconsciously to feel a deeper interest in him and his affections than she apprehended to be possible under the circumstances.

The heart of Frederic throbbed proudly as the conviction grew stronger every instant. He felt that he was loved, and that he had compelled his love which had been so steadfastly refused to him; loved by a woman of genius and enthusiasm, who had instinctively yielded to a passion which she had foresworn, against which she had struggled, but which had proved too mighty for her strength.

And he had only learnt this truth when it was too late: when, for the second time, he had promised to fulfil the wishes of his mother, and to immolate his happiness to what he had been taught to consider as his duty. The effort had been sufficiently bitter when it was made, but what must it be now?—now that he was loved by Sybil—that the wildest dream of his ambition was realized, and that all he coveted on earth was within his grasp?

To his impetuous nature there was madness in the thought; and, shrinking from a renewed exhibition of his weakness to his mother, and goaded by a host of feelings each more powerful than that by which it had been preceded, he had resolved, long ere he had reached home, to throw himself upon the generosity of Gertrude.

He was conscious of the humiliation to which he must inevitably expose himself by such a proceeding; nor was he by any means blinded to the fact of its want of delicacy and consideration; but still, in the selfishness of his passion, he could not forbear a feeling of gratulation at the conviction, that by these means he could not fail to recover his freedom, for that the pride of his cousin would necessarily lead her to spurn all claim upon a reluctant hand, and to liberate him from his engagement on the instant.

Perfectly satisfied in his own mind, despite the assurances which he had received from his mother, that the feelings of Gertrude would suffer no pain from his secession, and that her vanity alone would be wounded; he gave himself no uneasiness as to its ultimate effect upon her happiness; but he could not feel so well assured that Mrs. Mortimer would display equal philosophy. He was aware that beneath her apparent placidity she possessed quick and strong sensibility, coupled with a stern and rigid sense of honor; and that the first would be painfully excited by his desertion of the being whom, next to himself, she loved the best on earth; while a failure in the last, in the person of her own son, could not fail to wound her to the very soul.

For an instant the spirit of Mortimer quailed, and he almost shrank from exposing her to such a trial; but in the next, the form of Sybil rose before him—Sybil, who by an effort might now become his own; and once more he nerved himself to his ungracious task.

Gertrude might still be ignorant of his morning conference with his mother—he forgot that he had been absent during two long hours—and should this hope be realized, his difficulty as regarded the interview with herself would be materially diminished, for he was, at least, guiltless of any attempt to win her affections; and she must consequently acquit him of a want of consistency, of which he was innately more disposed to feel ashamed, than of the more vital fault which he was about wilfully to commit.

Thus, careless alike of winning and of retaining his love, and unconscious that he had himself recently given her a right to consider herself as the arbiter of his destiny, it was not impossible that he might even so far work upon her sisterly attachment as to constitute her his advocate with his justly irritated and offended mother—for Frederic had suddenly become diplomatic in his provisions. In short, as he reined up his horse at the gate of the avenue, he had almost succeeded in bringing himself to believe that he had already overcome the obstacles which had seemed so appalling at a first glance; and that happiness and Sybil were to be won by a simple wish.

He had scarcely alighted, however, ere the il-

lusion vanished. How easy are the conquests which we achieve before we encounter the enemy! How eloquent the addresses which we deliver before we are brought face to face with our interlocutor! But, alas for the promises upon which we pride ourselves! How often does the valor which had previously borne us up, evaporate before the presence of the adversary, and the aspect of the auditor!

And so it was with Frederic. He had no sooner entered the hall, recognized the door which in all probability alone separated him from his cousin, than he began to feel that the path which he had traced for himself was by no means strewn with roses; and it was consequently, almost with a sensation of relief that, upon entering the breakfast-room, he found it occupied by both his mother and Gertrude.

The welcome of the former was affectionate but somewhat sad; for she felt that his arrival had, under the circumstances, been too long deferred. She, however, uttered no reproach, while the conscious girl beside her, trembling with mingled fear and happiness, having greeted him with a forced smile and a burning blush, once more bent her fair face in silence over her work-frame. Suddenly remembering some important omission in her household arrangements, Mrs. Mortimer hastened to leave the room ere any other subject could be broached; and Frederic, who had not yet overcome his agitation, found himself *tête-à-tête* with his formidable cousin.

His first impulse was to walk to the window, where he stood for and instant, gazing fixedly on the objects beyond, but utterly unconscious in what they consisted; his next, to turn abruptly toward his silent companion, who still leant over her work, as though intent only upon its progress. He would have compensated the chance of escape with half his fortune, but it was too late; and finally, by a desperate effort, he flung himself into a chair which chanced to stand near her, and grasped the delicate hand that rested on the tapestry.

"Gertrude," he said, in an accent which she could scarcely recognise as that of her calm and indifferent cousin, and which, for an instant, she almost believed to be agitated by anxious affection; "you have much with which to reproach me. I feel that I must have disappointed most cruelly the anticipations of your fond and sisterly regard; but I trust to your generosity, to your forgiveness. Perhaps we have not understood each other. We parted as those ever part who have been dear to each other, while we met again almost as strangers. It is possible that I may have forgotten the changes which time never fails to produce on the feelings of a child who has expanded into a fair and beautiful woman; while, on your part, you may have omitted to make a due allowance for the influence which circumstances—which events—which, in short—But I will not dwell upon the past; only permit me to hope that we may, at last, although, perhaps, still in an imperfect manner, understand each other."

Gertrude raised her large blue eyes to his in inquiring wonder, but she could not articulate a syllable. Her heart throbbed painfully; a presentiment of some coming trial oppressed her, and once more her head sank upon her bosom.

"You have been informed, my dear cousin," continued Frederic hurriedly, for he had passed the Rubicon, and now only sought to terminate the interview as speedily as possible, "that, in his last hours, my father expressed a wish that we should one day be more closely united, while such was also my own most ardent hope when returned to a home so painfully bereaved. That was, however, as you well know, no moment in which to enter upon such a subject, and, perhaps the circumstance was fortunate for both of us. We had been too long strangers. We were ourselves unconscious of the changes to which we had been subjected, nor had much time elapsed ere I felt the fact; but believe me, my sweet cousin, that I no sooner found myself an alien from your heart, than I tacitly withdrew my claim."

Gertrude gasped for breath; but even overpowered as she was by this singular address coming so immediately at the close of the communication made only that morning by her aunt her innate sense of dignity prompted her at once to reply—

"You are free, Mr. Mortimer. On my side, I advance no claim upon your affections. You are the son of my benefactors—your will is my duty. Spare both yourself and me a discussion which must pain us both."

"You misconceive me, Gertrude," eagerly responded Mortimer, who, anxious to exonerate his own conduct, was blind to the intuitive delicacy of her motive, and, for the moment, even misunderstood himself. "If I could, for a moment, have flattered myself that I had created an interest in your bosom beyond that of mere relationship and habit, I should have acted very differently; but you have been consistent throughout. We have lived under the same roof, without one sympathy in common. I have done homage to your admirable qualities of mind and heart; I have felt, and ever shall feel deeply grateful for your devoted and filial affection towards my admirable mother; I acknowledge all the obligation which we owe you, but I base no presumptuous hope upon feelings which have borne no reference to myself."

"Frederic," said Miss Mortimer, who instinctively felt the real tendency of his expression and whose honest pride supplied her with temporary strength, "there needs no exonerating where there has been no wilful fault. We were not constituted for each other; and forgive me, my dear cousin, if I venture to entreat that you will, at least, spare yourself. You have repeated the concession of this morning, and I thank you—I have need to thank you (for that full acquiescence, wrung from a reluctant heart, might have involved us in one common misery) that you are frank enough—feeling that your affection for a beloved mother had led you into a fatal error—to confess your mistake at once, and to confide in my friendship to restore you to happiness. Be happy, Frederic, be happy!" gasped the soul-stricken girl. "Do not let the thought of me cloud the horizon of your existence. I know all that you could tell me, I have known, I have seen it long. My sister—

regard has been too sincere to look blindly upon the attachment by which you are absorbed. You owe me no explanation, no excuse. Perhaps I could have wished that you had spared me the trial of to-day, but it is now over, and, henceforth, I entreat you to think of me only as a devoted friend."

"Gertrude, what can you mean?"

"Would you urge me to be more explicit? Surely it is unnecessary. My path is plain. I owe all to you and your parents. Suffer me to pay back the debt. You did not understand the heart that you have wrung; and the fault has perhaps been my own. Let me but see you happy, and I care not for myself."

"Happy!" echoed Mortimer; "can I be happy otherwise than by the happiness of those about me? You are incomprehensible. From the first moment of our meeting, you have shunned and avoided me. I come to you in all frankness to explain—it may be to atone—"

"I require no atonement," said the heroic girl, as she swept back the rich clusters of her hair, and met his gaze unshrinkingly. "Do not waste an instant upon me. My aunt must be reconciled to your change of purpose. Confide in my regard. I have been weak, very weak; I should have known by experience, that a sincere affection cannot lightly be rooted out, and I should have felt that it will admit no substitute. Frederic, you love Miss Delamere, and I covet no reluctant heart. Forget that Gertrude Mortimer exists, or remember her only as the baby-playmate who amused your boyhood; but never cease to remember that, in your orphan cousin, you have a friend whose every energy will be exerted to spare you one pang, to deliver you from one suffering. Only be just alike to yourself and to me. Only confess that you have bestowed your affections elsewhere, and that I am the sole obstacle to your happiness, and, then, believe that the obstacle is at once and forever at an end. Shall it not be so?" she asked, as she extended her hand with a smile so ghastly that all the anguish of a bursting heart appeared to have settled upon her livid lip. "Will you not do me the justice to confide in my affection, and to rely upon my truth?"

"Gertrude, I do not know you!" murmured Frederic, appalled by the change which had passed over her faultless features: "Can you indeed feel—and for me?"

No words would suffice to convey the expression of mingled tenderness and reproach which for a brief instant lighted up the tearful eyes of the orphan; but in the next moment they were again averted, and their long lashes fell like a veil upon her pallid cheeks."

"Gertrude!" gasped Frederic, as he started from his chair, and turned away; "you have been *very* cruel."

For a short time no sound was audible save the hurried tread of Mortimer, as he paced rapidly to and fro the apartment; but at length he paused once more beside the work-frame.

"I was prepared to love you," he whispered hoarsely; "I *did* love you; but you repelled me. My mother had vaunted your tenderness, your amiability, your devotion, and I yearned to possess myself of your affections. But how did you meet me, Gertrude? *How?* I cannot live without the love of those about me: not the mere commonplace of habit, whose attachment is shared alike by all that surrounds it; but deep and exclusive love—that love 'even unto death,' which fills the heart to overflowing, and can be poured only upon one object; I yearned for it—panted for it—I sought it at your hands; silently it is true, but earnestly; and it was refused me. I looked further;—I may deceive myself—but I at least believed that I had found it—I believe so still. You now possess my secret, Gertrude. My whole being is absorbed in the passion to which I have delivered myself up. My very existence depends upon its success. I am no longer master of my own feelings. If I have indeed wronged your timid nature—"

"Enough—enough," murmured Miss Mortimer almost inaudibly; "We are friends, Frederic—Do you now understand me? Friends—We must never again speak upon this subject. How can I now serve you? I am ready."

The low sigh of her listener was his first response. He felt all the cruelty of the step that he had taken when it was too late to remedy the evil. His mother had judged correctly—Gertrude loved him; but what was such a love to him *now?* His whole heart and hope were bound up in Sybil. He knew not, he could not know, a second affection. It was too late to shrink before the dread of giving pain to another; his existence was on the die; and his path, though it might be difficult, was plain.

I am aware that my hero will disappoint more than one of my readers; I early vaunted both his mental and moral qualities; I drew a glowing picture alike of his heart and head; and yet I have suffered him to fail under his first trial. I have, however, no apology to make—I am simply relating a tale of every-day life, in which all the actors are human; and did I venture to paint a perfect mortal, I should but caricature my fellow-beings.

It is possible that Frederic might have successfully withstood every other weakness, every other snare, laid for him by his own passions and prejudices; but in Sybil he had unfortunately encountered the arbitress of his destiny. He believed that she loved him passionately, because unwillingly; and that belief fostered his peculiar failing.

Nevertheless he was still the warm-hearted, affectionate, and generous being whom I formerly depicted—as upright as honorable, and as right-minded as ever; but he had learned to view most things through a species of moral prism, which distributed its tints according to his own morbid feelings. His passion for Sybil had colored all his thoughts; and, in short, he was as he himself expressed it, no longer master of his own impulses. His affection for Gertrude still continued, but its nature was changed; she was to him as a dear sister, but no more; her unobtrusive beauty and quiet virtues, when compared with the dazzling loveliness and captivating qualities of Miss Delamere, sank into shade, and were almost negatived; he respected her character, he felt her worth, but his heart refused to ratify the decision of his reason.

Weak, but still worthy, he was conscious of

all the faultiness of his indecision, and pained by the suffering which it had induced, although incapable of sacrificing his own dream of happiness in order to mitigate its effects; and it was consequently, with deep feeling that he again took the hand of his cousin, as he said,—

"I accept the friendship so frankly offered, Gertrude; and in return I tender you the fondest affection of a brother. I know all your worth; perhaps I only appreciate its full value too late; but of this it is vain to speak. I throw myself upon your kindly offices. No one has more influence over my mother than yourself; exert that influence in my behalf. I fear that what you have to tell, and to defend, will wound her deeply; but she loves me, and will forgive all, if you become my advocate. May the day arrive in which I am enabled to repay your goodness! Believe me, I shall know how to be eloquent, when your happiness is to reward my exertions."

The pale cheek of Gertrude flushed for an instant. She could offer no reply to such an assurance, feeling as she did that for her, henceforward the word happiness would be a mere empty sound. She simply clasped the hand of her cousin in her own, and ratified by a look the promise she had already made.

She had scarcely done this when Mrs. Mortimer re-entered the apartment; a happy smile was upon her lips, and words of self-gratulation were ready to burst forth; for she believed that her absence had enabled Frederic to compensate to his cousin for all her past sufferings; but the light faded from her eye, and the congratulations died upon her tongue as she approached them: it was at once evident that both would be ill-timed; a conviction which was strengthened by the fact, that as she had appeared, her son hastily seized his hat, and hurried from the room.

"Gertrude!" she exclaimed anxiously; "What is the meaning of this? Can it be possible that Frederic has again deceived me?"

But Gertrude's strength was now exhausted; and she could only bury her face upon her tapestry-frame, and give free vent to the bitter tears of humiliation and blighted hope.

For an instant Mrs. Mortimer stood aghast; she could not mistake the nature of the emotion upon which she looked. It was evident that this was no outpouring of an oppressive happiness, which sought to relieve itself in a passionate burst of feeling; there was no struggling smile to reveal the latent joy; no effusion of affectionate tenderness towards herself to challenge her ready sympathy. She saw at once that the cold drops which trickled through the slender fingers were wrung from the heart's sorrow; and forgetting for an instant all the devoted love which she bore towards her son, she attempted at once to console her niece, and to relieve her own feelings, by giving loose to the indignant anger which his vacillating conduct had awakened in her generous spirit.

Only for a moment, however, did the noble girl suffer the outbreak of her irritation to have way. Rousing herself by a powerful effort, she lifted her pale face from its resting-place, and dashing away the tears which still crowded into her dim eyes, she hastened to declare that the blame of all that had occurred rested solely with herself; that her own vanity, her own weakness, had alone led to this distressing scene that her cousin had deceived himself in believing for a time that he could love her, and he frankly and truthfully declared his error before it had become a source of misery to both parties; that she had seen the folly and madness of her pretensions; and that, henceforward, she should regard him only as a brother.

Mrs. Mortimer listened in grief and admiration; but she was not to be misled. Throughout her whole life Gertrude had been to her an affectionate and confiding child, and she knew every impulse, and every emotion of the young pure heart which was now bleeding before her. She felt that the victim had been bound by her own hands to the horns of the altar; and although the soft voice murmured "Peace! peace!" there was no peace in the stricken spirit of the anxious mother.

"I see it all!" she exclaimed, in a hard, cold tone, utterly unlike the usual softness of her affectionate accents: "But Frederic deceives himself, as he has deceived me, if he hopes ever to obtain my consent to such a measure. I, you, my child, I can say nothing which would express my admiration of your generous and self-sacrificing conduct; but it shall not avail. He has acted unworthily in an unworthy cause. He has wounded me to the heart; smitten in my best affections; taught me to blush for the son who was at once my pride, and the hope of my old age. And for whom? For an adventurer, surrounded by mystery, and probably by disgrace; a woman hacknied in the world's ways, from whom he should have shrunk with the intuitive loathing of an honest heart; for a fiend who has brought dissension and sorrow into the bosom of his family. You plead in vain, Gertrude. He may be insensible to your affection, blind to your merits, incapable of appreciating your virtue; but he shall never disgrace the memory of his father, by bestowing in his name upon one who is unworthy to bear it."

"He loves her, my dear aunt."

An expression of cold contempt settled upon the fine features of Mrs. Mortimer.

"He has avowed to me," resolutely pursued Gertrude amid her sobs; "that his happiness depends upon Miss Delamere. Reflect upon this acknowledgment, I beseech of you. *His* happiness—the happiness of your beloved and only son. And can you wonder that it should be so? Remember her beauty, her wit, her marvellous acquirements; and confess that few indeed would be able to resist them. Forget me, and all that you had devised when thinking only of my weak attachment: Frederic is no longer a mere youth to be thralled by the force of habit; he has looked into his own heart, and felt the inefficiency of such a tie. Confess, too, my dear aunt, that I am nothing beside so brilliant a being as Sybil; I have long felt this truth, and it is one to which you cannot remain insensible. Let us forget the past; your affections and my gratitude will alike enable us to do this—in time."

I will hear no more," said Mrs. Mortimer, she rose from her seat. "The dream of my life is over; but I have still the authority which nature has given to the parent over the child. Frederic must choose between his mother and his mistress. Of your hand he has ceased to be worthy; but should he bestow his own upon the manœuvring woman by whom he is now surralled, he ceases to be my son."

Oh, in mercy revoke that cruel sentence, mother dear, dear aunt!" gasped out the affrighted girl, flinging herself upon her knees, and impeding the retreat of the excited mother. "Think of the hours of affection, of anxiety, of joy which you have passed together—think how his father loved him—have pity upon me who love him still!"

Mrs. Mortimer bent over the trembling suppliant at her feet, and pressed her pale lips to the still paler forehead which was upraised to meet them, but she did not swerve from her resolution. She felt that she had been made the tool and dupe of Mrs. Delamere; that she had been deceived by Frederic; and that she was the architect of her niece's misery. Her heart was wrung, and her pride was wounded. She had been so long accustomed to regard her son as being superior to his fellow men, that she could not brook this sudden dispersion of all her cherished illusions; and it was with a firm step and a tearless eye that she at length, supported by her indignation, and strengthened by the spectacle of Gertrude's wretchedness and heroism, passed into the library, and desired a servant to request the immediate presence of Mr. Mortimer.

The summons was, however, fruitless, for Frederic had already left the house.

CHAPTER X.

On quitting his cousin, the first impulse of Mortimer had simply been to absent himself for a time from home, until the influence of Gertrude had enabled her to reconcile his mother to his change of purpose. Ill at ease, and anxious, despite the evidence of his senses, to believe that the attachment of his cousin, of which he could no longer entertain a doubt, was the mere idle caprice of a young girl, who had for the first time been brought into contact with an individual of the opposite sex, he, however, no sooner found himself once more alone, than his thoughts reverted to Sybil. Sybil would not so readily have transferred her claim to another had his hand been pledged to her; but Sybil knew how to love and to love deeply. Her every word and look betrayed her. Had she not been all enthusiasm and frankness so long as she believed him to be free? And had not a sudden coldness and reserve succeeded to the knowledge of his betrothment? True, she had said, and repeated on many occasions, that she would never marry; but had he not as often smiled at a declaration in which he placed no faith? And was he not now justified in this incredulity?

He mentally reviewed all their late interviews, and at first he persuaded himself that there could be no doubt of her affection; but gradually he became less convinced of the fact. She was so beautiful, so full of mind and intellect—at once so fascinating and so accomplished, that it appeared presumptuous to believe that such a being could pass through the world's paths, as she had evidently done, calm and unfettered, merely to suffer herself at last to be won by the love of so obscure an individual as himself. She had, perhaps acted strangely and inconsistently at their last meeting, but who should say what dormant memories the announcement of his approaching marriage might have awakened? She had confessed to a former attachment; and was it not possible that the intelligence which he so abruptly imparted to her had struck some hidden chord which had for a time ceased to vibrate in her heart; and that thus her change of mood and manner might in no way bear upon her feeling for himself?

The suspicion was torture, and the cold drops stood upon the brow of Frederic as it became stronger every instant. Should this indeed be so, idly had he wounded the affection and pride of his mother, vainly had he tortured the sensibility of his cousin, cruelly had he deceived himself.

Any conviction, however bitter, was preferable to such an uncertainty, and in five minutes more, Frederic was galloping recklessly towards The Grange.

Great was his astonishment and dismay on perceiving that the hall was encumbered with trunks and packages, which a couple of servants were engaged in cording and heaping one upon the other; and still more utter was his despair, when he learnt that almost immediately after his departure, Miss Delamere had desired that the travelling carriage might be in readiness early on the following morning, to convey her mother and herself to the coast, where they were to embark for the continent.

The brain of Mortimer whirled, and his pulses throbbed with emotion. What could this mean? It was evident that the project was a sudden one, since no leave-taking had been contemplated. Could anything have happened in which the happiness or safety of Sybil was involved? Was he to lose her just as he had discovered that she had become necessary to his existence? Should she not, in such a case have at once appealed to him, for support and assistance? And yet how could she throw herself upon the protection of a man who had just declared to her that he was to become the husband of another? Mortimer was bewildered by rapidly conflicting feelings, and at length, scarcely conscious of the indiscretion of his conduct, he inquired of one of the busy servants the cause of Mrs. Delamere's sudden departure.

"I cannot say, Sir," was the unsatisfactory reply; "but I don't think it's a pleasure party, any way, for my young mistress looked dull enough, when she gave me her orders, and seemed as if she'd much ado to keep her tears down."

Sybil *was* unhappy, then! And once more Frederic began to connect this sudden grief with his communication of the morning, and to feel

convinced that the intention of this abrupt journey was to avoid himself, and if this, indeed, were so, they might never meet again. Such an apprehension was too painful to be borne; and, without further hesitation, he traversed the hall and entered the morning room, resolved to learn the truth from the lips of Sybil herself.

Great, consequently, was his disappointment, when he found it occupied only by Mrs. Delamere, who sat in the accustomed chair, in the accustomed attitude, listlessly looking upon the open pages of a volume from which it was evident that she did not imbibe a single idea; and this languid and impassible object, jarring as it did upon the excited nerves of Mortimer, was ill calculated to calm his agitation.

"Ha! is that you, Mr. Mortimer?" yawned the lady, depositing the book upon a table near her; "I am glad you are come. Sybil is busy in her own room. We leave this to-morrow morning early."

"Shall you be absent long?" asked Frederic, with a cold thrill at his heart.

"I don't know; Sybil settled it all. I hate travelling, but she said we must go;" and she turned uneasily among her cushions.

"You have received no unpleasant news, I trust?"

"No, I believe not; but Sybil knows best. It is her own arrangement; I suppose she is tired of The Grange."

Tired of The Grange! Miss Delamere tired of The Grange! How bitter was the inference! But the very excess of his mortification gave Frederic courage to pursue his inquiries.

"You are not about to take a very long journey, I hope?"

"I really can't say; I fancy Sybil has not quite made up her mind, for when I asked the same question, she merely said, 'Anywhere; she did not care where we went, if we got away from this neighborhood for a time.'"

And as Mrs. Delamere closed her eyes with an expression of fatigue after so unusually lengthy a speech, the blood rushed to the brow of her auditor, and a proud smile rose instinctively to his lip.

All was clear; Sybil loved him, and *feared* to remain where she must so soon encounter him as the husband of Gertrude. The post arrived at Westrum before noon, and consequently it was certain that no intelligence of importance could have reached The Grange through that medium since he had left it in the morning. On his arrival, he had been received with smiles, and greeted with the tidings of a projected party of pleasure; it was only after he had told his tale that the brow of Sybil had grown dark, and her tone cold. And now she sought to avoid him.

Frederic was no coxcomb, but the inference was too palpable to be mistaken. This fatal departure might be prevented—must be prevented; for was he not now free to pour out all his spirit before the idol of his heart? Gertrude had relinquished her claim to his hand, and was even now reconciling his mother to the transfer of his affections; that mother loved him, and would never perseveringly oppose his happiness—and Sybil! Sybil, by the very excess of her delicacy, by the very terror of betraying secret, had convinced him that her affect were his own. The moment of inaction consequently past. He had merely sought love of Sybil tacitly; it now remained for to ask it.

He turned once more to Mrs. Delamere:

"And Sybil—Miss Delamere—Where is she?"

His companion had recourse to her other tle, for this pertinacity overpowered her. was so little accustomed to do the honors o conversation, that she sank under the pre tax upon her energies, and it was almost tishly that she replied; "I really don't kn I believe in her room. You can ring the and inquire of her maid."

Frederic hastened to obey, and the ser who answered the summons returned ac panied by the Abigail, who, with a compl heightened by the hurry of her arrange informed the anxious visitor that her mi had a short time previously walked int grounds.

With a hasty bow, Mortimer left the and started in pursuit of the fair wand but he traversed the conservatories, and e every temple and grotto in vain,—Miss lamere was no where to be seen. At leng almost in despair of finding her, and half ter to believe that he had been misled, he pl into a small dense thicket, which skirts the property, and ere long he discovered Sybil seated under the shadow of an ilex, with her head pillowed on her hand, and her face nearly hidden by the dark and luxuriant masses her hair, which had escaped from the comb that habitually confined it and now fell abo her shoulders to the ground.

For a moment he stood motionless—fi in admiration and astonishment. It was the first occasion upon which he had seen the brilliant Sybil in tears; and now he detected the large drops slowly trickling through her fingers. The careless *abandon* of her attitude, a the secluded spot which she had chosen in order to conceal her grief from other eyes, also told a tale of deep and bitter suffering; and his heart beat quicker as the conviction grew upon him that he should soon be privileged to dry those tears, and to turn that grief to gladness. Yet still he lingered. He could imagine the faultless face now so effectually concealed while the graceful figure, touched here and there by the straggling sun-rays, which flickered through the leaves above her head, was so beautiful in its unconscious harmony of attitude, that was only by an effort he could resolve upon breaking so bright a spell.

His step was noiseless upon the moss-grown turf, and thus he reached her side before she was aware of his approach; nor even then did she stir eye or limb until Mortimer, gently bending over her, whispered her name.

"*You* here!" she exclaimed, as she landed from the earth, and dashed away the moisture from her long lashes. "What can Mr. Mortimer come here to seek?"

"Your love, Sybil—your coveted at priceless love!" was the impassioned reply. "I have struggled in vain to obey you—to satisfy

yself with your friendship—to immolate the ppiness of my whole life to a distasteful and doreed duty: I cannot do it, Sybil,—I had cerrated my powers of endurance. You must len to me, and love me, or my existence will hceforth be a blank. You are about to leave lgland, but that step, extreme and cruel as it shall avail you nothing; I will follow you to end of the earth; I will be proof alike ainst your coldness and your disdain. Till I rt you I was at peace; what I am now is ur own work, and you must abide the result your fascinations. Sybil, my precious Sybil, all I sue in vain!"

As the last words escaped his lips, the knee of Artimer bent before Miss Delamere, and her hid was clasped in his. He saw not the proud ad triumphant gleam which for an instant psed over her features, for before he again rsed his eyes to her face, all was once more cn and cold, and passionless.

Why are you silent, Sybil?" he pursued wh increasing emotion. "One word—I ask b for one—to be the most happy or the most nerable of men,—and you will deny it to n!"

What can I say!" asked Miss Delamere in aow murmur, but still without withdrawing h hand. "I know you only as the betrothed oyour cousin. From the first hour of our aquaintance I was aware of your engagement. I ave ever looked upon you as one no longer fr to act, or even to feel, beyond a certain wl-defined boundary. How then, could I love y, or seek your love! I am no idle girl who sc a suitor in every civil stranger, and an awal upon every courtly lip. My affections li not so near the surface that they may be wng or sported with by every touch of accid or vanity;—and I have told you more th once my steadfast purpose to resist all bdishments which might tend to peril my lirty of thought and affection."

I have no faith in such resolves," said Frederk doggedly, as he rose unbidden from her fe

Were we two temper-chafed children," obsed Miss Delamere, lifting her large luminoeyes to his with a smile so beautiful that it mht have maddened an anchorite; "I might rert by telling you that I placed as little dependence upon the vacillating affection which hs hovered for months between two different objects, and was at length only decided by impue. Nay, now you are angry," she contned with another beaming look; "I had no intation to offend you, nor as a rational and thking woman, shall I reply to you in such te as. No, Mr. Mortimer, for it behooves us bo, at such a moment as this, to be just to ourelves and to each other. It is my departure frc The Grange which has hurried you into thstrange, and forgive me if I add, unwarrantab step which you are now taking. Your hai is not your own, for it has been promised; ev your heart is no longer in your gift, for it is dged; and I am not one likely to dispute eit r. It is true that I am about to leave Englan It was my intention to have written my farrell to your family this evening; the courtesy which I have received from your mother and yourself demanded this consideration, after which, all would have been at an end between us. A year ago the existenee of the one was utterly unknown to the other,—a year hence it would have been to each simply a passing and a pleasant memory; why do you seek to render it otherwise?"

"Sybil," said Frederic, as his whole frame shook with emotion; "you can no longer deceive me with mere words. It is not your heart that speaks. I will not, I dare not believe that you are a vain and passionate coquette, who has wiled away a few heavy hours in ensuring my misery—and this I must believe, or be assured that I have ceased to be indifferent to your peace."

"You are bold, sir," said Sybil haughtily, as she raised her tall figure to its full height, and prepared to turn away.

"I *am* bold," acquieseed her companion, clasping her arm in order to intercept her retreat; "I *am* bold, Sybil, for I am desperate. Only a few hours back, conscious that I could not live without your affection, I threw myself upon the generosity of my cousin, and she liberated me from my engagement."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Miss Delamere energetically; "Gertrude Mortimer may be cold and self-centered, but she was secure of your hand, and it is not possible that she could renounce her right."

Once more the brow of Frederic cleared, and his eye gleamed with delight! "I thank you for the doubt," he said tenderly; "it tells me all I sought to know. And you *will* love me, Sybil, will you not? For I swear to you that I am free."

"And your mother?" murmured his listener.

"Gertrude has undertaken to convince her that she had mistaken us both, and to prepare her to receive another and a dearer daughter."

"And yet this must not be," said Miss Delamere, as suddenly perceiving the disarray of her magnificent hair, she stooped and raised the comb which lay at her feet, and twisted the scattered tresses into a luxuriant knot on the summit of her small and graceful head; "Such a proceeding would be neither delicate nor generous. Even supposing that I had been weak enough to suffer my feelings to overcome not only my reason, but also a resolution formed years ago, I could not consent to build up my happiness upon the misery of another; or forget that the preferenee which would enable me to do so, could only have originated in a transitory fancy, too soon to be dispelled. The contest between Gertrude Mortimer and myself would be alike idle and unnatural. She is yet upon the very threshold of womanhood; her heart is an uninscribed tablet, save where your name has been written; she is beautiful; and, like the sensitive plant, retires before a touch. She has never trod the stony paths of the world, and been galled by their roughness; she is very woman in all that is womanly; needing care, and affection, and support. Remember, too, that it is to you that she has looked for these from her childhood; and that she has a right to claim them as the inheritance of your father's affec-

tion; and then, having reflected upon all this, reverse the picture, Frederic, and look on me"—

For a moment she paused, as if for some disclaimer from her companion, but he continued resolutely silent. For the first time Sybil had addressed him by his Christian name; and his triumph at discovering how rapidly and involuntarily she was betraying the state of her own heart, made him fear to trust himself with a word, lest he should afford her an opportunity of resuming her self-possession.

"I am not about to provoke an idle and ill-timed compliment," she pursued with a stifled sigh; "I seldom speak of myself; and when I am compelled to do so, heartily despise the flattery which mortifies me by the conviction of my own egotism. I am aware that nature has not been a niggard to me: I have been told the contrary too often to affect a childish ignorance of my personal advantages. But more than these are required to ensure domestic happiness. The flower that blossoms in a day too frequently fades on the morrow. Do you understand the metaphor? You have known your cousin from her birth—I am the mere acquaintance of a few brief months."

"They have comprised all of my existence which I care to remember," broke in Frederic impetuously.

Miss Delamere thanked him by a look—and such a look!

"Every action, almost every thought, of your cousin, has been revealed to you. Of me you know nothing, save that I exist, and stand beside you."

"I ask nothing from the past—all from the future."

"With me the timidity of girlhood has given place to a decision of character which the world loves to criticise, although it is its own work. I have my own principles, my own prejudices, my own peculiarities; and, worse than all, I need no guidance, no support; I can choose my own path, and follow it."

"Only let us tread it together," whispered Frederic, as he pressed his lips to the hand that rested on his arm.

"You are incorrigible," murmured Sybil, in a tone which betrayed her innate gratification; "but you must, nevertheless, listen to reason."

"I will listen to anything from your lips."

"But, having so done, you will not have done all: you must act as well as hearken. Mrs. Mortimer will never consent to receive me as her daughter. Where *you* feel, *she* will reflect. You know what have been her plans; and she is no longer young. In our early years we content ourselves with flowers, when we find that we cannot, as we begin by hoping to do, grasp the stars; but maturity and age are more tenacious of their projects; their aspirations are more rational and practicable; and, accordingly, they abandon them with less carelessness. I cannot condescend to be merely received on sufferance in any family."

"Sybil, dear Sybil, your delicacy is morbid; is misplaced. My mother already admires and esteems you; and she will no sooner become convinced that you have my happiness in your keeping, than she will learn to love you as her own child."

"Do not deceive yourself, my friend," said Sybil playfully; "that Mrs. Mortimer admires me—perhaps! She listens to my harp, applauds my singing, prizes my sketches of your dear old house—so much, indeed, unfortunately, that I have scarcely been able to reserve one for myself——"

"When you are its mistress, and that I can spare you for so long a time, you shall sketch it from all points."

"Nay, if you interrupt me every instant, I shall despair of making you understand my meanimg," said Sybil gently. "That she does all this I admit at once; but esteem!—oh, believe me! that I shall never be esteemed by Mrs. Mortimer, if I thwart her plans; though I should present myself, with my genealogical tree in one hand, and the whole history of my past life in the other."

"You have but to present yourself as my affianced bride, and that shall suffice."

"Four yourself I doubt not; and I thank you that you at least are satisfied to take me upon trust; but I have carefully studied the character of your mother. Gentle and womanly as she is, she is capable of firm and strong determination. From your earliest boyhood she had resolved upon your union with your cousin; and she will not, trust me, revoke her purpose."

"I am no longer a boy, and I have refused consent to this hateful marriage. Am I not free to act as I deem best, and to secure my happiness according to my own ideas?"

"Undoubtedly, but you are unstable. In either side there must be a struggle. Let me play the monitor for once. Support it in the worthiest and most prudent phase. Fulfil the wishes of Mrs. Mortimer; and let us part."

"And this is your advice?"

"Is it not that which I should offer? Better far better to be the victim of my own sense of right, than of another's scorn!"

"And is the strife of feeling then confined only to yourself and to my mother?"

"Not so—Oh, no! not so," said Sybil with emotion: "I do not for an instant forget your cousin. Poor girl! so young, so beautiful, and yet so wretched!"

"I spoke not of Gertrude," said Mortimer impatiently. "I ventured to believe that I, too, might have been remembered when you talked of the victims to be immolated upon the shrine of exaggerated sentiment and overstrained delicacy. But enough of this, dear Sybil; cease to imagine that, by rejecting my affection, you restore me to my cousin, for all is over between us. I might have loved her had I never known Sybil Delamere, but she is aware that it is now impossible; and I little understand her nature if she would condescend to accept the hand where she was conscious that the heart was withheld. Spurn my affection, if, indeed, such be your will; but I swear to you that you will never be the husband of another. Leave the Grange, if you still persist in your purpose, but wander where you may, I will pursue you while I have life."

This is truly 'Midsummer madness,' Frederi' replied Miss Delamere; "however, thus mch I concede—our journey shall be delayed."

For *my* sake, Sybil!" asked Frederic, as he exnded his hand.

For *your* sake, if you will have it so," was th reply; and the small fingers of the lady reed for an instant on the outstretched palm ofer suitor: "But build up no vain hopes upon th concession," she continued laughingly; "for I a not yet convinced—nor won."

How then shall I win you? Teach me, and I ll be a docile pupil."

Nay, I know not," said the lady almost pensi ly. "How gloriously the sun is setting!" sh continued abruptly. "He is a grand painte I often think that could I transfer a few of the mixed tints to the canvass upon my easel, I ould feel as Pygmalion must have done wn he saw the produce of his chisel live and bathe."

por Gertrude! She too loved to gaze upon thsetting sun, but she never mixed up herself ar her own vain triumphs with the glory upon wch she looked.

CHAPTER XL

long as the intoxication produced by the prence of Sybil continued to exert its influence, evy feeling and every thought of Mortimer we absorbed by the one loved object; and it w only when he had reluctantly taken his depaure from The Grange that he once more beca keenly alive to the irksome and painful nare of the interview which awaited him with hi mother. He well knew how devotedly she lod him, and how trustingly she had looked to s affection as the prop and blessing of her oage; and the tears sprang to his eyes as he aditted to himself how great must now be her dipointment.

hose tears were, however, not the bitter, and toften infructuous drops of repentance; they ro only before the impulse of genuine filial affeon. His manhood rebelled at the mental anmoral coercion to which he had been subjed, it is true; but his affection for his mother reained undiminished. She had only sought tocure his happiness; but she had failed by neecting to remember that human nature, even thest faulty, revolts at a control which sedefails to defeat its own object; and by beliing that her idolized son was exempt from alhe errors of his fellow-men.

here she had taught herself to expect perfeon, she was shocked at the slightest indicatio of mortal frailty; and where the failure wone which involved not only his own consisney, but also the happiness of another, and thvill of his dead father, the blow was heavier th she could bear.

sad conviction that such must be the case trelled with Frederic to his home; and how dry seemed the venerable house, which had tilow been ever lighted up by the beams of hi wn sunny heart! Once his breast bounded as e passed its threshold, but now all appeared wrapped in gloom—Sybil was not beneath its roof—Sybil, the enchantress, whom he was to win through tears, reproaches, and regrets!

But Frederic deceived himself. The spirit of his mother was crushed within her. She had no longer energy for reproach. All her remaining strength of purpose was concentrated upon one point. The heart-dream of Gertrude was dispelled for ever; and she must aid her in the wretched task of smiling at her own misery. The illusion which had taught her to look upon her son as a being made up of all that was great and good, without one failing to cast a shadow over the brightness of his character, was gone; and she meekly bowed her spirit before the bitterness of a life-long disappointment; but still there remained one pang to be inflicted, to which she was keenly and sensitively alive, and with which she was threatened, it is true, but against which she firmly determined to contend.

Thus when Frederic entered her presence, she received him sadly but tenderly. His fault had been the offspring of a few months, but her love had been the growth of years; and the heart weeps long ere its crimson tide is exhausted.

"I have seen Gertrude," were her first words, after she had welcomed him; "and she has related to me all the substance of the morning's conversation. You are free, my son, to act as you think best regarding your cousin. I could have wished it otherwise, but happiness is not our lot in this world. She has acted, as she ever does, with a noble self-abnegation which makes me proud of the adopted daughter I have reared; and cannot permit myself to muamur when she is silent. Suffice it, then, that I shall never again intrude this subject upon you. Better, far better, that you should reject the hand of such a being at once, then receive it only to involve both her and yourself in one common misery. She is too good, to loving, to be flung by like an outworn toy: and this feeling is my best and only consolation under a serious disappointment."

"Believe me, my dear mother," said Frederic, at once touched and astonished at the calm and self-possessed manner of his mother; "that as I once before assured you, Gertrude and I are totally unsuited to each other."

"Say rather," was the reply, "that your means of happiness were made too easy by my want of judgment. I did not understand you, my dear boy; I should have created difficulties, invented doubts, and discovered inconveniences, in a marriage with your cousin; but it is now too late to repent the past; and I have no intention of pressing the matter further."

"Did you know, or could you guess, how much I feel in thus thwarting your wishes, you would understand that no such puerile cause has dictated my conduct," urged Mortimer earnestly; "I do assure you that I act only upon conviction."

"May you never have cause to discover your mistake, but I confess that I do not hope so much," was the rejoinder of Mrs. Mortimer. "Remember, Frederic, that marriage is the most important step hazarded by either man or woman; that it is no transitory speculation which

may be annulled when its fallacy is proved by a life-long venture, from which there is no honorable mode of escape, and which must decide the whole tenor of your after-existence. Thus then, it behoves you to look well to its probable result; neither to contract an engagement hastily, nor to suffer yourself to be deluded by a few social accomplishments, or personal fascinations. You do not marry for the world, but for your home; and the woman who dazzles the most in society is frequently the least calculated to form the blessing of the domestic circle."

"I admit the truth of your reasoning, my dear mother," said Frederic eagerly; "but surely it is quite possible to meet with one who unites all the necessary qualities to do both. I confess that I could not love a wife who was ineapable of sustaining her just position in society, as well as of performing her home duties; and I am exacting enough to require that mine should be equal to either emergency."

Mrs. Mortimer sighed deeply, but made no reply.

"Nay more," pursued her son; "I consider it only due to you to declare, without reserve or hesitation, that I have every reason to hope and to believe that I have found that one."

"Do you allude to Miss Delamere?" asked his mother coldly.

"I do. Sybil is the very being to realise every wish and every dream of my heart; and I believe that she loves me. Will you not, then, my dear mother, receive her with the affection which alone can render my marriage perfectly happy?"

"Has she told you frankly who she is, and what is her real position in the world?" demanded Mrs. Mortimer, with the same resolute composure which she had maintained throughout the whole of this trying conversation.

"She has not; but I am alone to blame, if blame there be. I would not insult her by a doubt, and I declined the confidence."

"And she permitted you to do so?"

"She simply yielded to my desire. Satisfied that she is all that is good, and pure, and high-minded, I had little curiosity to pry into the past."

Mrs. Mortimer sank back in her chair, and buried her face in her hands. She was about to make a mighty effort, and her composure was rapidly giving way; suddenly, however, she roused herself, forced back the burning tears which were endeavoring to escape, and looking steadily at her son, said sadly but firmly,—

"And can it really be true, Frederic, that you would introduce into the home of your ancestors, and the heart of your mother, a woman of whom you know absolutely nothing? — a handsome adventurer, whose wiles have overmatched your frankness?—a syren, who has blinded you to your own honor? And you ask me to look upon so doubtful a person as a daughter—as your wife? If this indeed be so—and I read no denial in your countenance— it behoves *me*, at least, to remember what is due alike to the name I bear and to myself. You are your own master. Should you decide upon placing your happiness and your respectability in the keeping of this ambiguous personage, I have no power to prevent the commission so egregio and dangerous a folly; but if you anticipate n consent and countenance to such a step, a cherish one hope of inducing me to become party to your disgrace—for that disgrace w inevitably result from such an alliance, I hav prophetic conviction—I now, and definitiv declare that you deceive yourself, for tha never will recognize Miss Delamere as daughter, until I am convinced that there ists no passage of her past life that she is an ous to conceal."

"Revoke that sentence, I beseech of you, dear mother!" exclaimed Frederic with stre emotion, as he approached her; but the ener of Mrs. Mortimer was almost exhausted: tears, no longer to be restrained, were falling showers upon her pallid cheeks; and she o retained strength to waive him from her as hurried from the room, exclaiming emphatical "Never!"

She had no sooner reached her own apa ment, and after a passionate fit of weeping l partially recovered her composure, than hitherto proud and happy mother, pressing throbbing temples in her trembling hands, be to reflect with earnest anxiety upon the positi of her son. Every report which had e reached her on the subject of Miss Delamer and the neighborhood had for months been with them—although when they first came her knowledge she had disregarded and almo forgotten them—now recurred vividly to r memory, and increased her alarm. The abr appearance of the mother and the daughter The Grange, unaccompanied by a single re relative or friend, and unprovided with any troductions; the lavish expenditure which ensued; the mystery in which the past histo of the strangers was enveloped; the cont exercised by the younger lady, her unquest able authority over the establishment, and e self-sufficing independence of her character all conspired to terrify Mrs. Mortimer, and o fill her with the most painful apprehensions

Where Frederic saw only single-hearted ss and enthusiastic feeling, his mother discov'd cold and worldly calculation; and while he lieved that he had won the love of Sybil ag st the dictates of her own reason, she felt convinced that he was the victim of a system f conduct as clever as it was premeditated.

Had Miss Delamere been a young and ix perienced girl, she might have felt incline to judge her less harshly; but Mrs. Mortimer id no difficulty in deciding that, despite all the ls of dress and manner, Sybil was at least the e al of Frederic in years, and much his senio in knowledge of the world; and that she ha re this become aware how often the heart w h might have resisted mere personal beauty, ay be won by the wiles of coquetry, and the ver tion of worldly wisdom.

The bloom and loveliness of youth can ot, under any circumstances, lose their charm; ut it is nevertheless certain, that a pure-mi ed girl never appears to less advantage than wen she is conscious of a passion which her intuve sense of propriety and modesty teaches h to conceal. There is an awkwardness in sinre

rection which even leads its possessor to over-
k her part; she shuns and repels where she
ould fain attract; she affects coldness where
r heart yearns to pour out its whole treasure
feeling; and she looks and moves in opposi-
n to her own secret impulses. The woman
the world is, on the contrary, ignorant of all
se moral refinements. Her words and ac-
ns are weighed and calculated; she is ever
dy to enhance her own advantages, both of
nd and person; her whole deportment is
gulated upon a given principle; she has a
rpose to accomplish, and she works steadily
ward towards its realization; her tears and
r smiles are alike subservient to her will; she
n adapt herself to every mood and to every
cessity; for her the romance of life is over,
d its realities alone remain.

Thus reflected Mrs. Mortimer; and with bit-
ness of spirit she felt how unequal was the
ntest between her own gentle and pure-mind-
Gertrude and the world-taught Sybil; and
w equally ill-calculated was the frank and
nfiding nature of her son to resist the bland-
ments of so accomplished an actress.

Not once did she suffer herself to believe it
ssible that she might, by these conclusions,
ong Miss Delamere; she remembered the
illiant fortune which Frederic had inherited
m his father, and she felt convinced that
erein lay the whole secret of her affection.
is true that the style of living adopted at
e Grange far outweighed that of her own
ablishment; but this profusion had only been
e work of a few months, and might terminate
abruptly as it had commenced. None knew
source, and none could consequently decide
its permanency: like every thing else con-
cted with Sybil it was a mystery, and con-
quently suspicious.

Turn whither she would Mrs. Mortimer found
reposing place for her spirit; all her associa-
ns with the past, and all her visions for the
ture, were alike destroyed. The home of
ace had once more become a house of mourn-
g, and she felt desolate even beside her own
arth.

CHAPTER. XII.

From her solitary chamber Mrs. Mortimer at
ngth proceeded to that of Gertrude; who,
ostrated by the intense emotion which she
d undergone, and the violence which she had
ne to her own feeling while laboring to re-
ncile the mind of her aunt to the views of
ederic, had flung herself upon her bed in an
tony of wretchedness, where the anxious Mrs.
ortimer now found her scorched with incipient
ver, her eyes hard and glossy, and her cheek
shed into a burning crimson.

"My poor, poor girl," she murmured fondly,
she drew a chair near her pillow; "You are
e first victim! But you must forget, or at
ast despise him, Gertrude. Yes; though he
my own son, the child of my hope and of
y age, still do I bid you despise him. He is
longer worthy of love like yours. He can
no longer estimate a pure affection; and your
pride must teach you to overcome an ill-placed
attachment." Gertrude answered only by a
burst of tears.

It is hard, very hard, for a young and pure
heart, which has confided its all of happiness to
the supposed love of an ardent and devoted
suitor, to find itself suddenly cast back upon its
own feelings by some cold worldly calculation,
or some equally unworthy caprice; but to such
a sufferer there is still some consolation left, in
the memory of many, many happy moments,
which even delusive as their promise has ulti-
mately proved, were at least a source of joy
while the illusion lasted, and soothed the self-
respect of the victim; who, conscious that she
was not won unsought, is thus enabled to pay
back scorn, for scorn, where she has strength
of mind to conquer her ill-placed passion.

But even this poor solace was denied to the
stricken and shrinking niece of Mrs. Mortimer.
She had given away her heart unasked, and the
tender had been rejected. The world had no
greater mortification to inflict; life no keener
suffering to endure. She loved, and her love
was despised. She felt that her mission on
earth was ended; and, young as she was, and
possessed of every attribute to adorn and to en-
joy existence, as she felt her temples throb and
her pulses beat with fever, she began to hope
that her overtaxed strength had failed beneath
the mighty effort which she had been called up-
on to make; and that her life was about to be
the forfeit of the struggle.

Alas, poor trembler! she little knew how
much the heart of woman can endure, and still
beat on; she had yet to learn that the bright
face of the sun may be clouded, and the fair
bosom of the earth be draped in pall, the eye of
the sufferer still find force to look upon the
changed aspect of all around it. Her experience
had come early, and was yet imperfect; there
was long and weary years before her to com-
plete the lesson; a lesson which is often car-
ried even to the grave, and never thoroughly
learned.

"That he should hesitate even for an instant
between you!" pursued Mrs. Mortimer with in-
dignation, as she tenderly wiped away the
scorching drops which fell upon the flushed
cheeks of her niece; "I no longer recognise my
son. But I have at once and definitely refused
my sanction to his marriage with that artful
woman at The Grange. No nameless adven-
turer shall lord it under the roof of the Morti-
mers while I live to guard the honor of our
house. Let him marry, if he will, some poor
and honest peasant-girl: bitter as such a trial
would be to me, I think I could support it, when
I knew that she *was* honest. But this woman—
what know we of her? What may we ever
know? And to reflect that such knowledge
might come when it was too late, and that we
had received in our very home a woman whose
name made the virtuous blush and the idle
sneer. No, no—that I could never bear. Dear
as he is to me, I would rather look upon him in
a coffin, and follow him to the vault of his an-
cestors; for he would then lie there undishonor-
ed, as the son of such a father *must* do."

And overcome by the vision which she had conjured up, the afflicted mother bent her face over that of her suffering niece, and their tears were mingled upon the pillow.

"May you not wrong her by these suspicions, my dear aunt?" gasped out Gertrude after a pause too painful for endurance: "Remember that we know absolutely nothing of these strangers, who may perhaps have been less reserved to Frederic. Let me conjure you to decide nothing rashly. His happiness the happiness of your only son, the child of your deep and untiring love, is at stake. Oh, let me implore you to be cautious; I know too well the misery of a blighted hope; spare alike him and yourself, for you, oh! how could you bear to see him fade away before your eyes, a withered and a wretched thing, careless of all save the grave to which he would be hastening?"

Mrs. Mortimer made no reply. In common with most other persons of gentle disposition and equal temper, it required some serious cause to rouse her into indignation and firmness; but the cause once in existence, her whole nature underwent a startling change. This was the first great trial of her life, for sorrow had touched her lightly, and had come only in the softening and inevitable course of natural events; and thus the whole force of her garnered-up powers of resolution and moral endurance were brought simultaneously into action, unshorn of any of their strength.

Proud of the name she bore, and of the son whom she loved so tenderly, she saw her best feelings attacked in their very citadel, and she armed herself in their defence with a jealous earnestness which rendered her deaf to all the reasonings of her more indulgent and forgiving niece; nor was the spectacle of that niece's suffering calculated to make her swerve from her purpose.

The appeal of Gertrude had, indeed, dried her tears, but it had effected no change in her resolution. Frederic had disappointed and outraged her affection; and this she felt that she must bear as best she might; but that he should dishonor alike himself and her, she was resolved never to permit, so long as her will maintained its influence over his mind. Thick sobs rose to her throat, and shook her whole frame, but she disregarded this physical struggle, and thought only of the moral evil with which she was threatened.

Thus, the enterview produced no comfort to either; for Gertrude bowed beneath her own sorrows, and bewildered by the sudden change in her hitherto gentle and placid protectress, did not venture again to plead a cause which ensured her own misery, but remained with closed eyes and trembling heart, a prey to rapidly-increasing illness and sickening dread. Come what might, to her the future was a chaos. Should Frederic obey the injunctions of his mother, and relinquish his suit to Sybil, he would assuredly abandon his home once more, and thus be entirely lost to her; while, wretched as was the alternative, in becoming the husband of Miss Delamere, he would, at least, remain where she could see him, and hear his voice, and be to him as a sister, and he would follow her to the grave for which she pined, and, perhaps, rest her when she was gone. And yet—she shuddered as she reflected upon the price which she must pay for these bitter indulgences, upon the sin of cherishing such feelings, towards the husband of another; and, worse than all, upon the impossibility of conquering a passion which could hope for pardon neither in her own heart nor in those of others.

As she writhed upon her bed of pain, vainly endeavoring to conceal her anguish both of mind and body from her companion, Mrs. Mortimer was aroused by the touch of a burning hand from a reverie into which she had fallen, and turned anxiously to utter some word of entreaty or consolation, when she saw the widely dilated and rigid eyes of the poor sufferer fixed unconsciously upon her, while her cheeks and lips had become as cold and pale as marble, and at once discovered that she was no longer able to give ear to either.

In an agony of terror she rushed to the bell to summon assistance; and ten minutes had scarcely elapsed ere the wild and ringing laughter, and incoherent words of the unhappy girl proclaimed a violent attack of delirium.

The bow, too tightly bent, had sprung from the unnatural tension; the pure and beautiful mind was prostrate, and wild visions were sweeping like impish revellers, across her tortured brain. She was at the bridal of Frederic, she was the handmaiden of the bride, and was attiring her for the altar; the bridal wreath was of roses, but she could not shake away the venomous insects that had nestled themselves among the leaves, and then she writhed and struggled in the arms of the weeping attendants in her efforts to dislodge the hideous intruders, but all was vain; and she flung the garland down, declaring that she could not bind poison about the brow of her cousin's affianced wife.

Then her fingers worked rapidly as she prepared the white and glistening robe; but a new a shade passed over her brow, and anguish closed her eyes, as she declared that it was wet with tears—salt and bitter tears—which fell like corroding drops of iron upon the delicate white lace, and marred its purity; and again she strove to wipe away the stains, and toiled, and writhed her slender limbs into a thousand painful distortions, until exhaustion once more terminated the paroxysm, and she fell back upon her pillow gasping out that she was summoned to her own funeral feast, where she would exchange her wedding-garments for a shroud, and her marriage-veil for a pall of crape.

Even to the beloved voice of her aunt the tortured ear was deaf, and the wrung heart closed; and long ere the arrival of the physician the fever was at its height.

And where was Frederic at this trying moment?

Once more on his way to The Grange, but himself scarcely conscious of the nature of his own intentions. Startled as he had been by the determined and unwonted energy of his mother, he was too thoroughly subjugated by the will of Sybil to be shaken in his purpose, and with the vacillation in which he had latterly indulged, he dreamed of delay, of temporising, of the

ry of some medium of action which might nd to reconcile all the conflicting interests by hich he was surrounded; but the more he eted, the more he became convinced of the pelessness of such a result.

As this conviction grew upon him, he deter ined to make a last appeal to the hitherto un ilding affection and indulgence of his mother, fore he communicated to Miss Delamere the xpected opposition to which he had been bjected; for, strong in his faith in the purity d honor of Sybil, he dreaded her indignation the intelligence, while as an *amende* to Mrs. ortimer for her concession, should she be ought upon at last to comply with his en eaties, he resolved to avail himself of what he nsidered as the implied offer of his mistress, d to accept her revelation of the past, in order at all mystery might be terminated at once.

Cheered by this resolution, he had already rned his horse's head once more towards home hen he heard some one galloping rapidly be hd him, and in another moment a groom in e Delamere livery placed in his hand a note m Sybil. He tore it open. It contained only ew lines, but they sufficed at once to change h intentions.

"Come to me," it said, "I am wretched, and ve much to say. Mamma expects you to din r. Mention no word of this morning's con rsation. She suspects nothing." SYBIL.

There could be no mistake. Miss Delamere s about to volunteer the very confidence hich he had determined to solicit, and thus he uld go doubly armed into the presence of his ended mother, and all difficulties would be ercome. It was only by a violent effort that l could restrain himself from pressing the wel ome paper to his lips, and having made a brief ply to the messenger, he at once struck spurs to his horse and retraced his way towards The Grange.

The dinner-bell rang in vain, and Mrs. Morti er, to her extreme dismay, seated herself at ble alone. Never before had she felt so tho ghly desolate, for hitherto, in the absence of r son, Gertrude had been her companion, and she remembered that one of her children was w stretched upon a bed of sickness, while she d parted from the other in displeasure, her art swelled, and she hurriedly quitted the m to conceal her emotion from the servants. r Frederic's sake alone she had made an effort appear in her accustomed place; and he had ented himself without one attempt at ex nation or excuse; even although, for the first e in their lives, they had exchanged other rds than those of affection.

This, only this, was wanting to complete my retchedness," she murmured to herself, as she e more bent her steps to the chamber of the ering girl; "Now, indeed, my cup of bitter ss is full, for my son's heart is estranged from m!"

CHAPTER XIII.

t was a glorious evening, and the vivid sun bms which were carefully excluded from the sick chamber of Miss Mortimer, were streaming broad and bright over hill and valley, and tin ing all the foliage with a golden glow, when Frederic once more full of hope and confidence, sprang from his saddle at the door of The Grange.

Ardent in all his feelings, his previous depression had been succeeded by a wild and baseless joy, which sparkled in his eyes, and gave an unwonted animation to his whole person. Sybil had told him in her note that she was wretched; and he comprehended at once that this wretchedness had been induced by an instinctive delicacy, which upbraided her for the silence that, in their relative position, was a wrong done to his affection.

Now, therefore, he was about to receive the whole outpouring of her trust, and he congratulated himself upon the chivalrous generosity which had led him to believe in her without proof, and to love her without any other guarantee than her own sweet and guileless nature.

She was alone when he entered the saloon, and in an instant he was at her side, with her hand clasped in his.

"You have summoned me, Sybil, and I am here."

"I thank you," was the calm reply. "After you had left me this morning, I felt that I, at least, had said too much or too little, and that it was expedient we should meet again at once. My proceeding may appear strange to you, but you know the frankness of my nature, and will understand that I am never influenced by the young-lady tactics of common society. This is destroying the romance of our position strangely, is it not, Frederic? But I am aware that I have been to blame, and I am anxious to repair my error."

"Who would not sin to excuse themselves so sweetly? Although I am unconscious of the fault, I am ready to exact the penance."

"Thus, then, in our late conversation, you spoke plainly and undisguisedly, I could not, and I did not affect, to misunderstand you. You offered yourself to me unreservedly, to me of whom you know nothing, save that I have pleased your fancy, and for so much, I will admit, gained your affection. I urged feebly, I fear, but truthfully, my conviction of your mother's disapproval, when I should have done more, when it would have been at once more dignified and more worthy of myself to have concealed my own feelings altogether, and to have assured you at once, and definitively, that with this conviction nothing should induce me to listen to your addresses. Suffer me, therefore, to do this now, and at the same time to assure you of my sincere regret, that I should have allowed you to be misled, even for a few hours, as to my determination. Nay, you must hear me out. I am quite conscious of my debt of obligation to yourself; it is one which, throughout my life, I am never likely to forget, but I am too proud to avail myself of a trust so unbounded, and that same pride—"

"Sybil, you are ungenerous!" exclaimed Frederic. "Was it for this you summoned me? I know not how I have deserved so bitter a disappointment. All the world appear to have conspired against me."

"That is precisely what I apprehended," said Miss Delamere coldly. "You have confided to Mrs. Mortimer our conversation of this morning; and my warning has proved correct."

"And what, though it be so?" was the impetuous reply. "I am dependent upon no one. My mother—even *my* mother, whom I had hitherto been accustomed to consider as the most unselfish and unprejudiced of human beings, may fail me when I calculate upon her affection, but she cannot compel me to sacrifice the happiness of my life to a caprice."

"And may I ask what is the nature of my unworthiness?" asked Sybil, in an accent which, although it was intented to be playful, involved a strong tinge of sarcasm.

Frederic bit his lip and remained silent.

"Nay, nay, be not afraid to meet me with a candor equal to my own," said Miss Delamere pressing his arm sportively. "You will, I am sure, do me the justice to admit that even after I had weakly suffered you to see that my affections were no longer in my own keeping, I urged your mother's cause, and not my own. Surely, then, my feelings merit some consideration."

"You are aware how earnestly she had set her heart upon my marriage with my cousin," observed Frederic at length, conscious that he must offer some reply.

"And was this all?"

"You force me to be unmanly, Sybil; but it is your will, and I must submit. Forgive me, then, if I concede that this was *not* all. My mother does not, cannot know you as I do; her secluded life renders her apprehensive——"

"Rather say suspicious," broke in Sybil haughtily.

"Be it so; you are a stranger to her; and I, Sybil—forgive her when you remember that I am her only child."

"I understand and appreciate all that you would say," was the reply of his companion, as she rose coldly and indignantly from her seat; "Mrs. Mortimer fears to unite her son with probable disgrace. I will relieve her from so painful an apprehension."

"Sybil, Sybil, you will drive me distracted!" exclaimed Mortimer. "Am *I* then, to be the sacrifice of this struggle of misplaced pride? Are no concessions to be made to save *me* from wretchedness?"

"To you, and for you, I should have considered none too great," murmured Miss Delamere, falling back in the chair from which she had just risen, and covering her eyes with her hand, which however, failed to conceal the large tears that streamed thick and fast upon her cheeks; "But I cannot, and I should not, condescend to lend myself to a degradation such as this. Let us part at once: I am inured to suffering, and you will soon learn to forget that I have passed like a dark cloud over the horizon of your life."

"Sybil," said Frederic, almost inarticulately; "If for me you will indeed consent to sacrifice your own feelings, may I not entreat of you to humor my mother in this caprice! Believe me that it does not arise from any doubt of your integrity; it cannot: but from an overweening affection for myself. You can understand and appreciate her anxiety, when you remember that it is to me alone that she must look for support and comfort in her old age. You know, too, how tenderly she loves me. Surely then——"

"It is precisely because I do appreciate and know all this," said Miss Delamere; "that I recal also what is due to my own dignity. Once more, let us part. Like Cæsar's wife, I should not even suffer myself to be suspected."

"You condemn me then remorselessly to wretchedness, Sybil?"

"Do not mistake yourself, Frederic; you will soon overcome a passing disappointment. You were happy before you knew me; you have now only to forget me, and that happiness will be renewed."

"And it is you, Sybil—You, who confess that you have loved,—who tell me this? But true; you have a right to do so—for you, at least have loved, and have forgotten."

"Yes, Mr. Mortimer," was the reply; but the eye of the lady flamed, and her bosom heaved as she listened to the reproach; "I have indeed done this: but shall I tell you how? By proving that I had raised an unworthy object upon the altar of my heart—by finding that the world, the hideous world, with its sordid interests and its vulgar prejudices, had come between me and my idol—by discovering the hands of brass and the feet of clay where I had fondly believed that all was sterling ore. And now blame me if you can, and dare."

"Sybil, you sport with my affection; you wrong my nature; you compel me to play a part unworthy alike of you and of myself. I can no more live without your love henceforth than without the air I breathe, or the earth upon which I tread. Be generous, Sybil, to yourself; and do not sacrifice an affection like mine to a mere overstrained idea of dignity. You have yourself read the character of my mother as though you had known her from your childhood, and thus you cannot feel surprise at her determination. You can have nothing to conceal, nothing to repent; and will you coldly condemn me to pay the penalty of another's error."

"Place yourself for an instant in my position," said Miss Delamere, as the large tears fell slowly upon her cheeks. "What has been my conduct since my arrival in your neighborhood? Have I not borne myself like one conscious of her own character and station? And would you ask me to submit to a degradation fitting only for a person whose antecedents had been suspicious, or at least, suspected? Am I not living under the roof with my own mother? Do we not possess all the habits and attributes of gentlewomen? And is it because a love of retirement has induced us to select a secluded corner of the kingdom as our temporary home, that I am to be insulted by doubts injurious to my honor?"

"Sybil, dear Sybil! believe me——"

"Frederic, I *do* believe you! Would that I had less easily been won to do so; but regrets are now alike idle and unavailing. I will even confess that our estrangement will cause a

pang: but it shall be borne; and, to return nce more to Cæsar for a parallel, I will hide ny head in my mantle, and none shall look up- n the struggle."

Large drops of emotion stood upon the brow f Mortimer as he listened; and when, as if to ender the image more complete, Miss Delamere uried her face amid the cushions of the sofa, nd her quick sobs fell upon his ear, he forgot ll save the syren by whom his very spirit was nthralled; and casting himself at her feet he owed that no earthly power should part them. What was to him home, parent, or the world's mile? She was his home, and his world; and ll beside her image was blotted out and anni- ilated. He covered her hand with burning isses; he besought her to have pity upon his gony; he addressed her by all the endearing ames which love lends to the lips of his vota- ies; he entreated only for one word, one smile; ut for a time Sybil was obdurate. Her pride ad been stung; and she misdoubted the moral ourage of the passionate but unstable suitor hom her beauty had won; nor was it until he agitation of Mortimer had reached its climax hat she again raised her head, and parting the uxuriant hair which clustered about his brow, azed upon him with a sorrowful tenderness hore eloquent than even his own impassioned ords.

There was hope, however, in that look, and rederic sprung from her feet, and clasped her a his arms, exclaiming: "You are mine, Sybil -Deny it not, you are mine! I read it in your yes. You will forget all save my affection. y life shall be one long devotion to your will, he long struggle to secure your happiness. ou know not, you cannot know, how earnestly love you!"

"*He* too, told me all this," murmured Miss elamere, as she suffered her beautiful head to rop upon the shoulder of her impetuous suitor, and yet he failed me in the hour of trial."

"Because he was a coward and a madman," id Frederic tenderly; "Because he knew not d could not estimate the treasure which he ing from him. Why dwell upon the past, with ch a present and such a future, to engage your oughts?"

"And yet he knew me in my bright girlhood," rsued Miss Delamere in the same subdued ice; "every action of my life; every thought my heart. The wild and perhaps absurd am- tion, of being loved only for my own sake, d not yet entered my mind; I was content to , or at least to seem, as others were, the mere vorite of fortune and of the world; and he et me in its sunniest paths, in the full glow youth and triumph. How then can I trust ain?"

"The more readily, because it was only thus knew you, my sweet Sybil," replied her com- nion earnestly. "Had he seen you, as I have ne, in your home, of which you are at once e blessing and the charm, I should have lost e richest prize that ever fell to the lot of man. ou have now, indeed, explained to me all that is hitherto incomprehensible. Tell me only at you no longer love him; I care not to know o he is; nay, I should shrink from such a knowledge, lest I should, even now, and here sully the pure joy of my spirit by a curse. Only assure me that you no longer love him, and I ask no more."

Lovely was the smile with which Miss Delamere replied; for although her lips moved, no sound escaped them. But Mortimer was satisfied; such a smile could beam only upon the one beloved; and as he gazed upon the beautiful face that was upturned to his own, he would not have exchanged his dream of happiness for the most glowing certainty of "waking bliss."

For a few moments they remained gazing steadfastly at each other; but at length, encouraged by the expression of his mistress's countenance, Frederic ventured to draw her more closely to him, and to touch her cheek with his lips. He was not rebuked, although she instantly withdrew herself from his clasp; and the measure of his joy was full.

"And now, Sybil, my own Sybil," he whispered, "let us talk only of ourselves—think only of ourselves; of the long years of bliss which await us, and of our bright prospects for the future."

"Without one reference to the past?"

"What have we to do with the past?" was the eager rejoinder; "For me it is for ever annihilated."

"And have you no curiosity—none—to solve the mighty mystery which was to be to us what the wall was to Pyramus and Thisbe?"

"None; till you care to make it known."

"It shall be then, the first trial of your truth," laughed Miss Delamere; "only pledging myself that you shall one day learn all that I have to tell, and warning you that it will scarcely repay you for the hearing, so infinitely small will be the amount of the revelation. But I will not wrong your generosity by volunteering an autobiography at this precise moment, lest you should suspect that I doubt your faith. Moreover, I shall love to play the coquette for once; and by piquing your curiosity, to keep up your interest in my unworthy self. How know you but I may be after all, a mere *ignis fatuus*, a wandering light, an impalpable form; and that, like Ixion, when you seek to embrace your mistress, you may one day clasp a cloud?"

The reply of Frederic convinced her that he was at least satisfied the illusion was not yet dispelled; and more fascinated than ever by the affectionate and endearing gentleness of his beautiful betrothed, he forgot all the difficulties and annoyances by which he was surrounded, to resign himself wholly to the spell of her fascinations. The dressing-bell rang unheeded; sufficiently adorned by the subdued happiness which was betrayed in her every look and gesture, Sybil felt that she required no added charm in the eyes of her lover; and it was only when a second summons in the dining-room reached them through a servant, that she hastily wreathed a few flowers from a *jardinière* in her luxuriant hair, and offered her hand to Mortimer to lead her from the saloon.

CHAPTER XIV.

The convalescence of Gertrude was slow, but certain. Her youth, and the gentle and uncomplaining patience with which she supported her suffering, proved to be efficient physicians; while their effects were strengthened by the deep and silent delight with which she remarked the affectionate anxiety and sympathy of her cousin.

She was no sooner able to leave her room than Frederic, whose conscience was not altogether at ease as regarded the origin of her indisposition, passed hours each day at her side; reading aloud from her favorite authors, or conversing on topics of general interest, calculated to amuse without exciting her.

Willingly, most willingly, would she thus have worn out her life. It seemed as though the one sweet dream of her childhood were indeed realised; nor would she trust herself to look either backward into the past, or forward into the future. The present was all in all to her; and as she saw her cousin move noiselessly to her sofa, and felt her hand in his, and watched all the little arrangements with which he busied himself for her comfort, tears of blissful gratitude rose to her eyes, and she forgot all her previous trials.

Nor was Mrs. Mortimer less happy than herself. Unconscious of the decisive interview of her son with Sybil, she too, began to hope that older and better feelings were resuming their influence over his heart; and that a mere passing fancy had yielded beneath a sense of her disapprobation and of his own folly. Nor did even his daily absences from home shake this belief; for she was reasonable enough to feel that, after his extreme intimacy at The Grange, he could not, consistently with a proper observance of courtesy and honor, at once withdraw himself from the society of Mrs. Delamere and her daughter; while that he could constantly pass hours in intimate companionship with Gertrude, whose pure and etherial beauty was but the tangible and palpable reflection of her equally pure and beautiful nature, and remain insensible to the charm, appeared to her impossible; and the rather that, in the languor and helplessness of convalescence, the grateful girl had in a great measure laid aside the studied reserve which she had hitherto observed, and suffered her cousin to read the depths of her young and guileless heart.

Little did either of them suspect that there was a moral bandage before the eyes of Frederic, which rendered him blind to the perfections of every object save one; and that the kindly attentions which had been originally the mere impulse of pity and brotherly regard, had increased and continued under the deeply felt, although unconscious, happiness induced by the restored affection of his mother.

It is probable that, had Sybil endeavored to dissuade him from his constant attendance in the sick room he might have been led to contrast her egotism with the unselfish generosity of her rival; but far from indulging in so dangerous a weakness, Miss Delamere encouraged him in his labor of love; while scarcely a day passed in which some offering did not reach the invalid from the ladies at The Grange, accompanied by the kindliest expressions of anxiety and sympathy.

Of these offerings, however, Frederic was never made the medium; sometimes they were conveyed by a servant, while at others the pony-phaeton, driven by its fair mistress, deposited at the door of Mrs. Mortimer the rarest flowers from her conservatory, the newest work from the press, or the choicest fruits of the season.

For a time Gertrude had felt querulous and irritated when these presents were laid before her; she shrank from obligations conferred by Miss Delamere, and would willingly have forgotten her existence; but her attentions were so pertinacious, so gracefully tendered, and so judicious, that she ultimately became reconciled, and looked even with pleasure upon the gorgeous blossoms which made a mimic summer in her shady room; or listened to the brilliant and well selected pages to which the low and earnest tones of her cousin lent an added charm, until she forgot that she owed their enjoyment to the considerate kindness of Sybil.

Mrs. Mortimer was, however, far from doing the same. Unable, without compromising her own dignity, to refuse these diurnal civilities she suffered them in silence, but not the less deprecated the diligence and perseverance with which they were tendered. She would fain have terminated at once, and for ever, all communication with The Grange and its inhabitants; but she felt that she had no means of so doing without exposing her apprehensions, and thus placing herself at the mercy of Sybil's sarcasms.

Could she, for a moment, have suspected that she was already pledged to her son, all her hesitation would have vanished under a sense of bitter displeasure; but Miss Delamere had herself suggested that there would be an indelicacy in making known their engagement during the convalescence of Gertrude; and Frederic, delighted thus to escape, even for a brief interval, the reproaches of his mother and the grief of his cousin—for he could no longer deceive himself as to the nature of her feelings towards him—made no effort to combat her opinion.

Gradually, however, as Gertrude regained strength, his attentions relaxed. His devotion to her comfort became less marked, and his absences from home alike more frequent and more prolonged. It is true, that while beside her he was still kind, and gentle, and affectionate; but it was soon apparent to the poor invalid that she was indebted to the regard of the cousin, and not to the zeal of the lover. Suffering had, however, calmed her mind, and weakened, although by no means conquered her feelings; and as it slowly overcame her malady, a deep and uncomplaining melancholy replaced the girlish buoyancy which had once marked her character.

The abstracted look, the frequent fits of absence, and, above all, the smile of release when Frederic had not tact enough to conceal a departed from her, sufficed to convince her that the imaginary paradise in which she had lived for a few weeks must soon give place to a less glowing reality; and she braced up her strength to

upport the change as resolutely as she could. The idea that by her, and through her, discord hould come between the mother and the son, ent her a factitious energy, incomprehensible ven to herself; and often, very often, did she ucceed in meeting her anxious aunt with a mile upon her lips, when her heart was deluged n tears.

Thus were things situated when a contagious ever was introduced into Westrum by a travel- r, which spread rapidly among the poor, and reated universal consternation. The native harity of Mrs. Mortimer was not, however, to e chilled by any personal apprehension; and hus, despite the entreaties of her family, she ontinued with undiminished assiduity her pe- odical visits to her numerous pensioners; and, r a time, their fears continued to appear su- erfluous: when, urged by a desire to render he advantage obtained, as she supposed, by her iece over a dangerous rival more assured, she o sooner saw Gertrude sufficiently restored to nder such a proceeding safe, than, affecting believe that she required to be aroused from he moral lethargy consequent upon a long and hervating indisposition, she resolved to collect out her the friends by whom she was surround- d: and, by making her house more attractive, obtain at once the twofold advantage of nusing her son in his home, and of affording to r niece an opportunity of displaying the per- nal attractions and mental qualifications with hich she was so richly gifted.

Those friends were by no means numerous, it they were well selected; for Mrs. Mortimer referred solitude to that species of social *pis ler*, which tends to fill the drawing-rooms of s fastidious party-givers; and thus, Dr. Jervis, e vicar, and his estimable wife, the local phy- ian and his two well educated daughters, and e families of the neighborhood, few, but well- ed, constituted the whole of her circle.

One only objection offered itself to this ar- ngement, and that one existed in the impos- ibility of excluding from her hospitality the la- s at The Grange. Well aware of the *caque- e* of a country town, and fettered, moreover, the unceasing attentions of Sybil to her niece, s. Mortimer at once felt the utter impractica- lity of passing them over; but less far sighted an Gertrude, she had taught herself to believe at the danger which she apprehended was now erpast; and it was consequently with less re- tance than she would formerly have felt, that e despatched a note of invitation, which was mediately and most graciously answered.

Nor was the delusion of the fond mother by y means extraordinary; for superadded to the t that she was familiar with all the estimable alities of her niece, and knew how to appre- te at its just value the whole amount of her rth, it was no less certain that, to the eye of isinterested critic, the beauty of Gertrude far nscended that of Miss Delamere, radiant as it s; although it required more mind to appre- te the one than the other in a more common erver.

The pure and Grecian profile of Gertrude, ultlessly chiselled; her deep and expressive e eyes, with their long lashes at least three shades darker than her hair; her radiant complexion; and the redundant tresses of a golden auburn, which fell in magnificent profusion to her shoulders; all combined to invest her with a soft and ethereal expression which almost amounted to the ideal; and to give an essentially womanly character to her loveliness, which spoke rather to the heart than to the eye; while her slight and fragile figure, pliable as the willow, and as graceful in its undulations, was so well assorted to her face, that it was impossible to look upon her without interest and affection; while the attraction of Miss Delamere existed rather in the rich and voluptuous impression produced by her whole appearance than by the perfection of any particular feature.

Very beautiful, indeed, she was; but the artistic critic would have declared that she charmed rather by her general demeanor than by positive and regular outline or coloring. There was a tinge of fearlessness, a shade of self-appreciation, a degree of boldness, in the ordinary expression of her fine black eyes, which, nevertheless, at particular moments, veiled themselves so deliciously, that those to whom their softened glances were directed appreciated them the more deeply from the contrast—upon the principle that no woman dislikes a coxcomb, who throws off his coxcombry for her alone. Her rich complexion was alone, it might be, a shade too glowing for a fastidious taste, but it diffused so wonderful an animation over her whole countenance, that it was scarcely possible to wish it less brilliant, while the extraordinary beauty of her mouth, and the magnificent teeth revealed at every smile, combined with the peculiar melody of her low rich voice, completed a face of no ordinary attraction. Her form was, moreover, faultless; and, in gracefulness of motion and manner, she did not yield even to her gentler rival; while in that self-possession and ease which can only be acquired by a commerce with refined society, she was greatly the superior of the more retiring Gertrude, who had been reared in comparative seclusion.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Mortimer flattered herself that after a time the quiet graces of her niece would entirely wean the heart of Frederic from the more artificial fascination of Miss Delamere; and that to produce this desirable result, he required only to see her in the society of other females of her own age, and to contrast her with her associates. Herself gentle and domestic, she could not appreciate the attraction which Sybil derived from her superior knowledge of the world, and strong in the hopes of success, she resolutely disregarded her own love of quiet and retirement, and to the surprise of those about her, declared her intention of no longer withdrawing herself from the hospitable advances of her neighbors. In order the more gracefully to effect her purpose, she had consequently, resolved to open her own house, and Gertrude although sensitively shrinking under a feeling of the invidiousness of her own position, meekly prepared to play her part in this new trial.

The dinner passed off somewhat heavily; for the art of dinner-giving is one of sufficient difficulty, especially in a limited neighborhood,

where all the parties are intimately known to each other; but even here the perfect tact of Miss Delamere enabled her to infuse a certain portion of animation into those about her. The elderly gentlemen were enchanted with her information, and their wives with her urbanity; while the younger ladies were enraptured by her elegant costume, and their brothers and cousins captivated by her beauty.

Gertrude, meanwhile, in her simple dress of white muslin, subdued in spirit, and oppressed at heart, contributed to the general conversation only by monosyllables; and was effectually thrown into the shade by her more brilliant adversary. The languor of illness lent, indeed, a deeper charm to her beauty, but it was one little calculated to attract the mere pleasure-seekers by whom she was surrounded; while the only eye which she sought to see turned upon her in affection, was rivetted almost incessantly upon the beaming countenance of another.

As the ladies rose from table Mrs. Mortimer felt painfully conscious that her object had failed, and that she had but afforded to Sybil a fresh opportunity of evincing the extent of her social talents; nevertheless, she still hoped against hope; and when, on reaching the drawing-room, she saw her dreaded guest, after having, with almost child-like anxiety, provided for the perfect comfort of her mother, (whose constitutional helplessness continually rendered her dependant upon others even in her most trivial arrangements:) move to the side of her niece, and take her hand with an expression of anxious sympathy, her heart once more swelled, as she decided that nothing could be comparable to the pure beauty of the pale girl who formed so strong a contrast with the matured and (as her prejudice impelled her to add) meretricious woman of the world, who was, even then smiling over the ruin which had been her own work.

But while Mrs. Mortimer so judged, the reason of Gertrude was differently impressed. She felt and acknowledged all the superiority of her enforced companion; nor did the fact that since the first moment of her arrival she had been unable to detect even a glance directed towards Frederic, which implied a sense of conscious triumph or security, jealously as she had watched for such, undeceived her as to the power which she possessed over his mind and feelings.

Moreover, Miss Mortimer had not been blind to the circumstance that her aunt owed to Sybil all the cheerfulness of the somewhat tedious repast which had just terminated; while she was equally willing to admit the amiability by which it had been succeeded; forming, as it did, so startling a reverse to the bearing of many a brilliant female conversationalist, who, on rising from table, suddenly throws aside all her energy; and retiring, while surrounded merely by her own sex, to a solitary *fauteuil*, or a distant sofa, closes her eyes in languid weariness, and awaits the return of the gentlemen to renew her triumphs.

In Sybil nothing had been overstrained; nothing obtrusive. Her rich voice, and her low melodious laughter, had alike made music in the circle; but she had never appeared to think of herself, while exerting her powers to amuse others; nor did her smiles cease, or efforts to afford pleasure terminate, with the presence of the most interested of her auditors.

Surrounded only by the ladies of the party, her looks were as bright, and her words as bland as ever; and seated beside Gertrude, with the hand which she had secured clasped in her own, no shadow of *ennui* could be detected, as she murmured out a thousand expressions of sympathy and regard.

"You have, indeed, been a sad sufferer, my dear Miss Mortimer," she said caressingly; "and you make me truly happy by the assurance that I was able, in a degree, however slight, to render your convalescence less dreary. Happily, however, it is now at its close; and you must really take more care of your health in future."

In spite of her efforts to suppress it, the sigh of Gertrude was audible to her listener.

"I fear also," said Sybil in a still lower tone; "that you are unhappy. You have not yet had time, like myself, to acquire the most useful of all philosophy which almost defies fate. Nay, why that blush? Beautiful as it is, it seems to rebuke my indiscretion; but, believe me, I was far from seeking to give you pain, conscious as I am that whatever may be the cause of your present melancholy it is free from self-reproach."

"You do me no more than justice," said Gertrude, raising her eyes meekly to those of her interlocutor. "Sad I may be—Perhaps long illness necessarily induces depression; but my life has been an open volume of which the pages were free to all about me; and as yet I have met blame from no one."

The reply had been simple and guileless, for no thought of repaying by sarcasm the courtesy of her visitor had crossed the mind of Miss Mortimer as it was made; but, nevertheless, it was now Sybil's turn to blush; and the eloquent blood mantled over her brow and bosom, and burnt there for an instant, as she fixed a searching look upon the pale girl beside her. A moment suffiecd, however, to convince her, that no covert meaning had been implied, and she at once regained her self-possession.

"And do you equally *attach* blame to no one?" asked Miss Delamere, at the close of this scrutiny; "Rest assured, that if any who know you have brought that shadow to your brow, one reproach from your gentle lips will suffice to make them retract their fault."

"I have no reproach to utter," said Gertrude somewhat coldly; "Nothing to resent; nothing to wish."

"Nay, then," laughed her companion; "you resemble the hero of the Eastern tale, whose curse was the power of fulfilling every desire and who died the victim of his own mortal satiety. But do not think to deceive me thus. Look upon me as a friend—a sincere friend. Appearances are against me, I admit; but I do not on that account despair that you will do me justice. Gertrude," she continued, lowering her voice to a still deeper murmur; "I know too well the cause of that pallor, and of those tears which are even now glistening in your eyes; but you wrong me greatly if you regard me as other than their innocent and involuntary cause. Nay, more——"

"Oh, no! enough, enough!" gasped her lis-ner; "I will not affect to misunderstand your ference; and it refers to a subject which never n, and never ought, to be discussed between s. I can well conceive that Frederic—that y cousin—had yielded to the wishes of his other, and consented to sacrifice his inclina-ons to her will; but I cannot condescend to e made the *pis aller* of a disappointed passion, or to owe a reluctant heart to the suggestive rotection of——"

"Why do you pause, Miss Mortimer?" asked ybil calmly: "Of a rival, you would say; and erhaps in the eye of the world I may appear such; but to yourself such rivalry must em impossible, or at best irrational; for to e it appears a folly too wild to be entertained ven for an instant. The ice is now broken, id you must suffer me to speak. It is true at at the present moment your unstable ousin believes that he loves me. But why? ecause you received his attentions coldly, id repelled all his advances; while his vanity und the consolation that it sought in my iendship; which I yielded the more readily at I looked upon him as a man no longer free offer more in return. Am I now excused?"

"Will you pardon me if I remind you of the ench proverb which says that '*qui s'excuse, ccuse*,' Miss Delamere?" asked the tortured rl with sudden energy: "I have never yet mitted an attachment to my cousin—never rmitted myself a remark upon his intimacy The Grange—never uttered your name as at of one by whom I had been injured; id thus——"

"Thus you would reproach me tacitly with e impertinence of my inferences; but, my ar Miss Mortimer, such sophistry is unworthy you, and I will also say of myself," replied bil with dignity. "For the first and last ne I am now forcing upon you a subject most teresting to us both; and indeed you must ar me out, if it be only for your own sake."

Gertrude dropped her eyelids heavily to sup-ess the tears that were struggling to escape; id resigned herself to silent endurance.

"Consider our relative positions," pursued iss Delamere; "and you will at once admit e justice of my arguments, and cease to look on me as an enemy. I believe that I am not ithout vanity—my woman-nature is powerful ough to assert its rights; but I am nevertheless sufficiently rational to understand that y comparison between you and myself must nd to my own disadvantage. You look in-edulous; but while so doing you have for-tten our respective ages;—the bloom and shness of eighteen—that *beauté du diable*, as a ench wit has termed it—which is the true ory of our sex, its brightest as well as its most anescent charm, is still your own; while for it is now over. Each day adds something your attractions, while it withdraws a shade m mine. To you dress is a mere pastime; to it has become a study,—while, as regards ental and moral qualifications, I know enough life, and above all, of men, to be quite aware at they prefer a scholar to a tutor; and there-re, when looking upon my experience in this light, I am aware that it is purely a defect. Still—and herein at least even you, my dear Miss Mortimer, will, I am sure, give me credit for my frankness—I admit fully and freely that your own coldness has induced your cousin to prefer my society, and even to attach himself to my person. But in this, believe me when I assure you, that I have been in no way to blame. I have told him, not once but many times, that for personal and private reasons I had decided never to marry; and this not lightly and coquettishly, but in sober and honest sincerity and truth. If I have failed to obtain credence for such assertions, it has been through no fault of mine; and I have now compelled myself to intrude this subject upon you simply to redeem myself in your eyes; and to assure you that, even should the illusion last, it will suffice for me to be convinced from your own lips that a renewal of his addresses is necessary to your happiness, for me at once and for ever to discountenance his suit. No personal feeling shall make me indulge my own interests to the destruction of yours; for far sooner would I secure the approbation of my conscience in the conviction that I had done my duty, than succeed in gratifying my wishes at the expense of your peace."

"If I understand you rightly," replied Gertrude with forced composure; "my cousin has assured you of his affection; and you have at least conditionally consented to receive his homage. In such a case neither party is any longer free. From my aunt you must be aware that you will experience great and resolute opposition; but that is a consideration for yourself alone. As regards my own feelings, I beg you to believe that, desiring only the happiness of Frederic, it will be my greatest joy to see it assured in any way. I advance no claim to an affection which has never been mine; nor have I shared the delusion of my kind aunt, who saw only what she desired. And now that we have sufficiently discussed this topic, you must allow me to make an effort to perform the duties of hospitality to our other guests."

As Miss Mortimer ceased speaking, she rose calmly and even proudly from her seat, and approached the music stand, where the daughters of Dr. Collins were examining the new ballads which were profusely scattered on every side.

The remainder of the evening passed off tranquilly and pleasantly. Agreeable conversation, well executed music, and perfect harmony, made the time run swiftly; for none saw lower than the surface; nor could guess that aching hearts were here, as elsewhere, disguised beneath smiling brows. And yet so it was; Mrs. Mortimer had discovered, long ere her party separated, that she had been buoyed up by fallacious hopes; for that her son, in all that pleasant circle, saw and heard only Sybil, whose brilliant talents had constituted its main charm; while she had merely to glance occasionally towards her niece to feel convinced that she was sustaining a struggle but ill calculated to assist her convalescence.

It is true that she smiled as she conversed with those about her, and even acceded without difficulty to the proposal of Sybil, that she

ould accompany her in a duet well suited to
splay the finished execution of both parties;
d all this apparently without an effort; but
e anxious eyes of her fond protectress were
t to be deceived. Well aware that the coun-
nance of Gertrude was a faithful index of her
elings, she readily comprehended the sudden
pses into melancholy and depression, against
hich the unhappy girl waged so unsuccessful
wfare, and from which she started only to
fect a gaiety that was foreign to her heart.
Ignorant of the conversation which had taken
ace between her niece and Miss Delamere, and
ystified by the calm and unpretending carriage
the latter, whom no attention of Frederic,
wever marked, could betray into the slightest
hibition of unwomanly triumph, she felt vex-
and disheartened; and it was with a feeling
intense relief that she heard the carriages
her several guests successively announced,
d received their parting compliments.
The last to quit the room was Mrs. Delamere
d her daughter; the elder lady having dis-
vered an absorbing source of interest in the
rangement of a set of Chinese puzzles, then
most unknown in England, and which had
en a travelling present from Mortimer to his
usin. Nor was it until Gertrude had begged
r to carry off her new treasure to The Grange,
at she at length reluctantly passed her arm
rough that of Frederic, and prepared to take
r leave.
"We part friends, good friends, do we not,
y dear Miss Mortimer?" murmured Sybil
ide, as her mother was engaged, with the as-
tance of her host and hostess, in folding shawl
ter shawl about her. "You retain no anger
ainst me? No suspicion of my loyalty?"
"Why distress either me or yourself by such a
estion?" asked Gertrude evasively, in her turn.
"Because I do not think that you do me jus-
e. My proceeding to-night, for example, has
rtled you. Any one save myself would have
runk from it; but I spurn all such cowardly
d vulgar notions of expediency, and based as
ey are upon false principles. Besides, my con-
ience would have reproached me had I not
nkly and openly afforded to you an opportu-
ty of disclosing your real feelings and senti-
ents. You have now done so, and I thank
u; for there is nothing which I so much
ead as the reproaches of my own reason.
nd now good-bye; let me soon see a bloom
on that fair face, for it is sadly pale to-night,
d makes my heart ache."
Then clasping the small hand which was in
urtesy extended to her, Miss Delamere bowed
smiling farewell to her wearied hostess, and
companied her mother to the carriage.
"To-morrow!" she whispered softly, as Mor-
ner assisted her to her seat; and in another
oment the gates closed behind her.

CHAPTER XV.

The night was calm and still; the moonlight
y clear and bright upon the lawn, and tipped
e trees with silver; and all was peace over
both earth and sky, as Gertrude, after dismis
ing her attendant, extinguished the lights upon
her toilette, and threw back the casement to
steep her burning forehead in the fresh breeze
that came, laden with perfume, from the blos-
som-teeming garden.
That evening had been to her one of intense
and agonizing struggle; and never had she felt
so desolate as now. True, she had before both
understood and seen that Frederic was lost to
her, but she had at least never before willingly
and deliberately resigned him to another; never
before given to that other a right to consider
him as her own. The womanly pride which
had driven her to this alternative was now
prostrate; and a thousand reflections, each
more bitter than the last, bowed her bruised
spirit to the very dust.
That Sybil had been ungenerous, indelicate,
and abrupt, she could not conceal from herself;
but had she not, in her turn, also betrayed a
weakness and want of self-possession which
almost authorized the impertinence to which
she had been subjected? Had she not wilfully
laid bare her heart to the merciless probing
beneath which it had writhed in torture, with-
out one effort to escape the infliction? And had
she not in order to spare her pride, armed her
adversary with weapons to be turned against
herself?
How she despised the hollow gaiety which
for hours she had assumed? How she detested
the hypocrisy which had taught her to belie
her best and holiest feelings! And how she
shuddered as she remembered that the die was
indeed now cast! In short, Gertrude was mis-
erable; her heart was wrung, and her spirit
crushed. Even hopeless as her attachment had
long been, she still loved Frederic with an in-
tensity so deep and absorbing, that he was the
centre of all her thoughts; and she had dwelt
so fondly upon that one image, that the impres-
sion had become indelible. It was not pas-
sion with which she regarded him; but the
pure and gentle affection which, although warm
and intense, was yet veiled and subdued by the
natural reserve of a modest and well organized
mind.
Thus, as she reflected upon her conversation
with Miss Delamere, she felt much as the drown-
ing mariner may be supposed to feel, who, after
flinging from him the last floating spar which
might have assisted to buoy him up, in order to
trust to his own unaided strength, suddenly
hears the water singing in his ears, and feels it
mounting to his lips, as he discovers that he is
unable longer to sustain himself.
Far different were the solitary reflections of
Sybil; as she, too, at that still hour, breathed
the soft air which entered at her open window,
and passed in mental review the occurrences of
the evening. Her large dark eyes were raised
to the calm sky which glittered with its myriad
worlds of mysterious light, and her head was
pillowed upon her hand; while her long and
luxuriant hair from which she had detached its
wreath of pomegranate blossom, and the combs
by which it had been confined, fell in rich and
profuse masses almost to her feet, and undulated
in the passing breeze.

The scene would have been a fine subject for the artist. In the very depth of the spacious chamber stood a toilette-table of ebony, surmounted by an immense mirror, mounted in the same costly wood, and lighted by half-a-dozen wax candles in branches of or-mulu.

Scattered over the table, and resting upon the drapery of antique point by which it was covered, lay a profusion of gems, among which the crimson garland had been flung, evidently in careless haste; and just within the reflection of the tapers gleamed out the white and delicate draperies of the bed, whose muslin festoons fell like a vapor over the hangings of pale pink silk, or were looped back by heavy tassels of the same color and material. Just beyond, the light touched, but only partially revealed, an exquisite statue of Silence, which occupied a small recess; and then a portion of the apartment appeared in a species of twilight, which was again invaded by the silvery beams of the moon; which, after falling upon the bending figure of Sybil, cast her shadow far along the floor, relieved by a framework of glittering radiance.

The heavy curtains had been drawn back from the window; and as she leaned there, absorbed in thought, her features, with their varying expression, were distinctly visible in the clear cold light. Her eye was dancing with triumph, and a proud smile sat upon her lip. She had, that evening, accomplished her master-stroke; she had, that evening, succeeded in her most difficult and delicate undertaking; and she was now enabled to declare to Mortimer that not only did his cousin willingly resign his hand, but that she had never indulged a hope of his affection, or a desire to claim it. Thus, then, she should be more than justified in the eyes of Frederic, and might even become less distasteful in those of Mrs. Mortimer herself.

But, suddenly, some unwelcome thought obtruded itself among these pleasant visions; and the brow of the lady darkened, and a shiver passed over her frame, as though the night air had chilled her. The rich lips quivered for an instant, and then became firmly compressed; while the slender fingers that were buried in her hair, by a simultaneous impulse closed convulsively upon each other, as if to clutch some object that was about to escape them. Her breath labored in her throat, and a moisture glittered in her eye; but by a violent effort she flung off the emotion, and a deep flush rose to her cheek, that dried the incipient tear, and seemed to endue her with fresh courage. She raised her head and glanced around her, at first haughtily, and with an expression of defiance; but her slow and lingering survey was scarcely completed, ere again brow and bosom became blenched, and she clasped her hands together so tightly that the blood appeared ready to spring from beneath the nails, as she murmured almost inaudibly—

"It is too late to retreat!—It is my last chance! I have perilled my all upon the die!—I must succeed, or I am lost!"

Then, closing the window impetuously, and drawing before it the damask draperies to exclude the moonlight, she hastened to extinguish the tapers upon her table; and ultimately flung herself upon her bed in the darkness, still folded in her dressing-gown, and enveloped in the masses of her loose hair. It was clear that there was no peace of heart in that sumptuous chamber.

Gertrude, too, wearied at length of her revery; but it terminated far differently from that of Sybil. At first, a feverish irritation had rendered her unjust alike to herself and others; then, a feeling of wretchedness and isolation had wrung from her some of those bitter tears which are known only in youth, and which are never shed by the merely worldly and selfish, or comprehended by individuals of sturdy nerves, and neutral emotions, who exact a *tangible* cause for every demonstration of feeling, and regard as folly every species of suffering which is merely moral.

Alas! however unimportant in the eyes of others may be the evils by which our miseries are indueed, they are by no means trifling in our own, when we are conscious of their result; nor when the heart is wrung, can it suffer less because the cause appears puerile to the world.

Those tears, nevertheless, calmed the agitation of Gertrude; and, after a time, she began to reflect upon the pledge which she had given to Frederic, to assist his views with her aunt; and to reproach herself for her weakness in thus yielding to her feelings, when every sigh of dejection on her part would increase the displeasure and determination of Mrs. Mortimer, and thus render his position more onerous. Meekly, therefore, she dried her eyes; and, having made her preparations for the night, knelt down beside her bed to pray, without one remnant of bitterness or resentment.

Thus was she still engaged when hasty steps sounded upon the landing, and in another instant some one tapped at the door. She hurriedly rose from her knees, and drew back the bolt, when she was met by the favorite maid of Mrs. Mortimer, who implored her to hasten to the room of her mistress, who had been taken alarmingly ill.

Gertrude flew rather than ran to the chamber of her aunt, whom she found partially supported by pillows and gasping for breath. A deep red spot was burning upon either cheek, and her eyes were veiled by a thick mist, which, at intervals, she endeavored to sweep away with her fevered hand. In an instant, the unhappy girl read the truth. Her affectionate protectress had imbibed the fatal disease which was then ravaging Westrum; and the fever was already at its height.

"Where is Mr. Mortimer?" she gasped out, almost inarticulate with terror; "Where is Dr. Collins?"

"My master is gone himself to fetch the doctor, miss," was the reply; "He left the house as we awoke you."

With a throbbing heart the frightened Gertrude discovered at once that the disease by which her aunt was attacked was one of the most serious nature. Even during the few hours which had intervened since they parted in the drawing-room, the change in her appearance was alarmingly visible. Her eyes were sunken and glazed; her respiration heavy and oppress-

ed; and the surface of her skin dry and heated. Nevertheless, the invalid endeavored, with a forced smile, to soothe and reassure the trembling girl; but it was with difficulty that she could articulate even the few words that she addressed to her, or the confession that she had, throughout the day, been conscious of a coming indisposition.

On the arrival of Dr. Collins he pronounced the presence of fever; aggravated, as he believed, by the recent exertions of his patient; but recommending simply some cooling remedies, and perfect quiet, declined to give a decided opinion upon the precise nature of the attack until his next visit; and then having seen an effervescing draught administered, took his leave for the night.

The cousins were, consequently, left to their anxious watch; and it was with dismay that they traced the rapid progress of the evil. Fearful fainting-fits were succeeded by perfect helplessness and torpor; and to these again supervened delirium.

Towards dawn, however, the consciousness of Mrs. Mortimer appeared to return; her eyes were fixed alternately upon the affectionate watchers beside her, and an expression of intense love passed over her features.

Gertrude was the first to remark the happy change; and springing from her seat, she was in an instant bending over the pillow of the sufferer.

"Aunt! my beloved aunt, speak to me!" she exclaimed, clasping the scorching form of Mrs. Mortimer in her arms; "Can I do nothing to relieve—nothing to ease you?"

A smile of gratified affection struggled upon the lip of the invalid, but she had no longer the power of utterance; and it was with trembling anxiety, and a painful foreboding of misfortune, that Gertrude busied herself about the sick-bed while awaiting the second advent of the physician. On his next appearance, although he spoke cheerfully to the cousins, and bade them rather seek to secure themselves from the possible chance of infection, than fear for his present patient, they were not deluded by his words; for, familiar with the expression of his countenance, they at once read there a greater consciousness of danger than he was willing to admit.

Any personal precaution was, however, far from the thoughts of either; their only care was to forbid all entrance to visitors, and to limit the attendance of the servants to the dressing-room, reserving the actual cares of the sick-chamber to themselves; an arrangement which was, nevertheless, partially invaded by the attached attendant of the sufferer, who, having insisted upon her right to watch over her beloved lady, was reluctantly permitted to share their vigils. This done, Mortimer retired for a brief time to his room; overcome with dread, and it may be, with remorse, as he remembered the unhappiness which he had lately caused to a fond mother, who might now be snatched from him for ever. Hurriedly he seized a pen, and seating himself at his desk, he wrote a few scarcely legible lines to Sybil, to inform her of the misfortune which had occurred, to forbid her approaching the house, and to implore her not to venture into Westrum before they again met.

The letter was instantly dispatched; and exchanging his coat for a dressing-gown, he hastened back to the sick-chamber. As he entered, Gertrude pressed her finger to her lip; and on bending over the bed, he saw that his mother had fallen into an uneasy doze—the first interval of comparative repose which she had experienced since the commencement of the attack.

As he was about to turn away he found his cousin at his side, and obeying the gesture of her hand, he seated himself in a large chair, in which she had already arranged the cushions, evidently in the hope that he might also sleep; but her affectionate solicitude did not avail; his heart and mind were too full for slumber; and as he looked around upon the melancholy scene before him, a thousand thoughts, and doubts, and even regrets, crowded upon him; while every passing moment seemed to concentrate a year of existence.

Nothing is more cheerless, nothing more depressing, than the slow approach of daylight in a sick room. The window of Mrs. Mortimer's chamber had been thrown wide open, in obedience to the direction of Dr. Collins; and as the cold gray drawn began for the second time to glimmer over the distant heights which shut in the coast, the night-lamp sickened into a pale yellowish gleam; and the wind as it swept through the branches of a lofty acacia near the house, moaned amid the leaves like a spirit of desolation. Upon the bed, and covered only by a light coverlet, lay the extended form of the sufferer; her cheek burnt with fever, her eyes dark and sunken, the pulses of her temples visibly throbbing, and her fitful starts proclaiming the unsatisfactory nature of her apparent slumber. Near her stood a small table already laden with phials, filled with divers colored liquids, and the thousand details which reveal the presence of illness; and beside her pillow sat Gertrude, pale it is true, but with a restlessness in her expression and an eagerness in her eye, which betrayed how thoroughly her whole being was absorbed in the duties of her watch.

No thought of self, no sympathy even with Frederic, occupied her at that hour. Her soul hung upon the abstract question of life and death which was so soon to be solved before her: and as a few incoherent words were occasionally uttered by the unconscious sufferer, she sank from the chair to her knees, and listened breathlessly, lest she should lose one sound of that cherished voice which might so soon be hushed for ever.

Nor was Frederic less worthy than his cousin to perform the filial duty to which he had bound himself. Pale and silent, he leaned back in his seat, gazing upon the convulsed features of his mother, and starting painfully at every spasm which shook her tortured limbs, as though by some electrical sympathy it passed over his own frame, or watching with helpless hope every motion of Gertrude, as though he trusted in her power to solace and relieve the poor sufferer, while he felt his own uselessness.

No one thought, no one regret strayed to Sy

bil, as he sat there in that melancholy dawning: he saw only, felt only for the mother who had loved him so tenderly, and whom he had recently so ill requited. During his silent watch had he been offered her life in exchange of every other earthly good, he would not have hesitated for an instant to secure it. He had deeply felt the loss of his fond father, but he had not *seen* him, fading and failing before his eyes; this was his first acquaintanceship with heavy sickness, and he shuddered as he remembered how few of those who had been tainted by the fever which was now rioting in the veins of his mother, had escaped with life.

Strange that neither to the one nor the other of these two devoted watchers came one reflection on the possibility of their own infection! Their sorrow was too sincere for selfishness, there was no stage-effect in that sick-room; no striving at applause, no craving for the empty praise of the idle and uninterested. Even at this early period each felt a foreboding consciousness that there was no hope, and their sole anxiety was to smoothe, in so far as human means and human devotion could do so, her passage to the grave who had so tenderly plucked away the thorns from their own path of life.

CHAPTER XVI.

Days passed over, days so long and so heavy that it seemed as though time had paused in order to prolong the trial: and still Gertrude and Frederic watched unwearicdly beside what they knew to be the bed of death. No tear escaped them during the brief and rare intervals of consciousness which enabled the sufferer to recognise and to acknowledge their devotion; it was only amid the fierce and fevered paroxysms of delirium that they indulged themselves in an outpouring of the anguish by which they were consumed, or suffered themselves to be overcome and prostrated by the melancholy prospect before them.

At the terrible hour in which we trace the sure approach of a cruel and irremediable separation: when a dear and holy bond is about to be rent asunder, and we are called upon to resign the affection and companionship which have been made precious by years of possession and sympathy, the world appears to fade into nothingness, and all the hopes and joys of our health and our prosperity seem to crumble into ashes. What can life offer at such a moment which presents an apparent equivalent for that which we are called upon to resign! What has the empty future to tender, save a vague and undefined hope, which vanishes into vapor before the cherished realities of the past! How many memories assail us, which had previously seemed to be blotted out, only to bring with them the torturing reflection, that at the expiration of a few brief days, perhaps even of a few brief hours, we shall be called upon to resign forever the gaze of those loving eyes, and the clasp of that gentle hand, which had been to us throughout life both happiness and support!

And such were now the wretched reflections of Gertrude and Frederic. Even the hopeful words of their friendly physician had ceased to greet them, during his frequent visits, nor did the anxious cloud upon his brow tend to reassure their sinking spirits. Never absent for an instant from the sick room, save when they singly snatched a scant and hasty meal in the adjoining chamber; driven even into this momentary desertion of their charge by the express injunction of Dr. Collins, who strenuously interdicted the useless and dangerous risk of swallowing food in an infected atmosphere, they became ere long careless and almost unconscious of all beyond the influence of their own sorrow.

Ultimately, however, the increasing paleness and languor of his cousin struck Mortimer with a new terror, and he anxiously implored her to retire to her own apartment, were it merely for an hour, in order to secure a less troubled slumber than that which she had hitherto taken upon her chair, but Gertrude only shook her head with mournful resolution.

"No, no, dear Frederic," she murmured; "I shall not long be called upon to watch, leave me to my vigil. Am I not also her child! And would you deprive me of perhaps the last sorrowful, but still deep happiness that I may ever know in this world!"

And Mortimer, whose wretchedness would have been almost intolerable had he been called upon to endure it alone, could only press her hand with affectionate gratitude, and murmur out his low-voiced but fervent thanks.

And so they sat side by side, for hours, listening to the meaningless words which at times fell upon their ears, full of tenderness and anxiety, and with which their names were constantly associated, or watching for a lucid interval in which they might once more catch a glance of recognition; and whenever, for an instant, the attention of Frederic strayed from his suffering mother to his devoted cousin, he saw her with her eyes eagerly and earnestly fixed upon the convulsed features of her beloved protectress: faint from weakness, but still strong in the courage of her love.

How glorious is the apparent omniscience of woman in a sick-room! With the eye of the heart she seems intuitively to discover every want and with the ready hand of tenderness to anticipate every wish. Her limbs never weary, her eyes never droop, her step is light and noiseless, and her voice low and soft. She has a word of comfort for every murmur, a glance of sympathy for every pang. And the secret of her power lies in the fact, that in the presence of suffering she flings off her own identity, and totally forgetful of self, lives only in the pangs of the helpless being whom she tends.

Thus it is that women of real feeling mourn longer and more deeply for those whom they have loved and lost than men; who, being by nature unfitted to the service of a sick-room, have fewer of those touching memories which grow out of the last sad moments of companionship; for even where they devote all their

energies to solace and to soothe the dying, they are devoid of the nice perception which enables a woman to see beyond the surface, and to hear with the ear of the spirit.

And so it was in the present instance. Frederic was ever ready and active when his services were claimed, but he could not, like Gertrude, foresee the necessity of action. He guessed not when the pillow became uneasy to the aching head, nor when the parched lips needed the refreshing moisture. At times, he overlooked, in his own sorrow, the precise moment at which the sustaining draught should be administered, or the position of the sufferer changed, but the watchful perception of Gertrude never slumbered, and he saw the wandering delight and expression of relief which, even amid her pangs, passed over the countenance of Mrs. Mortimer, as the gentle tendance of the watchful girl freed her from some unseen suffering.

All would have been comparatively easy to Gertrude, had she not hour by hour, and day by day, been compelled to feel that her beloved aunt was unconscious of all which took place about her: that she did not recognize her as she hung over her pillow to murmur in her ear the accents of tenderness, and that even the strong clasp of the fevered hand betokened pain instead of affection.

There is something strange and awful in the aspect of intellect alienated by disease—in that moral death which prostrates all the mental powers, and places a gulf, impassable as chaos, between the watcher and the watched. Where, we ask ourselves, as we listen to the meaningless words and the joyless laughter, where is the soul? In what unknown and mysterious world is it now wandering, liberated from all the thrall of earthly affections and anxieties? How can it be that we possess only the form, while the spirit is far away? With what and whom does it hold commune, during its estrangement? And with what viewless and fearful order of beings are we brought into almost immediate contact, through the medium of the estranged intellect before us? The reason totters as we ask ourselves the question, and the heart is pained by the very vagueness of the speculation.

At the termination of a week, the friendly physician, having requested a private interview with Mr. Mortimer, feelingly but definitely assured him, that all hope of saving his patient was at an end, and that he conceived it to be his duty to prepare her son for an event which would in all probability take place in a very few hours.

"I am aware, my dear sir," he concluded, as he wrung the hand of the young man with a sympathy which was evidently sincere; "that your respected parent has no wordly matters to arrange; for with her well regulated mind, she was incapable of deferring the performance of so serious a duty, and it is this conviction which consoles me under the apprehension that she may depart without one lucid interval sufficiently long or complete to enable her to follow up any definite idea. That she may, however, recover the necessary consciousness to recognise those about her, I believe to be highly probable, and to this prospect we must therefore endeavor to confine our hope. But I should reproach myself hereafter were I not at this moment frankly to declare, that in all human probability, her sufferings will soon be at an end, and so thoroughly am I convinced of the fact, that I shall not again leave the house until all is over, but will remain in the breakfast-room with Mr. Nottingham, whom I have requested to be prepared with such restoratives as may be desirable, either for the poor sufferer herself or for Miss Mortimer, who in her present worn and weak state, will not fail to be seriously affected by the shock which awaits her."

For a time Mortimer was silent, overcome by the anguish of his feelings, but at length he rallied sufficiently to inquire if it would not be prudent to induce his cousin to leave the sick-room before the awful moment arrived, and thus spare her the pang of witnessing the last struggle.

"You will undoubtedly do well to make the trial," was the reply, "but I fear that you will not succeed. In the hour of sorrow your admirable cousin appears to have no recollection of herself. I remember her on a former melancholy occasion, and even amid my own regret for one of the most valued friends I ever had, I could not repress my astonishment and respect at her courageous and devoted conduct. Depend upon it that throughout this new trial, therefore, she will not be less true to herself, although I fear that her sufferings will be even more acute, for no child ever loved a parent more affectionately than she has loved her aunt. And now go, my dear young friend, I will not detain you another instant from your post. Should my presence become necessary, you can summon me on the instant, but until it is so I will not intrude upon the sacredness of your sorrow."

Mortimer obeyed but his limbs almost failed as he again ascended the stairs, and approached what was so soon to be the chamber of death. When he entered he saw Gertrude upon her knees by the bedside, with her face concealed in the coverlet, but as she detected his stealthy step, she raised her head, and looked eagerly and inquiringly towards him.

"What had Dr. Collins to communicate?" she asked in a low whisper, as her cousin reached her side.

"His apprehensions for your own health, my dear Gertrude, and his desire that I should induce you to retire for an hour or two to your own room."

"Ha! Is it so? Must it be so soon?" exclaimed the poor girl, wringing her hands in agony. "And he would ask me to leave her! But perhaps it was right that he should do so—a duty which he was called upon to perform—he meant well I know. But you, Frederic, you her son, will not echo such a wish. She will yet recognise me, I feel that she will—and I would not lose that last look, that last smile for all—"

She could add no more, and suffocated by her suppressed sobs, she once more dropped her head upon the bed, while Mortimer as he hung

over her, attempted no further argument, convinced that all interference upon such a point must prove ineffectual.

Two more dreary hours went by, twilight was rapidly shedding additional gloom over the sick-chamber, and still Mrs. Mortimer lay in a state of torpor, disturbed only by the violent and unnatural laboring of her breath, and the spasmodic convulsions of her limbs, when suddenly she opened her heavy eyes, and, looking earnestly into the gloom, feebly articulated: "Frederic—Gertrude—where are my children?"

In an instant, they were at her side.

"My own dear ones!" she again gasped out; "come nearer—nearer."

They instinctively sank upon their knees, and each took one of her wasted hands in silence.

"We part—part for ever!" continued the trembling voice, "the world is passing from me—in peace." And then, bringing together the hands which clasped her own, she added with increased difficulty: "Heaven bless you both—both my own ones. My children, I have had a fearful dream—but it was no more than a dream, I see, and I feel its falsehood. Embrace me both of you—both at once—let me die in the blessed conviction that—"

What she would have added, they knew not, for she spoke no more; another earnest gaze, another beaming and happy smile, and the kindly spirit passed into that rest which was never again to be broken upon earth.

CHAPTER XVII.

All was, indeed, over. There was no longer any necessity for exertion, no longer anything to hope or fear. The darkened windows, the noiseless tread, and the deep stillness of the house of death, had succeeded to the tumultuous feelings, the weary vigils, and the agonizing suspense of the previous week, and, for a time, Mortimer experienced that frightful void of heart which appears to the survivor, as though it shut out all human sympathies, and is destined to be eternal. He had no longer a mother, he stood alone, and as he thought of the past, he sickened at the prospect of the future.

But although he sorrowed, and sorrowed deeply, the despair of Gertrude was still more intense. No tears came to her relief, her feelings appeared to be annihilated, and she sat with clasped hands, and eyes fixed on vacancy, unconscious of all that passed about her. In this moral prostration, there was no shade of self, she did not remember that she was now, indeed, an orphan, penniless and homeless, who must, hereafter, battle for every foot of way which she made upon the world's path, or that she possessed no other affection upon earth to replace that which she had lost—her whole being was absorbed in one great grief of her bereavement.

To her, the protectress of her youth, and the friend of her womanhood, had been all in all—and that all was gone for ever.

For hours, each day, she sat beside the pale motionless corpse, herself as pale and almost as motionless; nor was it until the morning of the burial that she was aroused into more demonstrative suffering. Then, indeed, the floodgates of her grief were opened, and, to the great relief of Dr. Collins, she speedily wept and exhausted herself into a succession of fainting fits, which rendered her insensible to the departure of the funeral train, and calmed the apprehensions which he had begun to entertain of the results of her immeasurable and silent agony.

On his return, he found her calmer. She even answered his inquiries, and consented to see her cousin, although her lip trembled as she complied with the suggestion, nor could she, when he approached her bed and took her hand, articulate one word of welcome or condolence. Frederic was deeply affected, and, for a time, even forgot his own sorrow in an attempt to soothe that of the fair and fragile creature before him. Theirs was a common grief, and each read the heart of the other without the help of words; while it was evident that the meeting once over, they felt consolation in the presence of each other, and the worthy doctor satisfied with the judiciousness of his arrangement, forced Mortimer gently into a chair, and, then, quietly retired from the room.

For a time, nothing was heard, save the low sobs of the faithful Roberts; whose services being ended about her beloved mistress, had been silently and zealously transferred to her niece; but, ere long, the affectionate whispers of Mortimer broke upon the stillness, and were rewarded by the grateful tears of his dejected listener, as they wept together over their mutual bereavement.

Throughout the remainder of the day, Mortimer kept his post at the bedside, and each party derived a melancholy consolation from this companionship. They were less desolate in heart, as they remained with clasped hands, and streaming eyes, indulging all the luxury of sorrow, and grieving rather for each other than for themselves.

It was not, however, until in the utter solitude of night, she could brood over her anguish uncontrolled, that Gertrude felt the full force of her loss; and even ventured to glance at a future which to her was fraught with terror.

So long as even the inanimate remains of her aunt had continued in the house, she had been less isolated in spirit; but now all was gone; she could not even cling to the senseless clay: the grave had claimed its tenant, and her work of love was ended.

For several succeeding days, Mortimer devoted his whole time to his cousin; nor did he once quit the house, save when with Gertrude leaning feebly upon his arm, he spent a short time in the grounds; and thus, although the stricken girl would not have admitted even to herself that it could be so, she was almost happy. Never had Frederic been so gentle, so affectionate; and when she occasionally endeavored to speak of her future plans, he silenced her by asking if she were, indeed, weary of her home, that she should seek another.

This state of things was not, however, fated to last. During the illness of Mrs. Mortimer, several letters had been delivered to her son

from Sybil; but, with the morbid feeling peculiar to heavy grief, he had shrunk from opening them, and thus renewing his intercourse with a person whom he knew to be distasteful to her, while she was stretched upon a bed of sickness; nor could he even reconcile himself to do so, until the first bitterness of his regret had passed over.

Time, however, soon produced its effect. The elasticity of the human mind is proverbial; and neither joy nor sorrow will endure for ever. Constant communion with, and increasing affection for his cousin, for a while sufficed to engage his thoughts; but ere long, he felt the necessity of a stronger stimulus; the very excess of his grief had worked its own reaction; and he began to reflect both upon the present and the future.

As we have elsewhere remarked, Mortimer could not live without feeling himself beloved; and this craving for an undivided and absorbing devotion naturally turned his thoughts to Sybil; when he began to marvel how he could have suffered her letters to remain unopened. He shrank from admitting, even to himself, that the last words of his mother had born a reference to Miss Delamere by no means favorable to his passion, and that she had eventually expired under a delusion which his future conduct would in all probability negative; but it is not the less certain that those very words had tended in no inconsiderable degree to influence him in leaving the letters so long unread.

That he was once more acting ungenerously towards his cousin he never reflected: for intent only on proving his gratitude for her devotion to his mother, he forgot that she was ignorant of his engagement to Sybil, and might possibly misconstrue the nature of attentions to which she had hitherto been unaccustomed; and, unconsciously even to herself, repay them with feelings which she had no desire to awaken.

Thus it was with no compunction as regarded Gertrude, that, having at length succeeded in silencing, even if he could not entirely subdue, the upbraiding of his own thoughts, he proceeded to examine the letters which had been so long accumulating; and, as he did so, Sybil rose before him in all her beauty and in all her love: while, as she wrote admirably, the spell deepened as he advanced in his task, until he felt his breast bound, and his brow flush with happiness.

The earlier notes were brief and guarded; and contained merely expressions of earnest regret at the serious indisposition of his mother, offers of every luxury at The Grange which might be acceptable to the invalid, and entreaties that he would keep her constantly informed of the progress of the disease. But as the danger of Mrs. Mortimer increased, the letters became longer and more affectionate. She bewailed the continued sufferings of her esteemed friend, but she was even more expansive in her expressions of anxiety about himself. She besought him to adopt every measure for escaping the infection, and even pointed out the preventatives with which she was acquainted; and finally, she reproached him so tenderly for his silence, that it was easy to perceive how impossible it was for her to feel resentment where her heart was interested.

The last, the longest, and the least guarded of all these epistles had been written on the day succeeding Mrs. Mortimer's death. It was a triumph of affectionate eloquence, a masterpiece of delicate and earnest devotion. She had wept tear for tear with him. She had appreciated all the virtues, and all the worth of his departed mother. She was conscious that nothing could compensate to him for such a loss, and yet there were affections, and ties, and sympathies, as pure and as holy, to call him back to that world from which he had now shrank away, with weakened spirits and a doubting heart. And there was no mention of Gertrude. She had forgotten all save him to whom she wrote. It was his tears alone that she would wipe away; his grief that she would soothe; his isolation that she would brighten into companionship and joy.

And joy indeed, once more stole over the spirit of Mortimer. Not even his apparent neglect had been able to chill the warm outpourings of a heart which he felt to be all his own. Like her, he forgot the sufferings of his desolate orphan cousin. Like her, he peopled the world with one all-sufficing object; and like her, he felt that although the cup of bitterness had been lifted to his lips, life could still offer a brighter and a better draught.

All the past, as regarded Sybil, came back fresh and glowing to his memory; and while he refolded the letters, he breathed deeply, like one who had cast off a heavy weight of care; and hastily, but scrupulously, securing his newly-found treasure, he left his room, and proceeded to the summer-parlor, in which he had spent so many hours of happiness in her society. There he felt that he could more fully appreciate the transport of being beloved, for there every spot and every object was replete with memories of her grace, her wit, and her accomplishments. Books in which her name was inscribed lay upon the table. Music to which her touch and her tones had lent and added harmony, was scattered over the instrument. Sketches drawn by her skilful hand, were in the portfolios; and above all, there was the window at which she had stood beside him, the tapestry-frame at which she had wrought; and the mirror in which her faultless figure had been reflected. As the miser gazes, enrapt upon his treasures, so did Mortimer linger over each and all of these—for each and all told of her who had become to him the universe; and he was so thoroughly absorbed in this employment, that he continued unconscious of an arrival, until the door of the apartment opened, and Sybil herself stood before him.

For an instant he remained motionless: for the deep mourning dress of Miss Delamere jarred upon the current of his thoughts, and almost brought with it a sensation of remorse; but the feeling lasted scarcely a moment beneath the soft and sympathizing smile of his visitor, and the tearful accent in which she murmured, as she advanced towards him with extended hand,

"My poor Frederic! And do I indeed see you thus—the mere shadow of your former self! Had you then so utterly forgotten the future in the present? Did no thought of Sybil and of her anxieties induce you to be more careful of your health than I read in your pale cheek and your heavy eyes, that you have been? But I will not reproach you—no! not even for a silence which has wrung my heart, although it has never weakened my trust in your affection. I, too, have sorrowed, Mortimer; but my tears fell because I felt that yours were mingled with them; and the knowledge of your unhappiness suffiecd to make me wretched in my turn; but even in my moments of deepest grief, I remembered the future, and was comforted."

"My own kind Sybil," murmured Mortimer, as he drew her to his heart, and she suffered her head to rest for an instant upon his shoulder: "Talk not to me of the past: you are here; and to me you are all in all: but you know not, you cannot guess, all that I have felt and suffered."

"You deceive yourself," was the reply; "and it is in order to induce you to break through the melancholy associations by which you are now surrounded that I am here. My visit is, as I need scarcely say, ostensibly to your cousin; but you will not require to be told, that this early advent is caused by a deeper and a dearer anxiety. Frederic, you must no longer remain under this roof. The constant sight of objects familiar to you in other times, and under other circumstances will tend to render your melancholy morbid and unnatural. That you should grieve is just and right; but remember that you owe much to yourself—and—may I not add, something also to me?"

"I know and feel the truth of all that you advance, Sybil," said Mortimer mournfully; "and gladly, most gladly, would I act upon your suggestion; but you forget that I am not free—that my poor cousin is still too weak to encounter the fatigue of a removal; and that I cannot abandon her in a sorrow which has been induced by me and mine."

A slight color rose to the cheek of Miss Delamere, and her fine brow contracted for a moment; but it was with even greater gentleness that in the next instant she raised her eyes to those of her companion, and said, slowly and emphatically: "It is you, Frederic, who forgot the ready comments of a censorious world; and although I know that for yourself you could despise them, yet have you no right to disregard their probable effect upon your cousin. You may tell me, in your turn, that I have disregarded them in my own person; and of this I am aware; for not even the presence of Miss Mortimer under your roof may to some appear a sufficient excuse for my thus venturing to visit a house which has no longer a mistress; but there are feelings which place us beyond such considerations, nor do I hesitate to admit that I have been swayed by these. I could not know you to be unhappy, and sacrifice the joy of telling you how deeply I sympathized in your sorrow, by any paltry fear of misconstruction; and I had been for so long a time deprived of the privilege of seeing you, that I cast from m every other thought than that of the delight blending my tears with yours. I felt the nece sity of seeing you myself: of convincing yo that in losing your estimable mother you ha not lost *all*; and so long as *you* recognise and a preciate my motives, I am careless of all beside

"How shall I ever repay you for such affe tion?" murmured Mortimer tenderly, as he rai ed her hand to his lips.

"By listening to my advice," replied Mis Delamere; "by looking calmly and dispassion ately upon your position; and by admitting th reason of what I have already hinted. I wi not speak further of yourself, for I believe yo to be sufficiently unselfish to feel little interes upon that point; but once more, remember th invidious position of your cousin. Young, beau tiful, and as one who was very dear to yo never concealed, tenderly attached to you, d you imagine for a moment that she can thu continue alone to share your home, and t absorb your attention, without the greatest risk to her fair fame?"

"Who would dare—?" exclaimed Mortimer with a kindling eye.

"Many," replied his companion steadily "and those even among your most intimate associates: mothers who have daughters to marry; men whose age places them beyond the reach of slander; girls who are ambitious of your notice; and young men who are jealous of your advantages. I feel that I give you pain, my dear Frederic; but the probe of the surgeon is frequently the only cure. You are misled by a false chivalry—"

"Sybil," interposed her listener; "Gertrude has no other friend, save myself, on earth."

"And would you render that one worse than powerless?"

"You may be right; but I love her as a brother. How, then, can I abandon her at such a moment?"

"Simply by remembering the responsibility of your situation. Miss Mortimer is no longer a child; make her the judge between you."

"After what has passed, I feel that I dare not. She has already too much cause of complaint against me."

"And do you believe that by augmenting that cause, you can acquit yourself in her eyes? Need I say, Frederic," and again a shadow passed over the features of Miss Delamere of more than dubious expression; "need I explain to you how gladly I would have offered her a temporary home at The Grange, had I not been conscious that I should only subject myself to the mortification of a refusal? Such, indeed, was my first intention, but I soon felt its fallacy and nothing then remained to me save to exempt her, in so far as I might, from future suffering. Be it as you will, however. It is evident that I have deceived myself with regard to the extent of your interest in your cousin. Since you cannot part from her, my path is plain: I am once more taught to feel how greatly I overrate the affection of another when I test it by my own."

"Sybil! how have I deserved this?"

"Forgive me, Frederic, forgive me," murmur-

ed Miss Delamere, burying her face in her hands; "you have made me very wretched, and I have not pride enough to conceal my disappointment."

"My own love!" exclaimed Mortimer, as he clasped her tenderly to his heart; "how little do you understand me! When you entered the room all around me spoke only of yourself. It was to commune with your image that I was here. Yes, although I visited for the first time since the death of my mother the apartment in which she the most delighted, I had forgotten all save you—all save the hours which we had passed together on the same spot. I was to retrace a thousand memories of yourself that I was here. Sybil, you are my world—the very essence of my being: but I lay under a heavy debt of gratitude to my cousin, and I dare not even seem to forget its amount."

"Yet you wilfully risk the destruction of her peace—and mine."

And the tears of Miss Delamere forced a passage through her fingers.

"Be it as you will," said Mortimer, unmanned at the sight of her grief; "henceforward I can have no will but yours. Yet how can I explain an absence which will condemn her to perfect solitude in a house so lately visited by death? Will she not feel my departure as a wanton cruelty, which even her indulgence cannot excuse?"

"Not if you are frank; not if you sincerely place before her your real motive."

"Had she only secured another home," said Mortimer, reluctantly yielding to an influence against which he was unequal to contend; "I should feel less hesitation in informing her of my purpose; but, save myself, poor Gertrude possesses only one or two very distant relatives, to whom she is utterly unknown; and with whom, even should they consent to receive her, she would probably be unhappy."

"What, then, are your future plans regarding her?" asked Sybil, suddenly raising her head and looking steadfastly towards him.

"I confess that, as yet I have not formed any," was the reply.

"Then listen to me," said Miss Delamere, as she affectionately took his hand, and met his eyes with a smile. "We live in no modern Utopia, where men's tongues are dipped in honey, and women dream only of the blossoms amid which they walk; nor is the present all in all. Both Miss Mortimer and yourself have a long future before you, into which each must look steadily and carefully. You owe her much, very much; and it behoves you to act at once with generosity and prudence. She *has* relatives, you say; arrangements may therefore easily be made for a time, until you have a right, consistently and irreproachably, to offer her a home under your own roof. Acquit me, I beseech you, of a paltry jealousy which I should scorn, and do me justice. When that day comes I shall be the first to blame, should you fail in so high and holy a duty."

"Sybil, forgive me," exclaimed Mortimer passionately; "sorrow has made me weak and supine; and I indeed require your guiding affection. You are right, quite right. I am wilfully subjecting poor Gertrude to misconstruction. All shall be done as you suggest; and I trust that I have long years before me in which I may be able to prove how deeply I feel all that I owe her. But you have forgotten, dearest, that by this arrangement you are also banishing me from your own presence—sending me forth a wanderer without a beacon-light."

The eyes of Miss Delamers flashed, and her bosom heaved; but the smile was bland and the voice steady, in which she replied:

"Talk not of me, Frederic; my faith in your affection will suffice until the departure of Miss Mortimer enables you to return to Westrum; moreover, we have a great resource in a perpetual and daily correspondence. In such a case selfishness must be utterly laid aside. I speak to you only as a sister; be guided on this occasion by my advice, and trust me, you will have no reason to regret it. Moreover, no time should be lost. I repeat that the position of your cousin is invidious, while your own is scarcely less so. And now my ungracious task is ended. My visit was to Miss Mortimer, but I doubt if I can longer await her coming; and I will, therefore, leave alike my greeting and my condolence in your hands."

"And what more leave you, Sybil?"

"My heart, my soul, my being;—trifle not with the trust."

"Dare I believe so much?"

"Mortimer," said Miss Delamere, as she rose to depart; "I have been once deceived, and my life nearly paid the forfeit of my mistake; and yet I never loved *him* as I love you. Beware, therefore, of yourself, if I am dear to you; you know not, you cannot guess, all that your falsehood would involve."

"I shall never know it," whispered her companion, as he detained her.

"It would be, at best, a fearful knowledge," said Sybil with a slight shudder; "May it be spared to both of us."

And so they parted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Another day had dawned; and the cold gray light, as it slowly spread over the eastern horizon, fell upon the kneeling figure of Gertrude Mortimer, who, with her face buried among the cushions of an arm-chair which occupied the deep bay of the window of her sleeping chamber, had remained throughout the whole long silent night motionless, tearless, and almost unconscious.

There are feelings so deep that they annihilate the power of thought, and for a time almost seem to arrest vitality. Such were those of the orphan. The cousins had met as usual in the twilight; and, arm-in-arm, as was their wont, they had paced to and fro beneath the tall trees which overhung the water. They had done so every evening since the convalescence of Gertrude had enabled her to encounter such a fatigue; and every evening hitherto she had returned to the house when the heavy dew warned

ed her to retire, renovated both in health and heart. But now all was changed. With the image of Sybil still bright before him, Frederic had summoned sufficient resolution to point out to his dismayed and astonished listener the probable results of their present mode of life; and his representations, carefully and even tenderly as they were made, opened before her an abyss of difficulty, which, in her innocence, she had never apprehended.

That any ungenerous comment could be elicited by her residence in the dear old home which had cradled her childhood, and under the roof of a cousin who to her was as a brother, had never entered into her imagination; but now the veil was rent away, and she saw all the wretchedness of her fate. It was true, too true, that she had no longer a right to feel herself the natural and authorized inmate of that home—the legitimate companion of that cousin; and at once the fearful question arose in her mind, Where, then, am I to hide my sorrow? From whom am I to look for sympathy and affection?

Separated at an early age from all the relatives of her mother, by whom her very existence had probably been long forgotten, and to none of whom she could now be an object of interest, she knew not where she could apply even for shelter. The child of tenderness and indulgence, she had yet to learn the bitterness of that bread which is yielded rather than offered—of that protection which is an obligation rather than a blessing; and although, when Mortimer awakened her to the truth, he had been careful to remind her that, by the will of her deceased aunt, she was entitled to a legacy of two thousand pounds, she had scarcely heeded the assurance. As she had heard it when it was first announced to her, so did she hear it now, for she had yet to learn the importance of the fact; and the only impression which remained upon her mind, was one of gratitude for his earnest declaration that, let her dwell where she might, she would ever be to him an object of the dearest interest, whom it would be alike his pride and his delight to shield from every trial.

Poor Gertrude! To her the past and the future were alike a blank; while the present was fraught only with pain and difficulty. For the first time she felt the real influence of that terrific bugbear, the world—that thing of the hydra-head, and the million tongues. She shrank away appalled from its contact, and would fain have hidden herself from its eagle ken, and scorching touch. But where? The grave had swallowed up the bulwark which had been hitherto raised between them. She was alone; alone to wrestle, and alone to weep. She had turned to Frederic for counsel; but, like herself, he knew not upon what to determine.

And thus they had parted for the night, both depressed, both irresolute; but with what different feelings! Pained as he was, alike for his cousin and for himself, Mortimer was still able to relieve his anxiety and to mitigate his regret, by thoughts of Sybil, and visions of future happiness; while the poor and desolate orphan crept to her solitary chamber to brood in silence over this new and unexpected trial.

Tears slow and bitter, coursed each other down her pale cheeks, and hours passed by before she had even power to think; she felt her misery, but she could not analyze it. At length, however, this mute despair exhausted itself, and a clearer perception of her real position forced itself upon her reason. Her wan cheek crimsoned at the idea of slander—slander, connected with herself, however undeserved; and she tacitly acknowledged the propriety of her immediate separation from her cousin.

For awhile that one conviction overpowered her; nor had she ever known until that night how tenderly and exclusively she loved him. She knew it now, however; now when that one idea, the idea of living no longer under the same roof—of enjoying no longer his cherished companionship, annihilated all beside, and made all else appear as dust in the balance.

He loved another but even that was nothing so long as she could remain near him, and listen to his voice, and meet his smile. And now this poor luxury which she was daily purchasing with the wreck of her own peace, was wrested from her. They were to part. The world had already pronounced its fiat, and there was no appeal.

Then came another transition of feeling; less poignant perhaps, but still more frightful. She was to go! But *where?* She grasped her cold forehead with her burning hands, and tried to think. What a waste spread wide and blank before her! She could not remain at Westrum! all eyes would be upon her there; all would remember the past, and she should wither beneath the lip-deep pity of the idle and the curious: not there—where she must witness the progress of her cousin's suit, and hear the thrilling peal chime out the moment of his marriage. And Westrum had hitherto been her world; and all beyond was strange and new to her.

Mortimer was her last surviving relative on her father's side, and thus she found no resting-place for her weary heart, where she would willingly have sought it. Of her mother's family she knew no more than that two of her relations still existed: the nearest of whom was a brother, who by careful perseverance had realized a handsome fortune, which, by his unsocial and penurious habits, had been yearly increasing; but whose heart had long been closed against all his connexions.

Gertrude gasped for breath as she recalled to her memory all that she had heard of him: his harsh unkindness to her consumptive mother—his insolent neglect of her widowed father—his utter abandonment of herself. To Mr. Sinclair she felt that she could make no appeal; to him she must be simply an object of grudging charity: an intrusive and unwelcome dependent. She could not accept his protection upon such terms as these, even should he be induced to promise it; and that he would do so was more than doubtful. Of Miss Warrington, the maiden aunt of her mother, she knew little, save that she dwelt in a small village in Devonshire, where she contrived with some difficulty to make a

very confined income suffice for her limited wants, but she was aware that every year a brief and formal, although kind, letter had arrived at Westrum from the old lady, desiring tidings of her own welfare, until she had attained the age of womanhood, when these periodical enquiries had suddenly ceased: and all intercourse was thus terminated between Mrs. Mortimer and the last relative of her mother who had appeared to feel an interest in her fate.

All this was bleak enough; and the timid and loving heart of Gertrude shrank tremblingly before the bitter trial of re-awakening a long dormant, and in all probability, extinct affection in the bosom of an aged and unknown relation, of whose disposition, habits, and prejudices, she was, moreover, utterly ignorant. Needy as she was, there was much reason to apprehend that she would, from motives of prudence, decline to burden herself with an inmate who could do little towards a decrease of her penury, and might prove an incumbrance rather than a comfort; but cheerless and unpromising as the plan appeared, it was that upon which the unhappy girl decided. She felt that she could better support the privations of poverty and the exactions of old age, even although rendered doubly selfish by a life of solitude, than the insolent intolerance of purse-proud and heartless vanity, meting out its benevolence with a scornful lip and a niggard spirit.

Thus resolved, the orphan rose from her knees; and drawing back the curtains which had hitherto shut out the daylight, seated herself calmly and tearlessly at her desk. She had wept over the past; she shrank from dwelling upon the present; but she nerved herself bravely against the future.

She wrote respectfully and frankly; she explained alike her position and her apprehensions; she boldly declared the limited nature of her resources; and she threw herself upon the generosity of her mother's kinswoman. She made no professions, and volunteered no promises; she knew the purity of her own intentions; and she was too proud to sully them by exhibiting a doubt that they could be suspected.

The task was nevertheless, an arduous one; for she had no clue by which to guess how her communication would be received. She felt that she had no claim upon the kindness of the lonely old lady; and she said so with the same truthfulness which was constantly her habit. It was easy to read that her heart had bled as she wrote, but she did not intrude her sorrow where she was uncertain of sympathy.

Her painful task ended, she closed the letter, once more shut out the light, and throwing herself upon her knees, prayed fervently for strength to meet the result of her application, be it what it might; and then, calmed and comforted, she slept, and for a time forgot in the deep and dreamless slumber of exhaustion, the weight of sorrow by which she was bowed almost to the earth.

In the morning, when the cousins again met, Gertrude summoned sufficient nerve to acquaint Frederic with her decision of the past night; but he, who had found it comparatively easy to paraphrase the reasonings of Sybil, felt his heart sink as he contemplated the actual position of the orphan.

"You are too hasty in your arrangements, my dear Gertrude," he said anxiously; "as although, for your own sake, it is necessary that we should part for a time, it is by no means expedient or proper that you should quit the home of your childhood with a haste which would seem to imply that you were no longer a welcome inmate. I will not dwell upon my own feelings in this emergency—they are too painful; but I must insist that you are just to yourself. You do not know, my dear cousin—and Heaven grant that you never may!—the myriad trials of poverty; the wringing misery of those perpetual and soul-draining expedients to which the well-born poor are subjected. You cannot share the privations of Miss Warrington."

"I care not for poverty," observed Gertrude, forcing a smile.

"Because you do not comprehend it," replied Mortimer gravely; "Nor must you ever do so. I will not insult you by urging my right upon this point; let it suffice that it ought to be, and shall be enforced; but at the same time, it is incumbent upon you not even to appear as though you were willing to add to difficulties, already, no doubt sufficiently oppressive. Be guided, I entreat of you, by me. In the first place, do not as yet, even dream of leaving Westrum. I will absent myself for a time, and this must be all that is necessary to prevent unpleasant remarks."

"Never!" exclaimed Gertrude energetically; "You shall not be driven from your home for my sake."

"Will you not yield to my wishes, Gertrude? Remember, my dear girl, the probable importance of this one step to all your after life. I have already much, very much, with which to reproach myself; do not deepen my self-blame by showing me that you disregard my advice. Are you not the sister of my adoption? Are you not——"

"Enough—enough," gasped out his listener; "Be your will what it may, it shall be obeyed."

"Do not speak so coldly," said Mortimer, with emotion: "Only to know you happy, I would make almost any sacrifice. Let us then, work together to this end, for it *must* be accomplished. Why do you not claim a home—call it so if you will, though I trust soon to offer you one more genial—why do you not claim a home with Mr. Sinclair? He was the brother of your mother—your own nearest relation; and under his roof you will at least be secure of every luxury to which you have been accustomed."

"I dread the price that must be paid for luxuries which I am contented to forego."

"Do not be misled by what may, after all, prove to be a false apprehension. It is true that Mr. Sinclair was a cold brother, and a lukewarm friend; but he has been throughout life intent only upon accumulating wealth. We have not communicated with him for years; and time, my dear Gertrude, works strange changes. Your uncle is a solitary, childless man; he must have passed many a weary hour, even amid his prosperity; and remember, that if he has re-

mained silent during so many years, we, on our side, have made no attempt to dispel that silence. It may be that he will thankfully receive to his heart the child of his only sister; and should you once meet, the result cannot be doubtful. In any ease you owe it both to yourself and him, to make the first appeal to his affection."

"I will do so."

"I thank you for your compliance, but let it be done cautiously; do not suffer him to imply that you have no other resource—do not permit him to believe that you are dependent upon his acquiescence for a home."

"Upon what pretext can I then address him? asked Gertrude, almost reproachfully. Mortimer buried his eyes in his hands, and remained silent.

"My dear Frederie," resumed his cousin, with a composure which grew out of the very bitterness of her anguish: "whatever I do, and to whomsoever I apply in my extremity, I must act with openness and honor. I have been the child of benevolence almost from my cradle; and although the hand of charity has hitherto been extended to me so tenderly that I have never felt its weight, I must now learn to receive the bitterness with the blessing, and to be grateful for the boon, however offered. I cannot approach my uncle with a vain sophistry upon my lips; I must present myself as I am: I need a home, and it is from him that you have willed for me to ask one. I feel and know that you would spare me every mortification to which it is possible that I may be subjected by telling the whole truth; but believe me, it would only make the suffering greater, were it deferred until it brought with it the rebuke of my own conscience. I will write to Mr. Sinclair since you desire it; but it must be as I have written to Miss Warrington; and I have a firm conviction that our correspondenee will soon terminate."

"The whole affair makes me wretched," murmured Mortimer; "I feel that I am wrong, and yet—"

"Wherefore accuse yourself?" asked Gertrude affectionately; "you have acted towards me with the frank and upright principle which I had a right to expect from you. I am weak, I know; but I will not prove unworthy of you; of those ———"

Tears stopped her utterance; and Mortimer, no longer able to contend with his emotion, seized his hat and hurried from the room.

How often is eowardice blent with the better feelings! Mortimer could escape by flight the spectacle of a sorrow which he deeply felt; but he had not the heroism to sacrifice his own selfish gratification in order to mitigate its extent.

Much had passed during the interview that was soothing to the feelings of Gertrude; but nothing which had lessened the difficulties of her position. She was still helpless and homeless; and the new task which had devolved upon her of addressing Mr. Sinclair, was the most mortifying trial to which she had been yet exposed.

That he would receive her as an inmate she did not for an instant anticipate, and she consequently felt that the suffering was gratuitous; but it was Frederie's desire that she should at least offer him the alternative, and she was content to abide by his directions. The letter was therefore written in deep sorrow, but with perfect resignation; and the days which necessarily intervened before an answer could arrive, were among the most cruel of her life.

It came, however, at length; and cold, brief, and insulting as it was, she experieneed a sensation of relief on finding that he definitely declined her proposal. He was sorry, he said, that those who had reared her as that most useless of all created beings, a fine lady, had ultimately left her a beggar; although such a climax might have been expected; and it could not be rationally anticipated that he, who from motives of prudence had remained a bachelor, would voluntarily eneumber himself with a person about whom he knew nothing, and who could advance no claim upon his notice. He wished her well, and warned her to be prepared for mortifications and trials of all sorts, which it would be impossible for her, situated as she was, to avoid; but he hoped that by humility and industry, supposing that she possessed any talent sufficiently useful to be turned to account, she might ultimately be able to make her way in the world. And this was all. There was no word of sympathy; no sentence of encouragement. The gulf between them yawned wider and blacker than ever; and she had no refuge, save in the compassion of the poor and solitary Miss Warrington.

Mortimer had awaited the reply of Mr. Sinclair before he left Westrum; and it was with a feeling of bitter indignation that he perused it. His first impulse was to hasten to town, in order to seek an interview with the cold-hearted worshipper of Mammon, and to impress upon him the unworthiness of his conduct, and the responsible position in which he stood towards his last surviving relative; but from this measure he was dissuaded by Gertrude herself, who meekly represented that her uncle was fully borne out in his assertion that she had no claim upon him, save that which his own heart might have afforded her, and who declared her willingness rather to suffer any privation than to intrude herself again upon his notice.

Mortimer argued in vain; for once his cousin was resolute. The very extremity of her position had nerved her with a fictitious courage.

"I have still a hope," she said, forcing back the tears which rose to her burning eyelids; "I have still one relative who may feel for my orphan state, and with whom I shall be safe from the comments of the idle and the malevolent. My tastes are simple; for I have never forgotten that I was indebted for all the blessings by which my youth has been surrounded to the goodness of others; and thus I have taught myself to comprehend that I might one day be called upon to resign them. Moreover, my dear cousin, I am rich in the conviction of your regard, a treasure of which the world cannot deprive me, and thanks to the unfailing kindness of her to whom I owe everything, and whose affection endured even beyond the grave,

I am not quite pennyless: while I possess talents which may also be made available. Go then, in peace, my dear cousin; and rest satisfied that, in one way or the other, I shall soon be enabled to send you an assurance that your anxiety upon my account may cease. Do not imagine that I speak lightly or presumptuously: I have thought much and seriously during the last few days; and I am comforted by the conviction that others have successfully combated against circumstances even more unpromising than those by which I am now surrounded."

"Could I but see any means by which your departure from hence might be rendered unnecessary—" broke in Mortimer.

"There are none; and I ought earlier to have foreseen the necessity of my removal; nor can I find any excuse for my want of prudence, save in my ignorance of society, and the extent of my mental suffering. Now, however, all is clear to me; and for my sake and your own, it must no longer be deferred. By to-morrow's post I shall forward my letter to Miss Warrington; and should that fail, I must learn to suffice to myself."

"You do not comprehend the trials of which you talk with so much calmness."

"It may be so," said the poor girl sadly; "but it is a knowledge which will soon be acquired, and must be accepted with philosophy. And now let us rather speak of your departure. Like my letter, you must leave Westrum to-morrow; and I shall be better able in solitude to arrange my plans, and brace myself to whatever necessity may arise."

"You will write to me frequently, daily, Gertrude?"

"I can scarcely promise so much; but directly that I have anything to tell, you shall hear from me. And now, Frederic, let us part at once; you have much to arrange, and your time is short. I too, need rest. To-morrow we shall meet again before your departure; and meanwhile we do but unnerve each other."

"You are perhaps right," said Mortimer irresolutely, "and yet——"

"Not a word more, my own dear cousin, if you would spare me," murmured Gertrude almost inarticulately, and Frederic attempted no further expostulation, but drawing the drooping girl to his bosom, and pressing his lips to her pale brow, he gently replaced her upon her seat, and left the room.

As he disappeared, she swept back her dishevelled hair, fixed a long look of anguish upon her mourning dress, and then bowing her head upon her hands, remained motionless.

He was gone! They had parted, perhaps for ever; for already she had resolved not to expose herself to the trial of the morrow's meeting. He was gone! And where? To forget her and her sorrow in the smiles of Sybil. He, at least, had a haven of happiness in which he could find shelter from the pitiless storms of that world on which she was about to be launched, unknowing upon what bleak shore she might be driven.

She felt like one in a frightful dream; all about her appeared unreal; the floor rocked beneath her feet; and old familiar objects wore a strange aspect that chilled her to the very heart. She almost doubted her identity, and yet, it was all too true; the dimness of her vision passed away; and the truth, the frightful truth, stood cold and bare before her.

Slowly, but steadily, she rose from the sofa, and for a while her hand wandered over the thousand cherished trifles that were strown upon the table before her. Her eyes were tearless, and her lip never quivered. Hers was the very desolation of the spirit to which tears are refused!

CHAPTER XIX.

"My Dear Niece,—

"You have acted prudently, and properly. You cannot, and must not, remain one day longer than is absolutely indispensable under the same roof with your unmarried cousin. A young woman's reputation is like a sheet of white paper, and people are ready enough to scrawl upon it when they can.

"I am glad, for your own sake, that Mrs. Mortimer has behaved so handsomely; for there is no blessing like independence. It has been the comfort of my own life, that I am independent of every body.

"I hope that you are not a beauty—I detest beauties—and that you are not a gad-about; I never go out except to church; and not often even there, owing to my deafness. If you are notable, we shall get on famously together, for I have a great respect for the useful; and where people are not over rich they must be managing.

"I have given orders to have all prepared for you, so you will have no trouble when you arrive, and will have time to look round.

"Drop me a line to say when I may expect you; and keep up your spirits, for I have long learned the folly of fretting for what cannot be mended.

"Travel as cheaply as you can; money spent upon the road leaves nothing to show for it, and is waste at best. When I travelled I always carried a provision-basket, and found it a great saving.

"As we shall so soon meet, I shall reserve all further advice for future occasions; and only add, with my respects to your cousin, that I am,

"Your affectionate aunt,

"Martha Warrington.

"P.S. I opened my letter to bid you wrap up carefully. Sore throats are easily caught at this time of the year."

Gertrude gasped for breath. She had once more a home, and she was thankful. It is true, that a few words of consolation and sympathy would have cheered her shrinking spirit; but there was at least kindness in the quiet and matter-of-course manner in which her unknown relative had at once opened her house, if not her heart. The style of the letter was dry and quaint; but still it gave little clue to the real character of the writer.

The caution of old age, and the prudence of parsimony, were indeed apparent; but beyond

these, the orphan could gather nothing upon which to hinge a single idea of the real disposition of her aunt; and these were naturally so have been anticipated under the circumstances. Taken altogether the prospect was not a cheering one; but it nevertheless held out a certainty of protection and security which excited her gratitude, and aroused her from the torpor into which she had fallen since the departure of her cousin.

She felt that no time was to be lost, and she resolved to obey the directions of her new mistress to the letter. Earnestly, therefore, she commenced her simple preparations. Every thing that she possessed she owed to the generosity of her departed aunt; and now, when she was about to quit for ever the home of her lost happiness, she felt as though her ownership in all had ceased.

In vain did the weeping Roberts entreat and expostulate; Gertrude was firm. One by one she rejected the proffered eleganees which she had been accustomed to call her own; replacing each in its proper position, and scrupulously refusing to herself the gratification of retaining the most trifling object not absolutely necessary to her personal comfort.

The pang was at once bitter and complicated, for most of these had been the cherished treasures of long years; but not the less were they all abandoned. Tears swelled in her eyes as she turned away from the instrument which had been a birth-day gift; from the work-frame at which she had so sedulously wrought beside her gentle aunt; the books that she had loved, the flowers that she had tended. She cared little for the costly baubles with which she had so often been adorned, for they reflected only hours of empty gaiety and vain display; but all that spoke to her of a companionship and an affection for ever lost, wrung her heart almost to bursting.

At length all was ready: the modest packages were made; the chaise which was to convey her to the country town, whence the coach in which she was to travel to her destination took its departure, was ordered for the morrow; and then, and only then, she sat down to acquaint Mortimer with her proceedings. To have done so earlier would have been to summon him home only to renew a parting which to her had already been a trial almost beyond her strength; to have, perhaps, subjected herself to receive him as her companion during the journey; and thus to have prolonged her sufferings, and incurred the risk of exciting the displeasure of Miss Warrington, who had evidently been unprepared for such an arrangement.

Had she been less absorbed by grief, it is probable that she might have displayed less firmness; but there is a recklessness in actual anguish which causes all minor considerations to be unheeded; and thus the timid and tenderly nurtured orphan, who had never hitherto moved from her home without the protecting escort of her aunt, now calmly prepared to set forth on a long and weary journey, alone and self-dependent.

For the last time, she wandered in silence and sorrow about the grounds; for the last time, she flung herself upon her knees beside the bed upon which her loved protectress had so lately lain stretched in death; and for the last time, she lingered at the door of her cousin's room, and remembered how proudly and how joyously she had decked it out with flowers, when he returned to his home, and to the hearts of those who had so long awaited him. Alas! for what! Then, came the parting with the old and attached servants, who had known and loved her from her childhood; and she had to part from one and all with a closed hand; but she meekly explained her inability to repay their affection by aught save words and wishes, for which they blessed her as she went; and she at length flung herself into the chaise; and, drawing down the blinds, wept unrestrainedly, as she was borne away from her home—her friends—her memories—and her hopes.

Poor Gertrude! The measure of her misery was full. She had drained the cup of bitterness to its very lees; and still she was like a seared autumnal leaf, driven onward, she knew not where; the very spot of fate.

Nothing can be told of such a journey. What were its petty annoyances, its puerile difficulties, its coarse inconveniences to her! She had a more perfect antidote against all outlay either of anxiety or money than even the basket of the thrifty Miss Warrington, in the heart-sickness which made her careless of all personal indulgences.

And so she travelled on day and night, unconscious of fatigue, and only aroused to the necessity of sustaining nature by the officious suggestions of her fellow-passengers; nor did she shrink away even from the ungenial contact with the voluble and the busy, or from the unaccustomed food which was placed before her; she neither heard the first, nor heeded the second. Her thoughts and her memories were alike her only companions.

At last, her dreary pilgrimage was over, as the coach stopped at a wayside inn, to change horses, where a peasant lad civilly inquired if one Miss Mortimer were a passenger; and, having received an affirmative reply from the coachman, approached the window, and, touching his hat, announced himself as her guide to Bletchley, which lay off the main road.

A short note from her aunt, desiring her to follow the messenger and to leave her luggage at the inn until the evening, when she would send a car to transport it to its destination, left her no alternative; and, alighting from the vehicle, worn and weary as she was, she prepared for this new exertion.

Ere she had walked many minutes, however, she felt thankful that it was necessary, for her way lay through rich fields ripening for the harvest; then, bounded a pleasant copse, where the nuts hung in clusters above her head; and, finally, led her along the margin of a little stream, whose ripple ran cool and bright over a bed of pebbles. The birds were singing merrily in the boughs, the sun was shining cheerily in the heavens, and the soft breeze bathed her fevered forehead in freshness.

What a relief was this from the stifling atmo-

sphere, and the noisy discomfort of the moving prison in which she had been so long immured! Wretched as she was, she felt the bland and blessed influence of nature; and, as her rustic guide trudged on silently beside her, she strove to shake off her depression, and to make an effort to meet her new friend with composure and self-command.

On any other occasion, the fatigue of such a walk would have overcome the slender strength of the orphan; but now it gave her time for reflection; and, as they approached the village, she remarked with delight the modest church, half overgrown with ivy, which stood apart upon the summit of a gentle rise, at whose base the rivulet wound placidly along; while its downward slope was studded with the humble graves of the villagers, and grazed by innumerable sheep. All seemed calm and peaceful; and, save where one straggling street formed an ungraceful line in the centre of the picture, the modest cottages peeped out, each from its nest of leaves, and she already found herself wishing that in one of these she was about to find her home.

It was, consequently, with a feeling akin to disappointment, that she saw her guide make directly for the central street; and, after having traversed it to a third of its length, open the gate of a dingy, grim, brick house, separated from the pathway by a stripe of gravel enclosed within an iron palisade. Her heart swelled, and her spirit once more sank; but this revulsion of feeling was happily interrupted by the apparition of a female figure upon the threshold. It was evident that some one had been watching for her arrival; and the very fact conveyed a welcome.

This conviction lent her new energy; and, when the extended hand and the feeble voice convinced her that she had interpreted its meaning aright, she could only murmur out a few inarticulate words as she suffered herself to be led into the dwelling.

She had just left the balmy fields, the benignant sunshine, and the fresh breeze of heaven, beneath which her heart had expanded, and her sorrows had for a while been hushed; and again she suddenly found herself surrounded by gloom, and that bleak discomfort which strikes upon the sense even before the eye has become cognisant of its cause. But she repressed the sigh which was rising to her lips, as she endeavored to reply to the friendly greeting with which she was received. Miss Warrington had again sunk into her chair, as she entered the apartment; and it was not until she had slowly removed her bonnet, that Gertrude ventured to glance towards her new protectress.

When she did do so, her eye fell upon a tall and meagre form, so rigidly upright that the attitude was almost painful to contemplate, from the impression of restraint which it produced. It seemed impossible that any emotion, however powerful, could relax the rigid sinews of the frame, or the hard muscles of the countenance; while every fold of the tightly-fitting and dingy black dress, and every plait in the snowy neckerchief and cap, appeared to partake of the same precision. The gray hair was banded smoothly over a forehead upon which long years and worldly trials had alike failed to impress a wrinkle; while the dim eyes, the long straight nose, and the tightly-compressed and slender lips, completed a picture little calculated to inspire other feelings than those of timidity and apprehension.

And the frame was worthy of the picture.

The apartment was low and dark; and it was easy to perceive that every article of furniture had occupied its present position from the moment in which it had become the property of its owner; the heavy and unwieldy chairs appeared to have grown to the walls against which they were ranged in straight lines and even distances; the antique table, with its claw feet, had worn a dint into the floor, and its polished surface was guiltless of a stain; the tall bureau loomed dark and rigid in a recess beside the fire: and not one vestige of actual inhabitation, not one trace of the every-day occupation which lend a grace and a gladness to every home, however humble, of which they form a part, was perceptible throughout the room.

Gertrude had nerved herself to encounter poverty and privation; but this utter absence of all the minor elegances which help to throw a veil over the sternest trials of life, struck her to the very heart; and its effect was the greater, because it was an evil for which she had been totally unprepared. An open book, a single flower, would have removed the impression; but neither book nor flower was to be seen in the little parlor of Miss Warrington. All was cold, and bleak, and desolate.

An instant sufficed for this ungenial survey; and then, shivering with a chill which seemed to be coursing through her veins like a stream of ice, the unhappy Gertrude withdrew her eyes from the blank around her to fix them once more upon her companion.

The old lady had, meanwhile, been as busily occupied in examining the person of her niece; and it would have been easy for any one, accustomed to interpret the expression of her almost inflexible countenance, to discover that she was not entirely satisfied with the result. She became, if possible, a line more upright; her thin lips were drawn a degree more tightly together; and her bony fingers were more closely clasped. Even through the dimness of her failing sight, she had already ascertained that her new inmate was a beauty!

The first solecism of poor Gertrude was an attempt to place her bonnet, which she had held for a considerable time in her hand while answering the inquiries of her aunt regarding her journey, upon the uncovered table.

"You will excuse me, my dear Miss Mortimer," said the old lady, as she solemnly waved her back with her hand, "but I do not allow anything to be placed upon that table, until I am assured that it is free from dust, and can do no mischief. As we are to live together, we had better understand each other at once. If your bonnet fatigues you, be good enough to place it upon a chair."

Gertrude obeyed in silence. Her heart was wrung.

"I have no doubt that we shall get on very well before long," pursued Miss Warrington, "that is, as I remarked in my letter, if you are simple and quiet in your habits; as, indeed, under your present circumstances, you will require to be. Method is everything: it is by method that I have lived respectably upon my slender income, as becomes one who is a gentlewoman by birth; and it is by method only that you will learn to do the same. But now, I dare say, you will be glad to go to your own room, and rest yourself after your journey. You will find all prepared. I have, indeed, gone to some slight expense in order to make you comfortable; but you are welcome to all that I can do, and I hope that you will approve of my arrangements."

Gertrude faltered out her thanks; and the old lady having rung a hand-bell which stood within reach, she hastily snatched up her bonnet, and followed the staid middle-aged servant by whom the summons was answered, up a dark and narrow flight of stairs; and, with a feeling of relief impossible to describe, at length found herself alone in the apartment which had been allotted to her.

Her first impulse was to cast herself upon her knees, to implore strength and support in her coming trials; and to offer up the mute thanksgivings of her spirit for the home which had received her, when she might have been a desolate wanderer in the wilderness of the world. This duty performed, she rose and glanced with some interest round the narrow room that was now her own. All was scrupulously clean and orderly; the uncurtained bed was covered with a counterpane of snowy whiteness; the painted table was similarly adorned, the solitary window was draped with festoons of dimity, and overlooked a garden shaded by tall old trees; the mantel was decorated with an oval piece of satin embroidery, representing the parting of Hector and Andromache, in a black frame; and the walls had been newly whitewashed.

Poor and rude as all these arrangements were, Gertrude, nevertheless felt grateful; and endeavored to believe that she should soon cease to regret the absence of the elegance to which she had been accustomed, in the luxury of solitude. It was the daily and hourly demand upon her feelings in the society of her aunt which appalled her; for she had already seen enough to be convinced that they had not a habit or a sentiment in common.

Once shut into the little room which was to be her own, she believed that she should find strength in the very extremity of her isolation; and as she contemplated the luxuriant foliage which made a twilight in the apartment, she remembered Westrum and its embowering trees, and she felt that she yet possessed one source of rational enjoyment.

Long, therefore, ere she was summoned to the tea-table of Miss Warrington she had recovered sufficient calm to meet her, with at least apparent cheerfulness; and she made the effort the more readily, that she was conscious how little her sorrow was likely to be met with sympathy; and how much it might be misconstrued, and perhaps resented.

Old age is apt to attach an undue importance to the brilliant futilities of life, and to suspect others of prizing them at an equal price; and thus the sorrows of the heart, even while they reject or overlook such considerations, are frequently mistaken for the mortifications of vanity, and provoke rather animadversion than pity.

Even inexperienced as she was, Gertrude intuitively felt this truth; and conscious that her new protectress must be well aware of the change which she could not fail to discover between the affluence to which she had been accustomed, and the comparative penury to which she was now condemned, she saw at once that it behoved her to display no disappointment or inconvenience from the transition.

To the meek and unselfish nature of the orphan this was easy; for to personal privation she was indifferent. It was the moral coercion which she foresaw that alarmed her; that bare and whitewashed room would have been to her a paradise, could she only have been assured that there her life could have been spent; but this she knew to be impossible; other duties awaited her, and these must be performed at any cost.

It was, however, with a sensation of pleasure that she found herself introduced into a less formal apartment than that in which she had at first been received; when, after having smoothed her hair and bathed her eyes, she again descended from her chamber. True, all was chilly, formal, and methodical, in this new parlor also, but still it was less appalling than the state-room, which had evidently been opened in honor of her arrival. The gaunt bureau was replaced by a small writing-table; the chairs were capable of transport; and upon the table stood the cheerful tea-equipage, flanked by a pair of candles; while upon a set of swinging shelves suspended from the wall, rested half-a-dozen volumes, of divers degrees of antiquity.

Miss Warrington, in a roomy and upright chair of time-polished mahogany, was already established before the tea-tray, as rigid, as passionless, and as correct as before; but the accent in which she invited her guest to seat herself was kind, and even gracious.

"Your baggage has arrived, my dear niece," she said, as Gertrude ventured to approach a chair, "and by this time to-morrow you will be quite at home. For a while, at least, you will have no leisure to be dull; for this is a busy season at Bletchley. We have preserves to make, and wine; and I have no doubt that you will willingly relieve me of so great a responsibility."

"I almost fear———" commenced Gertrude timidly.

"Fear what?" asked the old lady, somewhat sharply, as her pinched lips became thinner and closer: "Surely you do not mean to say that you are ignorant of so simple an accomplishment?"

"I must, I believe, plead guilty to this ignorance, my dear madam," replied the orphan with a sad smile; "but I shall rejoice to learn all that you may be kind enough to teach me."

The first feeling of Miss Warrington was evidently one of intense surprise and displeasure; but this was soon rebuked by the submissive manner of her young relative.

"Well, well," she said encouragingly, "the fault is perhaps not your own; and if you are indeed willing, as you say, to learn, it may still be repaired. But, bless me, Miss Mortimer, how did you employ your time?"

"In reading, madam, in painting, or with my instrument, or my needle."

"Then you *can* work? That at least is something, and may be made useful in every family; but reading, painting, and playing, are mere waste of time, and can be turned to no account. I have no reproach of that kind to make to myself in my old age; and you will do well to avoid it for the future."

Gertrude sighed in silence.

"I am glad to see," pursued the old lady after a pause and still in the same monotonous and sententious accent, "that you are at all events free from the silly love of dress; the amount of your packages has already convinced me of that fact."

"I have brought with me, madam, merely my mourning," replied Gertrude, devouring the tears which forced themselves into her eyes, "nor do I apprehend that I shall ever wish to throw it off."

"And you are right, quite right," said Miss Warrington, totally misapprehending the sentiment of the assurance; "With good management nothing is more economical than black. I have worn it for years, and therefore speak from experience. Fortunately, we have no shops at Bletchley—at least, none of those shops that are the Vanity-fair at which young women barter their prudence for finery. We are quiet people at Bletchley, and have nothing to do with the idle nonsense of fashion."

And so passed the evening; wearisome and flat, and almost interminable. Not a sentence was spoken by the lady of the house which did not bear some reference to that gnawing, grinding, ever-present necessity, which is enforced by slender means coupled with the pretension of gentility. Every action, every thought, and every effort, was ruled by the one leading principle; all were to tend to the same object; nothing was to be said, or devised, or undertaken, which did not acknowledge as its aim, the furtherance of some petty economy, or some puerile saving.

Gertrude was bewildered. She felt like one in a new world; and her spirit quailed under the consciousness of her utter inability to comprehend or to assist the views of her enforced associate. Frederic was right. She had indeed talked too lightly of trials which she had never comprehended; of a struggle which she had been unable to foresee. Hers had hitherto been the poetry of life; she was now about to be initiated into its prose.

CHAPTER XX.

The receipt of his cousin's letter at once hastened the return of Mortimer to Westrum, which he reached in the hope that he might anticipate her departure. We have already shown that he failed in his object; nor was his regret lessened by the desolate sensation created by the aspect of a companionless house. Amid all his self-blame—for that he did feel much is certain, however unwilling he might be to admit the fact to himself—his annoyance was, moreover, increased upon perceiving around him every object on which his eyes had been accustomed to rest: and of which he was well aware that Gertrude was the actual owner. There stood her piano—and he knew the value she had attached to it; here were her books—the chosen friends of her retirement—nay, the key placed in his hand by the weeping Roberts, and which opened a small inlaid cabinet, the bequest of his dead father to a niece whom he loved as a child, soon convinced him that, even to the graceful ornaments which all women prize so highly, she had left everything behind.

For a time, Mortimer felt as though there were a tacit reproach in this self-denudation on the part of his absent cousin; but a moment's reflection enabled him to do her better justice; and he was deeply impressed by the intuitive delicacy of her proceeding.

His first care was to give earnest instructions to Mrs. Roberts to cause everything, however trifling which had been the property of her young mistress, to be carefully collected; and, this done, he accompanied the willing waiting-woman through the principal apartments, and bade her point out every object for which she had heard his cousin profess any preference or regard, and add them to the rest. The packages were then made; and the heart of Frederic felt lighter as he saw them driven from the door.

During his ramble through the grounds that evening, he was almost happy in the knowledge that Gertrude would find comfort and consolation in the accustomed objects thus restored to her; and as the deer, wearied of waiting for the kind notice of their gentle mistress, approached him to claim his caress, and appeared to demand, with their mild eyes, tidings of their missing playmate, he almost smiled as he responded to their mute but intelligent inquiry.

Poverty could not now subject his cousin to *every* species of privation; and the period of her exile must soon terminate; for had not Sybil, his own high-hearted Sybil, reminded him that her proper home would soon be beneath his own roof? Frederic had forgotten that women seldom forgive even a shadow of rivalry.

The letter which he had despatched to Gertrude to announce the departure of her property, was almost buoyant; for, delighted to have thus, in some degree, made compensation for his other short-comings, he forgot in the prospect of her temporary gratulation, the more enduring evils by which she was surrounded; and, after reproaching her for leaving Westrum without affording him the opportunity of accompanying her to her new residence, he reminded her that ere long, he should reclaim her at the hands of her present hostess; and painted the future in colors bright enough to scare her spirit as she contrasted them with the

ues of the present; and felt the utter impossibility of their ultimate realization.

It was consequently, in an eviable frame of mind that he started, on the following morning for The Grange. Sybil was not yet apprised of his arrival, of which he had abstained from acquainting her, anxious to enjoy, to the fullest extent, the delight of her surprise; but, before we accompany him to this new meeting with his affianced bride, we must conduct our readers to the luxurious abode of the proud beauty, and introduce them to a new acquaintance.

Among the other characteristics of the pleasure-grounds of The Grange, was a long walk fringed with superb laurels, which traversed an exotic shrubbery at some distance from the house, and formed a delightful retreat during the more sultry portion of the day.

As Mortimer was leaving Westrum, two persons entered the walk, one of whom was Miss Delamere, and the other a stranger, upon whose arm she leaned, as in earnest and engrossing conversation, they moved slowly forward.

There was a singular expression of mingled triumph and apprehension on the brow of Sybil, while the features of her companion wore a restless and anxious look, totally at variance with his apparent character. He was a tall and finely-formed man of about thirty years of age, with large light-blue eyes, fair hair, arranged after a foreign fashion, a marked and somewhat salient nose, and a beard closely cut, and encircling his chin, a mode now designated *en collier* but which was, at that period, totally unknown in England. A decided air of fashion, and even of pretension, could be detected through the extreme, but evidently studied simplicity of his dress and bearing; and there was an expression of haughty supercilliousness about his mouth, which he found it impossible at intervals to suppress.

"And you are really happy, Sybil?" were the first words he uttered after a pause, during which his eyes had been rivetted upon the fairy-like form of his companion.

"Certainly."

"I dare not believe it possible."

"And wherefore?"

"Because you once loved me. Deny it not: you loved me."

"Is this intended as an insult, Sir Horace?" asked Miss Delamere, as she suddenly paused, and withdrawing her hand from his arm, looked proudly into his face.

"Pshaw!" muttered the stranger through his clenched teeth, at the same time re-possessing himself of the liberated hand, and again leading her forward; "Do you connect the idea of insult with your love? Be more rational, charming Sybil. You are conscious that there is no great pleasure to be derived from dwelling upon the past for either of us; but this slight reference was necessary. You are too clever a tactitian, too accomplished a woman of the world, to imagine for a moment that it is simply curiosity which had led me to intrude upon you on this occasion. You cannot think it, and must be well able to solve the riddle. Tell me then, why am I here?"

"I am no Œdipus," was the cold reply; but the heart of the lady beat tumultuously, and her eye fell as she compelled herself to answer: "You must e'en play the Sphinx yourself."

"You will not help me to a solution?"

"I cannot."

"Nay, then, since you are resolved, I know you well enough to feel all the fruitlessness of persisting further—and yet your woman-heart—"

"Has ceased to control my reason," interposed Miss Delamere. "I have learned the fallacy of imagination, and am now content to abide by realities."

"But are you quite sure that you are really doing this? I confess that to me, your whole existence here appears only a graceful fiction. Sybil, you are no common being; but even you may be too adventurous."

"Would you assume the right to control my actions?"

"By no means; I am not so rash. If I found it impossible to do so when I possessed that right, I should scarcely venture to make the attempt now. But I confess that when I remember the slender amount of the wreck of your father's fortune, and the exact addition which was made to it, I cannot comprehend the splendor by which you are surrounded."

"Miracles may be wrought even in the nineteenth century," said Miss Delamere quietly.

"So I perceive; but will not the bubble burst?"

"Before I answer your question, you are bound to answer mine. What brings you here?"

The gentleman did not immediately reply; but, after the pause of an instant, said resolutely: "A passion which I cannot overcome."

"And yet," faltered Sybil, evidently panting with emotion, "after what has passed—"

"True; after what has passed, you have a right to be astonished at my presence; and yet, Sybil, you must feel at once that where you have been loved, you never can be forgotten."

"You are complimentary."

"I am, at least, sincere. You have seen fit to make yourself the centre of a social pageant; nor shall I attempt to fathom your motives. Only this much I may venture to remark—that be your reasons what they may, the farce which you have put upon the stage must soon be played out. Do not persist, therefore, in what may ultimately prove a ruinous error; but let me drop the curtain, while the audience are still dazzled by the effect of your machinery."

"You speak in enigmas. Is your haughty mother cognizant of this new caprice?"

"Call it what you please," said her companion, as he clasped in his own the small hand that rested on his arm, "I will not cavil with you for words. No, *bella è cara*, my mother knows not that I am here; knows not, in fact, that I am in England; nor will she even be aware that I have left Florence, if you consent to my wishes, so rapidly will we wing our way back."

A singular expression passed over the eloquent features of his listener, as she asked somewhat bitterly: "And your suspicions—how are they to be laid at rest?"

"I must exert my philosophy," was the reply, but the tone in which it was uttered implied

more uneasiness than pleasantry. "A year hence, Sybil, and from what I see around me, I am quite aware that you must be penniless. You will tell me, perhaps, that the lovely face, now so proudly turned towards me, will prevent such a climax; but do not deceive yourself. The fates only know why you have chosen a wilderness like this for so gorgeous a display, or what benefit you expect to derive from it; for here there cannot exist a single being capable of appreciating you; I will not say capable of loving you, for you have placed yourself upon too lofty a pedestal to encourage such advances; and, moreover, I know you to care little for exciting such a feeling."

"And yet I once loved *you*."

Her companion shook his head. "That you deceived yourself for a time into the belief, I will concede," he said gravely; "but the result proved your mistake. Remember why, and how we parted."

"My necessities compelled me to the concession," murmured Sybil, as the hot blood burnt upon her cheek.

"Why will you wilfully misunderstand me?" he asked impatiently. "You know well that I made no allusion which could wound your pride —mine was a mere question of feeling."

"Be it so," said Miss Delamere; "and now?"

"Now, I would remind you how devotedly, how earnestly I loved you; and with what reluctance I lent myself to the wishes of my family, even after I discovered that it was in vain to hope that I could ever inspire you with an equally absorbing passion. Yes, Sybil, even then, I loved you, although I could no longer shut my eyes to the fact that vanity was with you more powerful than affection; and that—but enough—I am not here to reproach, but to convince you that, in my breast, at least, affection was no feint; and that I am still as much your slave as ever."

"Do not believe it," said Miss Delamere scornfully: "I have no faith in the constancy of your sex. I should as soon endeavor to write on the wave, or ride upon the wind, as to rely upon the permanence of any passion, however violent. No, no, Sir Horace; you, who were scared by a phantom, when I was unscathed by a single breath, cannot now, in sober earnestness, come to claim the hand which you formerly rejected."

"I come to reclaim the heart."

Sybil started. A shiver ran through her veins; her pale lips parted, but she could not articulate a syllable.

"You tremble, Sybil," continued her companion; "and yet, what can you fear? Look dispassionately at our mutual position. I am free and wealthy. My presence here to-day must convince you of the extent of my love. You are madly braving a certain and a swift-coming destruction, from which I would fain save you. It were idle to expose the reasons which render it impossible that I should offer you my name; but my heart, Sybil—that heart which you first taught to feel, is all your own. Will you reject its homage?"

"And this to a woman whom you once sought to make your wife!"

"Even so. Do not let us enact a melodrama, Sybil. To the world be what you please. Make of yourself, if you will, the presiding genius of the Aladdin's garden which you have created about you, and induce those who visit it to believe that every leaf and every blossom is a gem; but to me be honest. Had I heard of you in a remote retirement, shunning the eyes of the world, and anxious to escape not only the influence, but also the temptations of the past, I should have endeavored to forget you; but as, even in my foreign home, I traced you step by step, fondly lingering in the shadow of my blighted affection, and learned alike with wonder and incredulity the inexplicable nature of your proceedings, I began to hope that you would not again meet me unmoved; but that———"

"Why do you pause, Sir Horace? You see that I listen calmly."

"In short, Sybil," faltered her companion, "I taught myself to believe that, recklessly as you might rush upon your own ruin, you would no willingly involve your mother in the same suffering; but that I should be able to induce you to spurn the comments of a world by which you had already been wounded; and to restore both yourself and her to legitimate affluence."

The self-command exhibited by Miss Delamere as she listened, was almost frightful. Her lips were ashy pale, and the veins about the temples swollen almost to bursting; but her step was steady, and her head erect. It would have been impossible from her manner to analyse the feeling by which she was possessed.

"Have I deceived myself, Sybil?" pursued the low passionate voice; "Will not you be mine as I have loved to dream? A life of devotion shall repay the sacrifice; you shall not breathe a wish, you shall not indulge a vision which I will not hasten to gratify. Speak, dearest; do I plead in vain?"

A strange wild smile flickered upon the lip of Miss Delamere; and, encouraged by her silence, and an expression which he misinterpreted, her companion ventured to throw his arm about her waist. He encountered no resistance; but as he drew her towards him, a bitter and hollow laugh broke from her lips as, bending her head, she whispered in his ear—

"Neither ruin nor disgrace await me, Sir Horace Trevor; I am an affianced wife!"

Then, turning upon him a look of haughty defiance, she withdrew herself from his clasp only, however, to perceive, at a distance of a few paces, Mortimer, evidently overpowered by emotion, standing directly in her path.

For an instant she quailed, but only for an instant; in the next she advanced towards him with a radiant smile and an extended hand, exclaiming blandly:

"Ha! you are welcome, truant. I was just beginning to weary of my newly-arrived cousin, who is practising all his pretty fascinations upon me on his way to one whom he loves better. And when did you return? Do not venture to tell me that you have been more than an hour at Westrum, lest I resent so gla

g a proof of indifference towards the friends ho have been long and anxiously awaiting our re-appearance. And now I must make ou known to my relative, Sir Horace Trevor; he admiration of our sex, and the envy of his wn. Horace, this is Mr. Mortimer, of whom e were just speaking."

Frederic had instinctively clasped the hand hich had been extended to him, but he did not tain it; and as they were successively named, he gentlemen exchanged a cold and haughty ow, which augured unfavorably for their future good understanding.

At a single glance Miss Delamere thoroughly ppreciated the inimical feeling with which hey met; and, uncertain of the extent of what lortimer might have seen or heard before she ecame aware of his presence, she hastened o introduce an irrelevant subject of conversaion.

"And thus you are still wedded to Florence, Horace," she said, as if pursuing a former topic; and fully purpose an immediate return there? n truth, I am by no means astonished at your esolution. You know that with me, also, beauiful Italy has always been a favorite dream."

"Then why not return there?"

Sybil stole a glance at Frederic, who was walkng silently by her side, ere she replied with a mile—

"My movements are not always under the ontrol of my wishes; many things may occur o prevent such an expatriation—at least for the resent."

"What woman wills, fate wills," said Sir Horace with emphasis; "and especially when that woman is Sybil Delamere."

"Alas! how well you know to the contrary."

"Certainly not from my experience of the past. You may have thwarted the projects of others; but I believe that you have in general been tolerably successful in accomplishing your own."

"*Et tu, Brute!*" exclaimed the lady with a light laugh, which, however, failed to disguise altogether a certain feeling of anxiety and restlessness; "but I ought to have remembered that it is dangerous to tilt against you in a war of wits. Talk, therefore, if you please, of any one rather than of myself, for you will mislead Mr. Mortimer into a belief that I am a very dangerous person; an idea which I am very sure has never yet occurred to him."

"I congratulate your friend upon the personal qualifications which have enabled him to remain blind to the fact," replied Trevor sarcastically: "he must be possessed of an ample fund of talent and amiability, to work such a miracle as that of encountering alone and unrestrictedly the fascinations which turned the heads of half London; and even then despised the limited extent of their power. You did not know Miss Delamere in town, Mr. Mortimer; immersed in pleasure, surrounded by adorers, and the very arbitress of fashion; or you would have feared to approach her here, where you were exposed to the whole artillery of her blandishments. Do not be deluded into the belief that she is to be encountered with impunity. I—her cousin—warn you of her error."

Sybil bit her lip; and Mortimer, still too much irritated to trust himself with words, answered only by a slight bend, and Miss Delamere passed her hand through his arm, and leaned upon it, as though she clung to him for support.

"Truly this Grange affair is a strange whim," pursued the incorrigible Trevor; "I leave you in a crowd; yourself the busiest mote quivering in the sunbeam, and I find you here buried in like a delinquent nun, between four walls."

"I was weary of the turmoil to which you allude."

"Weary!" echoed her interlocutor; "Not so, fair lady; if I know anything of human nature, and above all, of woman nature. Your sex only weary of the world when it has wearied of them; and all those who look you in the face will feel the impossibility of such an effect in your case."

"You have faith in nothing," replied Sybil gaily.

"I have heard," was the retort; "that a stricken deer always flies to the covert to die."

"While I,"—interposed Miss Delamere, making a violent effort to control her emotion; "sought the solitude of the country in order really to live; for my previous state of being was mere empty existence. I was like one who had never looked upon a sun-rise; and who knew not the marvellous blessings and the glorious privileges to be obtained by those who really seek them."

"Better and better! You philosophize. I am delighted that I ventured thus to invade your retreat, for I shall leave you a wiser and a happier woman. Thus, then, you have blotted out the past, and now live only in the future?"

"You read me admirably."

"And am I to declare this to poor Captain Fitz—what was his name?—whose head you turned for a whole month, and whose heart was only saved from destruction by the fact of its having already been regularly broken once or twice every season for the last five years."

"You may declare it to a whole military phalanx."

"But not to Prince Gustave, surely, Sybil?"

Despite all her self-command, the hand of the lady trembled upon the arm that supported it, and her eyes flashed with irritation; but the expression of triumph which she read upon the features of Trevor made her rally in a moment; and it was with an affectation of interest which betrayed her inward emotion that she exclaimed.

"Ha! Apropos of the poor young Prince—where is he now parading his listlessness? I have not heard of him since I left town."

"We have been residing together in Florence."

"Together!" echoed Sybil with a start, and evidently for once thrown off her guard.

"*E'perche non, la mia bella?*" asked Sir Horace; "Did you not encourage our acquaintance? And could you believe me to be formed of so coarse a clay as to be unable to appreciate the delicate porcelain of your exquisite friend?"

Mortimer listened in silence, but Miss Delamere could feel the violent throbbing of his heart

as she walked beside him. Fortunately he had not been required to join in a conversation which turned upon persons with whom he was unacquainted; but this exemption had only enabled him the more fully to note every word which had been uttered by either party; and the longer he listened, the more painfully he felt in how false a position he stood as regarded the past life of the woman to whom he was about to unite his fate. Moreover, the manner of Sir Horace towards Sybil displeased him. It is true, he was her cousin; but even that relationship, close as it was, did not appear to Frederic to justify the supercilious and almost accusing tone in which he sometimes addressed her. There was a levity, also, in his allusions, which implied a want of respect for her dignity; if not actually for her feelings. Either she had loved these men who were now so lightly mentioned; or she had trifled with them, and thus given him a licence to couple her name with theirs; and in either case, how was his idol fallen?

He thought of his buried mother, and sighed.

His companions still talked on, but he listened no longer. His whole soul was in the past—that past which was to him a mystery and a blank. Could it be that Sybil, whom he had believed to be above the weaknesses and the errors of her sex, had frittered away her youth in those heartless and puerile affectations of attachment, which merely gratify the vanity without awakening the feelings; but which, nevertheless, wear the bloom of purity from the spirit, and harden it into worldliness, while rendering it for ever afterwards incapable of a deep and honest passion? Or had she, indeed, loved so absorbingly, that her heart had become a waste; and that those who knew best were conscious that they could not pain her by allusions from which others of her sex would instinctively have shrunk? Vainly did he ask himself these questions. They could be answered only by a knowledge of the past.

One thing was evident. Sybil had been one of the gayest votaries of fashion—courted, admired, and adulated; and she had suddenly withdrawn herself from the world, and buried herself in the country, where she was an utter stranger. What could have induced such a resolution? It could not have been any diminution of homage, for she was still young, beautiful, and brilliant; while it was equally apparent that the sacrifice had not been made from prudential motives; as she had, on her arrival at The Grange, at once entered upon a course of almost reckless expenditure, which implied no pecuniary anxieties. Hitherto, Mortimer had never speculated upon the subject. It had been Sybil's pleasure to act thus; and he was grateful for any caprice which had brought them together; but now a doubt of he knew not what crept over him; and the words of his mother rose before him in characters of fire. A thousand confused ideas and vague misgivings floated across his brain. He felt as though his affection had been wronged and trifled with; that Sybil was not what he had believed her to be; and as he moved forward, instinctively obeying the impulse of the beautiful hand which still rested upon his arm, he was conscious of an irritation which he struggled to conceal.

Ere long, however, Miss Delamere was struck by the altered expression of his countenance, and apprehensive that the conversation of her new guest had impressed him to her disadvantage, she hastened with her usual tact, to turn it upon himself, well aware that the mention of his own name could not fail to arouse him from his untimely reverie, and judging by its effect upon his physiognomy, that she must at once adopt a bold measure in order to counteract its influence, and retain her hold upon his honor.

"Yes!" she said, in reply to some observation of her more loquacious companion: "Therein, at least, you are quite right, and Mr. Mortimer himself is a breathing evidence of the truth of your remark."

Frederic started as he heard himself named and once more he listened with attention.

"How so?" asked Sir Horace, listlessly. "Are the gay deceivers of our sex to be found upon every soil? Surely here, at least, you should have escaped."

"And yet I have done the very reverse," said Miss Delamere, in a tone of light gaiety which grated unpleasantly upon the ear of her lover; "I buried myself as you see, in order to live entirely for my own fancies and feelings, but my star had willed it otherwise, and I only rushed upon my fate."

"And am I to imply that Mr. Mortimer is that fate?"

"I must even permit you to do so; but believe me, that fault has not been my own. You would not imagine, Horace, to look at him, calm and placid as he appears, that he has far more strength of character than yourself; and yet so it is. When I arrived at Westrum, I not only made his acquaintance, but that of his betbrothed wife, a cousin, born and educated for the express purpose of rendering him the happiest man on earth. By the way, how is it that you men never will be content to be happy save after your own fashion? You can imagine nothing prettier, or more gentle, or more guileless, than the fair betrothed, and yet he has seen fit to overthrow all the family arrangements, and to lay his heart upon a less worthy altar."

"You are modest, my sweet kinswoman. But how did you accomplish this transition?"

"Have I not already told you that the fault was not my own? In vain did I represent to him the imprudence of thwarting his mother's wishes. In vain did I counsel, argue, and even frown, all was of no avail. He was still rash enough to persist. Were you not, Frederic?" and she turned towards him with a smile for which, only on the previous day, he would have forfeited a year of existence.

Now, however, even that smile could not overcome the feeling produced by the indelicacy of such a communication, made in such a tone. Shocked by her levity, Mortimer could only stammer out a few disjointed words; but, affecting to understand from these that he assented to her assertion, she continued without any change of manner,—

"Thus then, you see that I must stand ac

q tted, although in endeavoring to restore him
this reason, I contrived to lose my own: and
nv you will probably be better able to under-
stad why I have ceased to regret town and
it gaieties. For pleasure I mean to exchange
happiness, and to substitute affection for ad-
nation."

Mr. Mortimer little suspects how many ene-
ns he will have succeeded in making. Like
tl brothers who peopled earth by flinging
stes behind them, he will soon discover that
hhas created a shoal of envious adversaries,
wo will never forgive so heinous an act of pi-
ry as that of carrying off the brilliant and co-
ved Miss Delamere."

You speak emphatically, Sir Horace," said
Mtimer with a clouded brow.

And I have cause to do so," replied Trevor,
cuposedly; "You have disarranged all my
on plans also. My errand here was to induce
mfair cousin to return with me to Florence,
as you have most inauspiciously crossed my
ph. For I should have succeeded, Sybil,
shuld I not?"—he asked, with an expression
oeye and lip which flooded her brow with
crison—"if you had not given Mr. Mortimer
a ght to hold you back?"

In any and every case, your failure would
hie been signal," said Miss Delamere, with a
hightiness which she had not previously dis-
pyed towards him; then, as if fearful that she
ried too much, she added carelessly: "My
mher, as you are aware, detests the water,
as is not young enough to make a perpetual
primage of her existence. We were about to
le Westrum for the continent a short time
bk, but my wishes were overruled."

nd again she looked earnestly and affection-
aly in the face of Mortimer, as if to recall to
hmemory by whom and how they had been
cotravened.

till, alike pained, displeased, and disappoint-
ed Frederic could only reply by a constrained
stle. Willingly would he have found himself
ahe, for the pulses of his forehead labored
alost to pain, and he felt quite unequal to the
eort of taking part in a conversation which
jred upon the sensitiveness of his nature;
bt he could not endure the idea of leaving
Sil to the society of her cousin, who had al-
rdy become odious to him. By his officious
aearance he had torn away the veil which
ner should have been raised, and had reveal-
ed to him the woman whom he loved divested
of alf the spell by which she had hitherto
bn environed. He was conscious, too, that
hhad exhibited himself most disadvantage-
oly to this supercilious stranger, who not
on possessed the privilege of a relationship
wch authorized him to become a guest at
T Grange, but who was also cognisant of the
pt—that past which he now felt must in-
fnce all his future life—that past of which he
hu until to-day been careless; but which now,
pntom-like, scared him as he glanced towards
it.

eluctant as he was, however, he felt that the
eort must be made. He must return to his
dolate home, now doubly desolate, for Ger-
tde was no longer there to welcome him with
her meek smile, and her low soft voice, and he must learn to endure the conviction, that while he sat in solitude, brooding over his doubts and apprehensions, his brilliant mistress was bandying sallies and sarcasms with one who had known her from her childhood, and who was evidently in her entire confidence.

Feigning therefore, suddenly to remember an enforced appointment, he drew out his watch, and declaring that he had already exceeded the given time, he hurriedly took his leave; but not before Sybil had tenderly murmured in his ear: "Farewell then, till to-morrow, my own Frederic! Remember how earnestly I shall wait and watch for you."

CHAPTER XXI.

And his home was indeed desolate when he once more entered it. His dinner was served in silence, and removed untouched, and then he was once more alone. Nothing could exceed the feeling of dreariness with which he listened to the sound of his own footsteps, as he paced to and fro in the echoing apartment which had once been glad with fond and cheerful voices, or the loud ticking of the time-piece, which only served to show him how wearily the moments passed along.

Fatigued at length by the monotony of his own movements, he threw himself upon a chair, and abandoned himself to a train of bitter and upbraiding reflections. He could no longer doubt that he had been deceived: that deluded by his vanity, and misled by a headstrong passion, he had become the easy prey of a heartless and manœuvering woman. The pang was a bitter one, and as he remembered the pure and unselfish affection which he had recklessly flung from him, he bowed his head upon his breast, and a tear stole into his eye. For an instant he resolved never to see Sybil again; she was not yet his wife, and he would leave her free to exert her arts upon another victim; but this resolution failed as suddenly as it had been conceived: he might indeed liberate Sybil, but he could not free himself from the spell which she had cast about him. Even now, even at the moment when he mentally acknowledged her probable unworthiness, he was rather inclined to curse the intrusive cousin who had opened his eyes to her demerits, than her in whom they existed. For weal or for woe he felt, indeed, as she herself had expressed it, that Miss Delamere was his fate.

It was too late to contend, his honor was engaged, and she held his happiness in her hands. And then came the soothing memory that she had owned to him a previous affection, so sincere as to have threatened in its failure the very principle of her existence; but still, as she had declared, less deep than that which he had himself inspired. And who would say but that her love for him might obliterate every other passing fancy, and restore her to him, as he had once fondly believed, all his own.

Thus vacillating between his pride and his passion, did Mortimer alternately vow to escape

by flight the snare which had been laid for him, and then resolve immediately afterwards to maintain his right over the affections which he had won.

"When once she is really mine," he murmured to himself; "she shall at least renounce all intercourse with this sarcastic cousin, who has suddenly come between us like a blight, and meanwhile, I will watch her narrowly; not a word, not a gesture shall escape me which bears reference to the past. In order to comprehend my position fully, even although by so doing I should but be meeting regret and disappointment on the very threshold of my married live, I will garner up every inference and every illusion: and thus, day by day, and hour by hour, I shall learn something of her past existence—something which may tend to acquit her in my eyes, or which must render me supremely wretched."

In vain did a passing memory bring back his thoughts to Gertrude: her image dwelt with him only as that of a loved sister and a regretted friend, no pulse bounded as he recalled the sweet companionship of past days; Sybil was to him all in all; and even while his reason doubted, and his pride rebelled, the vehemence of his passion continued unabated.

Nevertheless, he resolved on the following day to abstain from visiting The Grange. He had a plausible excuse in the accession of business, which had supervened on the death of his mother; and even amid his anxiety to watch the proceedings of Sybil, he could not overcome his dislike of her cousin.

Accordingly he ordered his horse, and rode leisurely through the green lanes, and over the hills of the neighborhood, suffering the animal to travel at his own pace, and almost to follow his own path; nor was it until upon entering the town on his return that he was aroused from the painful and irritating train of thought, in which he had indulged throughout the ride; but then, indeed, he awoke once more to the realities of the present, as he encountered Miss Delamere and her guest, seated side by side in the little pony phaeton, which the lady was driving with her accustomed ease and skill.

The meeting was constrained on all sides, for the annoyance, even if not the jealousy of Mortimer was at once renewed; while Miss Delamere herself for an instant appeared embarrassed. Nevertheless, with that tact which seldom deserts her sex in any extremity, she was the first to rally, and playfully menacing him with her whip, she exclaimed with a sunny smile, as soon as the necessary greetings were exchanged; "You dare not reproach me, Frederic, for having played the truant, for you must remember that I told you I should expect you at an early hour this morning, and accordingly I waited your appearance until I felt that it was vain to expect you any longer, and therefore I yielded to the entreaties of Sir Horace, who was anxious to see somewhat of the *ultima thule* to which he had so courageously ventured, and resolved to do the honors of our hills and lanes, not however, without a hope, which is now realized, that we might encounter you upon our way."

"Did I produce the impression of one who intended to intrude a reproach?" asked Mortimer rather coldly.

Sybil looked uneasy.

"You see that my fair cousin is at least prepared to wear her chains meekly, Mr. Mortimer," observed Trevor in his accustomed accent.

"Miss Delamere is too good," was the stiff reply; "but as yet, I have no right to inflict them."

A sob, almost of suffocation, rose to the throat of the lady, of which the bitterness was no diminished as she detected the low but self-gratulatory laugh which escaped her companion.

"And what think you of our Siberia, Sir Horace Trevor?" pursued Mortimer in the same cold tone; "Can you breathe amid these primitive wastes, where the perfumes of fashion have never come? Can you contrive to exist in this wilderness where men dare to vegetate without a previous patent of exclusiveness and *ton?* Or have you seen enough to induce you to retreat in alarm to a more congenial hemisphere?"

"I like Westrum and its environs vastly," said the baronet with a yawn; "I always had a passion for discoveries, and I begin to hope that I have in reality more rural tastes than I hitherto gave myself credit for possessing. As to living here, I say nothing, but every one condemned to such a fate may at least congratulate himself upon the fact of emulating Truth, which, as some one has somewhere told us, has taken up its residence at the bottom of a well."

"Are you aware that all my property is situated in this country, Sir Horace?" asked Mortimer haughtily.

"Yes, oh yes: so I understand from my cousin. Sybil has no secrets from me, you know."

"I was not aware," retorted Frederic with increasing displeasure, "that Miss Delamere herself was so well informed upon the subject."

"My *dear* Frederic," said the young lady coughing down a sensation of no pleasant description, as she saw her prudent inquiries thus betrayed; "surely you do not intend to make me understand that you so readily forget your own communications to me? Sir Horace, with the natural anxiety of a relative, asked questions which I answered without reserve, supposing that you wished to make any mystery of so common-place a circumstance."

Mortimer felt embarrassed in his turn; he had no recollection of having made his pecuniary affairs a subject of conversation during his interviews with Sybil, but he was unable to deny that such had been the case, and he consequently remained silent.

"You will dine at The Grange—of course," said Miss Delamere earnestly.

"I fear—I believe—I think that it will be impossible," was the reply. "I have to make arrangements for the payment of Gertrude's legacy, which have already been too long delayed. She is my *cousin*, as you are aware," he added, with a peculiar emphasis, "and merely personal consideration should induce me to neglect her interests. Her signature to certain papers is indispensable, and in order

obtain this, it is necessary that I should see her. I had intended to ride to The Grange this evening to take leave for a few days, but as we have so fortunately met, I will do so now."

"Are you serious, Frederic?" asked Sybil with a throbbing heart.

"Perfectly so; and no moment could be more auspicious than the present (when I know you to be assured of pleasant and congenial society) for the performance of my duty. Make, therefore, I pray you, my excuses to Mrs. Delamere, whom I hope to find in strong health on my return."

"And you really will not dine at The Grange?"

"I cannot. My conscience already reproaches me."

"And when may we look for you again?"

"I can scarcely answer the question. I am about to travel from one *ultima thule* to another, and I know not what may occur to detain me. I need not, however, on that account detain *you*." And pressing the hand which Sybil extended to him with a reproachful smile, he slightly touched his hat to the baronet, by whom the salutation was returned with equal coldness and they separated.

"Sybil!" exclaimed Sir Horace with a light laugh; "I fear that the twig is not so well limed as you believed. The young Squire is less plastic than he should be in such able hands as yours."

"You do not understand Mortimer," said his companion, vainly endeavoring to conceal her mortification; "he is annoyed that I should have left home when I promised to wait for him, and he wishes me to perceive his annoyance."

"Is that all?"

"What more *can* there be?"

"Nay, you know best; but it struck me—It is too absurd, fair *cousin*, I admit, considering our impromptu relationship, got up too, as it was, for his especial delectation—but it struck me that the gentle Corydon was jealous."

"Nonsense!"

"Do you dare me, Sybil?"

"Trevor, you are absurd."

"Perhaps so; but remember that my absurdity has brought me from Italy, and I owe no forbearance to this tetchy swain of yours. So long as I believed you to be sure of him, I compelled myself to submit, aware as I am that he had certain social conventionalities in his favor, but having within the last half hour seen reason to change my opinion, I warn you that I enter the lists again."

"Do you persist in your insult, Sir Horace?"

"You give my humble suit a harsh name, fair lady! Do you hold it as nothing that I have found it impossible to forget you?—that in order to secure your love I am ready to expatriate myself for months, or even years?—that although my whole family will be estranged from me by such a measure, I am here to implore of you to assert your superiority to vulgar prejudice, and share my fortunes?"

"Do not deceive yourself while you fail to deceive me, Sir Horace," said Miss Delamere with an angry and impatient gesture. "I could in no manner so greatly gratify your suspicions and arrogant relatives as by disgracing myself as you suggest; for those who could not brook Sybil Delamere as your wife would rejoice to exult over her as your mistress. You see that, unlike yourself, I have courage enough to call things by their right names. And now hear me while I declare to you that had another individual on earth dared to insult me by such a proposition, I would have resented it to the latest hour of my life; but with you, Sir Horace Trevor, I am peculiarly situated, and I have felt myself compelled to endure the affront. Let it, however, suffice to assure you, once for all, that nothing less than your hand and name will ever induce me to listen to you for a moment!"

"Again, Sybil?"

"As you please," was the scornful retort; "Remember that it was not I who solicited a renewal of our intercourse."

"But should this worthy country squire fail you?"

"You have heard all that I have to say upon the subject. But of this be convinced, that Mortimer will no more fail me than I shall fail myself. it may please you in your exclusiveness to despise him; but he is a man of honor, and will scorn to falsify his words."

"Honor!" sneered Trevor; "it is a term which admits of such various significations that it becomes difficult to define it accurately. We all pique ourselves upon our honor, even when others conceive it to have been altogether forfeited."

The eyes of Miss Delamere flashed, but she made no rejoinder.

"You will be a coquette to the last, Sybil," pursued the baronet after a pause; "but one can scarcely look you in the face, and not forgive you; although, knowing your power as you do, you might be more merciful in its exercise. But what of this cousin mentioned by your Pyramus? Is it the pretty orphan to whom his mamma had promised him as a husband? If so, *gare le loup!*"

Miss Delamere curled her lip in scorn. "Yes, the legacy to which he alluded was one bequeathed by his mother to her *protégée;* but I am perfectly tranquil on the subject. When the eagle has once gazed upon the sun, he is content to close his eyes on the moonlight."

"A pretty metaphor enough; but do not forget that even the eagle cannot gaze for ever without wearying of a splendor so blinding. Poetry has its charms for a while, but the veriest enthusiast must at times descend to prose. Even I am occasionally prosaic."

Sybil endeavored to assume an air of gaiety and unconcern; but she was, nevertheless, not without some misgiving on the subject of Mortimer's visit to his cousin. It was evidently a resolution as suddenly formed as it had been abruptly announced; and she felt that they had parted coldly and unsatisfactorily. That the presence of Sir Horace Trevor, and his unguarded allusions, had tended to render Frederic uneasy and suspicious, she could not conceal even from herself; and, sincere was her secret gratulation, that she had, by boldly avowing their engagement to a third party, made it impossible

for him honorably to recede without some defined and tangible cause.

Still she dreaded the power of old associations and habits over the nature of one so impressionable as Mortimer, at a moment when he was writhing under imagined slight; and she had no sooner reached home than she retired to her own room, in order to reflect upon the measures to be pursued to prevent, or at least to delay the threatened departure.

Meanwhile, Sir Horace Trevor strolled to the library, half mortified, and half amused by the dialogue in which he had just been engaged; and, to his surprise, found Mrs. Delamere installed in an easy chair, in an apartment which she generally shunned.

"Do I disturb your studies, my dear madam?" he asked as he entered.

"Oh, no! I was only thinking, and I would rather not think," was the tremulously uttered reply. "But where is Sybil?"

"In her own room, I believe. She complained of being somewhat fatigued."

"And where is Mr. Mortimer? I am always uneasy when I do not see Mr. Mortimer here."

"Mr Mortimer has just taken leave of Miss Delamere. He leaves Westrum to-morrow on a visit to his cousin."

Mrs. Delamere raised her head by a sudden impulse, and fixed her eyes steadfastly upon the speaker.

"Gone to see his cousin!" she murmured as if unconsciously. "Only returned yesterday, and leaves again to-morrow!" Then, as she glanced rapidly around her with a slight shudder, she pursued, more directly addressing her companion: "Is this your work, Sir Horace Trevor?"

"On my soul, no! Why should you suspect it?" was the reply.

"I do not know—I cannot explain," she said languidly, as she once more fell back into a recumbent position; "but I am becoming more bewildered every hour. However, Sybil knows best. Yet why, or for what you are here, Sir Horace, I cannot comprehend. You have now no claim upon Sybil?"

"I do not seek to advance any," replied the Baronet with quiet sarcasm: "I came to The Grange simply to pay my respects both to yourself and her."

"It is very extraordinary," faltered the old lady. "Does Mr. Mortimer approve of your visit?"

"I did not hazard the inquiry," said Trevor, taking up a book at random, and throwing himself into a chair; "but judging from the expression of his countenance, I should feel inclined to doubt it."

"Then, why do you remain? Why does Sybil allow it?"

"She has adopted me as a cousin."

"Sir Horace Trevor," said the agitated mother, "do not jest upon such a subject. You know that I am helpless in all that concerns Sybil; but you cannot, you *dare* not, seek to renew your addresses to her. You dare not, for you are a man of the world, and you dread its sneer. Why, then, would you ruin her prospects?—Why would you destroy us both?"

"Believe me, my dear madam," exclaimed the Baronet, touched in spite of his egotism by the tears which were falling slowly over her pale cheeks, "that I am far from having any such intention; and surely, when you look upon the luxury by which you are surrounded, you must admit that the idea of ruin comes strangely from your lips."

Mrs. Delamere clasped her hands convulsively together, but after a moment she conquered her emotion sufficiently to reply with a forced composure, which was almost impressive:

"I could have understood the remark from any one but yourself, and have admitted it truth, Sir Horace; but from you it bears strange and painful construction; from you who knows so well—Let it pass, however. You have perhaps, earned the right to wound me—"

"My dear madam, I swear to you—"

"Let it pass, Sir Horace, let it pass; but, one more, why are you here?—why did Sybil consent to receive you? You are not, you cannot be anything to each other; and remember that should your visit excite the displeasure of Mr Mortimer, your revenge will be a cruel one."

The idea which her own words had conjured up, and the unaccustomed energy which she had exhibited, had, by this time, fairly overpowered the unhappy old lady; who, burying her face in her handkerchief, as if to shut even the sight of her companion, sobbed aloud. Trevor rose, and paced unensily up and down the room. He had always been used to see Mrs. Delamere so placid, and so apparently reckless of all that passed about her, that he was totally unprepared for this sudden burst of feeling; nor was it until she had regained some degree of composure, that he ventured to approach and take her hand.

"Speak your wishes, my dear madam," he said, in an accent of deference which seemed strange in such a speaker; "and, be they what they may, I will obey them."

Mrs. Delamere looked up with a smile of gratitude too intense to be mistaken. "I thank you," she murmured between her sobs: "with my whole heart I thank you. Sybil is, I fear, playing a desperate game; and her fate is in your hands. Leave us now, at once, if you would save her—leave us now, and forget us."

"I will order my horses within an hour."

"Horace, how I once loved you," faltered the feeble voice; "Oh, why were you not my son?"

"Farewell, my dear madame, for ever," said Trevor, as he wrung her hand respectfully, "I will but take leave of Miss Delamere, and depart at once."

"Do not even that," implored the old lady as she detained him for an instant. "I will explain it all to Sybil. It is better that you should not meet again."

"Be it so—I came hither because I was a coxcomb, and presumed upon the past. Your tears have rebuked me; and not through my means shall you shed another. Tell her that I sincerely desire her happiness, and bid her at the same time beware. To her, the past should act as a powerful monitor, as it has done to me. Farewell, but never cease to remember that I have expiated my present error by my obedience."

Mrs. Delamere would have replied, but before she had wiped away her tears he was gone.

CHAPTER XXII.

And Mortimer had also proceeded homewards after parting from Sybil, but it was with a heavy heart and depressed energies. His indignation at her levity and carelessness of wounding his feelings, had endued him with a factitious strength during their interview, and urged him to the sudden resolve he had announced; but he was no sooner alone than he repented his precipitancy, for he at once became conscious how entirely his happiness depended upon her, and how utterly he was in her power.

It was, however, too late to retract his words; and now, in order to sustain an appearance of consistency, he felt that he must carry out his project, and thus leave her for days to the undisturbed society of her cousin—of the man whom, of all others he hated, without being enabled to advance a plausible reason for his dislike. The aversion was, nevertheless, as strange as it was intuitive; nor did Mortimer seek to counteract the feeling. It sufficed that Trevor admired Sybil, and that he was in her confidence, to make him obnoxious to his jealous and exciting nature.

Moreover, the sarcastic allusions and biting jests of the baronet had aroused at once the indignation and the suspicions of Frederic; they had cast a baneful cloud over the hitherto bright hemisphere of his passion. Its pure glow was sullied; its fond romance was dispelled; he had seen the cherished idol of his heart treated as a mere woman, and he felt himself aggrieved.

By what right had this presumptuous stranger intruded himself and his memories of the past between him and his betrothed wife? Upon what pretence did he presume to censure and judge one who was plighted to another? And then came the recollection that Sybil had herself justified such interference, by openly and unseasonably communicating to him an engagement in which he could have no concern, and probably felt little interest; and this reminiscence was even more painful than those by which it had been preceded.

Fain would he have acquitted her of every blame, in order that all his irritation might vent itself upon her cousin; but, even blinded as he was by a hitherto uncalculating passion, he could not reconcile the scene in the garden, and her subsequent disclosure, with that nice conception of the delicacy of her sex which he had loved to indulge.

True, Sybil was no common character, and she had warned him of the fact long ere he had told her that she was dear to him; he should therefore have been prepared for any exhibition of moral daring; but his feelings had been involved in the demonstration, and it had startled him unpleasantly. It was not that he shrank from acknowledging their engagement; he would rather have gloried in declaring it before the face of the whole world; but thus lightly and unhesitatingly revealed by herself, it seemed robbed of half its sanctity.

Suddenly a servant entered the apartment, and placed a letter before him. He glanced listlessly at the address, and then, with an eager gesture, tore it open. He had at once recognized the handwriting of Sybil.

"We cannot part thus,"—these were its contents—"I must see you before you go, were it only to hear from your lips what I have already read upon your countenance. I do not seek to upbraid, or to reproach you—you have, perhaps, mistaken both yourself and me; and I desire only to learn the extent of that mistake. I love you too well to murmur; and I forgive you if you can forgive yourself. Sir Horace has gone; in my present state of mind I could not tolerate society. You only leave Westrum to-morrow; there is yet time for you to devote one half-hour to the unhappy "Sybil."

Mortimer sprang to the bell; ordered his horse; and in ten minutes was on his way to The Grange.

Sybil loved him—she was unhappy—and Trevor was gone! All his suspicions were at an end; they had been dispelled like Alpine mists before the morning sun.

And so time passed on; and Frederic, who had vowed to himself that, ere long, he would possess every secret of Sybil's heart, spent hours and days at her side, careless and forgetful of all save the present. Even the memory of Sir Horace Trevor had almost ceased to be distasteful to him, from the cold and indifferent manner in which he was constantly mentioned by Miss Delamere; nay, he began to accuse himself of absolute folly and injustice, to the fascinating creature whose every feeling and anxiety were evidently bound up in himself; and to marvel at the weakness he had betrayed.

Had Sybil loved her cousin, he would have won her, doubtless, years before; for that he or any man, could fail to return her affection, appeared to Mortimer impossible. Yet, nevertheless, and incongruous as the fact may seem, he clung to his present mode of existence without one effort to enhance his happiness by at once making Sybil his wife.

Had the alternative been forced upon him, he would rather have resigned his life than the prospect of obtaining her hand, for without her he would have felt that life to be a blank; but still, as the diver, who, however sure of his skill, hesitates for a while ere he takes his venturous leap, so did Mortimer linger in the midst of present security, as though unwilling to lose the firm footing which he still retained.

Thus weeks and months sped on; and if a shadow occasionally fell upon the bright brow of the lady, it was soon chased by smiles. All her tastes, all her avocations, were made subservient to his wishes. She was at once his friend, his counsellor and his idol.

Their solitude was almost uninvaded; for although the gentry of the neighborhood were ready to admit the fascinations and accomplishments of Miss Delamere, they were not the less jealous of her attractions, and suspicious of the mystery by which she was surrounded; while

those among them who had been the familiar friends of Mrs. Mortimer, could not see without regret, and even blame, the effect of her blandishments upon the destined husband of their banished favorite.

The constant visits of Frederic at the Grange, were subject of continual comment; and his consequent estrangement from themselves kept alive a feeling of distaste towards its inhabitants, which sufficed to render their visits brief and unfrequent.

Thus, then, nothing intervened to ruffle the smooth current upon which the lovers glided along the stream of time; and this circumstance was favorable to Sybil, inasmuch as it afforded her ample opportunity to pour out all the stores of her well-cultivated mind and brilliant faney; and each night, as he rode slowly homewards, dazzled, and more enthralled than ever, Frederic marvelled how so bright and gifted a being could be content to pass her days in an obscure retirement; and to lavish upon him alone all the treasures of her intellect, and all the fascinations of her beauty.

What was the world to him with such a companion? Henceforth Westrum would be his world; he should care for no other, and he should live and die beneath the roof of his ancestors, without one hope or one ambition unsatisfied.

Thus had he quitted Sybil on one occasion, after an evening of calm and rational enjoyment; enhanced by the exertions which she had made to "hold his reason prisoner." They had sang together over the same chess-board, more engrossed by each other than by the game; and while Mrs. Delamere slumbered, or seemed to slumber in her chair, they had built up a thousand airy castles, each more soft and sunny than the last.

They had talked of the future fondly and eagerly; and Frederic had bespoken her interest and sympathy for his poorer tenantry, and her assistance in a store of projects, all tending to render the home in which their lives were to be spent more worthy of her presence; and as he did so the eye of Sybil sparkled, and her chest heaved; while at intervals her parted lips, and earnest attitude, bespoke a momentary anticipation of what must follow.

The chain woven by her lover was bright, but the connecting link was, nevertheless, wanting; he said nothing which could convert that future into the more immediate present; and thus she waited and watched in vain; and they parted, even as they had done on every previous occasion, without one word from Frederic which implied a wish to realise his visions by their early union.

Still, it was not until he was really gone, that Miss Delamere could believe in such a result. Never had he been more tender or more expansive. What could it mean? Bound to her, as he now was, by every tie of honor, by every bond of principle, could he be merely trifling with her feelings? She still stood in the centre of the apartment, where his hand had clasped hers, and whence she had met and answered the last long look that he turned upon her as he retired. Her cheek was flushed and her eye glittered; she knew not what to think. The death of Mrs. Mortimer had removed the only avowed obstacle to their marriage; the departure of Gertrude rendered all dread of future rivalry impossible; he was alone, quite alone, in a silent and cheerless home; he made no attempt to disguise the extent of his attachment to herself, while she was conscious that she had left no means untried to rivet the chains which he had voluntarily adopted; and still he appeared to live on as though the present sufficed to satisfy all the exactions of his heart.

And she had borne this strange and almost humiliating uncertainty for months, believing each day that the morrow would terminate her suspense; and that morrow had come and gone, and brought no explanation. What could it mean?

Suddenly the bloom faded from her cheek, and the light from her eye. Could he have learned the history of the past? Her limbs tottered, and she sank upon a seat. With the rapidity of lightning her thoughts glanced back to the visit of Trevor—Had he indeed betrayed her? But no; that was impossible; for never once had she left them alone together; while the feeling of avoidance which each had exhibited towards the other was also a guarantee that such could not have been the case.

Then she remembered that Mortimer had, during the removal of Gertrude, been absent for many days in town—Who had he met there? With whom had he held communication? Could he have encountered any of her former friends, and questioned them as to her past history? And, if so, what was the meaning of his subsequent conduct? Did he dare—did he consider himself authorized to sport with her feelings, with her fate, with her very existence?

The doubt was almost too terrible to bear; and as she sat in silence, with her hands tightly clasped together, the large drops of emotion started on her brow, and her breath labored until it escaped audibly from between her clenched teeth.

The brilliant beauty was crushed and bowed; and in that moment Gertrude was revenged.

Gradually, however, she became more calm the improbability that Mortimer, who was almost a stranger in London, should in so short a space of time have gained admission to a circle which prided itself upon its exclusiveness; and the still greater improbability that he should have attained to a sufficient degree of intimacy with any of its members to enable him to prosecute such an enquiry, forced themselves upon her reason; but still she could find no plausible solution to his mysterious silence; and a thousand harrowing apprehensions haunted her mind. Every day, and every hour of suspense heightened alike her alarm and her difficulty. She reflected with terror that her youth was gone; and that, did she now fail in effecting the object for which she had striven so zealously the failure might be fatal. She could not hope long to retain the bloom which characterized her beauty; and her position was desperate. Mortimer alone could save her; for ruin was approaching with giant strides, and she had no other resource.

"Something must be done," she at length gasped out, unconscious of her own utterance; "I must know all—all that is before me. I cannot endure this gnawing suspense and live. He must speak, and speak clearly. But how compel him to this? He is weak and suspicious, and startles at a shadow—and yet, he must speak out. Either he is in my power, and I am safe; or he has played me false, and all is over. Trevor cannot have betrayed me—he can know nothing—or, should it be otherwise——" her voice died away in a hoarse whisper, and once more all was silence.

Suddenly a thought flashed across her, and a withering smile rose to her lip as she approached a writing-table, and seated herself before it. For a few moments she remained buried in thought; and then, slowly and earnestly, she began to write. It was evident that the task which she had undertaken was no light or easy one, for she progressed in it slowly, and appeared to form, not only every word, but even every letter, with consummate care and study. But at length it was completed; and, after having attentively examined the contents of the paper, she folded it with equal deliberation; and then, having selected a particular seal from a number which lay upon her desk, she closed the letter, and threw the seal that had secured it into the fire, which was still mouldering in the grate.

This done, she remained for a while silently gazing upon the decaying embers, as if jealous lest they should fail in their work of destruction; but she no sooner saw the glittering ore melt and disappear, than she returned to the table, took up the letter, and, having concealed it in her bosom, calmly, and with renewed self-possession, rang for her maid, and retired to her own apartment.

On the following day Sybil was invisible even to Mortimer. Indisposition confined her to her chamber; and, after lingering for a couple of hours about the grounds, and sauntering to and fro beneath her windows, in the vain hope of obtaining at least a glance of her figure as she traversed the apartment, he was compelled to return home ungratified. Nor, even then, could he compel himself to any occupation. A whole day without Sybil overcame his philosophy.

Nothing sufficed either to interest or amuse him. He felt no apprehension as to the result of her illness, for Mrs. Mortimer had treated the matter lightly, declaring that it was only a head-ache; and that Sybil was subject to headaches when she over-exerted herself, which she had done lately, and she had warned her of the consequences. However, Sybil knew best; and in all probability would be quite well again on the morrow. Thus, there was no cause for anxiety; and Mortimer was at liberty to bewail his own dreariness; to feel the wretchedness of his large and echoing rooms, and to comprehend his utter dependence upon another. The sensation was by no means a pleasant one. He had become so habituated to the constant society and companionship of Miss Delamere, that he almost felt injured by its sudden withdrawal. She might, so he argued, surely have received him; but then the reflection crossed his mind that she had declined the visit of her mother and that he could advance no claim to an indulgence which had been denied to her parent. Still he was only half reconciled to his exclusion; time hung heavily upon his hands; and he began to feel a conviction that some definite step must be taken to prevent the recurrence of such a mortification. And what step? There was but one which could invest him with a right to dispute the will, and to monopolize the society of Sybil; and to this he had long looked forward as to a fixed and certain event. Why, then, did he hesitate, and fall into a somewhat gloomy reverie, as the vision of an early marriage with his beautiful betrothed fastened itself upon his mind? Was she not to him all that she had ever been; or changed only by an increase of tenderness? Did he doubt her? No, no, that could not be; and yet, it was nevertheless certain that a cloud still hung over his thoughts. Sybil had indeed given him her heart, her time, and her interest, but he had failed to gain her confidence.

While he had frankly placed before her, not only every action, but almost every feeling of his life, even from his earliest boyhood; and, as the Orientals express it, had "laid his heart in her hand," she had betrayed no answering trust. She had gladdened him by her gaiety, soothed him by her sympathy, and delighted him by her devotion; but beyond this, to him she was still morally unknown; and as he became, in his enforced solitude, conscious of the whole extent of her power over his fate, the words and warnings of his dying mother again sounded in his ears, and would not be silenced.

Angry and irritated at his own weakness Mortimer again and again mentally argued, or at least strove to argue down these intrusive recollections. Why should he suffer them now to oppress him? Was he not pledged to Sybil? Had he not willingly, and even eagerly, sought her hand? And could he now, at the eleventh hour, yield to such visionary misgivings without dishonor? Once her husband, he should know all; and that all, as she had herself assured him, would amount to so very a trifle that he could not fail to smile at his own eurisosity. Yet still the shadow lingered. While constantly in the presence of Sybil he cared for nothing, thought of nothing, save the passing hour; his heart and his fancy were alike satisfied, and he regarded his marriage only as a distant contingency: but once abandoned to his own solitary reflections, and compelled to look into the future as well as upon the present, the jealousy of his nature rose up in arms, and his reason rebelled against his passion.

What, however, availed that reason now? Sybil was his betrothed wife, and the argument was strengthened by the selfishness from which no human being is wholly free; to be happy, he must be happy with her—she had become necessary to his existence. This one blank and weary day had revealed how little he sufficed to himself; and then—by the conviction his reverie took a brighter hue, and he began to shape out in his own fancy such a scheme of life as would have renewed the golden age.

Pity that the materials with which fancy loves to build should be so frail! What mighty fabrics of mortal blessedness should we not create about us if they were more substantial! But as the child erects its castle of cards only to see it crumble and disappear upon the slightest touch, so do men too often rear those goodly schemes in prospect which, like the gold of the fairy-gift, prove mere ashes when in possession.

At an early hour on the morrow Mortimer was at The Grange; and this time he was admitted without difficulty. Miss Delamere had left her chamber, and was already in the southern parlor. He needed no announcement, for with this ceremony he had long dispensed; and opening the door softly, he entered. But his arrival produced no change in the attitude of Sybil; and he was instantly struck by the change in her appearance. She was lying upon a sofa with her face buried among the cushions. Her hair was drawn away from her forehead, and gathered into a large loose knot at the back of her head, evidently without care; a morning dress of white muslin was rather folded about her than adjusted to her figure; and there was an air of negligence about her whole person so foreign to her usual habits, that it at once bespoke the presence of some overwhelming sorrow.

Mortimer detected this at a glance, and in an instant he was by her side.

"Sybil, my own Sybil, what has happened?"

Sybil started, and raised her head, and if Mortimer had been struck by the change in her general appearance, he was still more startled by the alteration of her countenance. A deep crimson flashed upon her cheeks, her swollen eyelids betrayed a night of tears, her lips were pale and quivering, and her hand trembled as he took it in his own.

"Speak my beloved! Tell me, what is the meaning of all this wild grief?"

"Frederic!" she murmured almost inaudibly, "I dare not!"

More and more bewildered, Mortimer gazed upon her like one in a dark dream; but she was unhappy, she was crushed beneath some weight of sorrow, too great even for her to bear, and he forgot at once all save his love: "Nay, you *shall* speak, Sybil!—Sybil, are you not mine? Have I not a right to share your grief, arise from what cause it may?—Should you have any secret from me?"

But Sybil was still silent, although her sobs became audible.

"Lean on me, dearest!—There, hide those swollen and weary eyes upon my bosom, and tell me all," pursued Mortimer more gently: "You know not what you make me suffer by this suspense. To see you thus, and to be refused your confidence, is more than I can bear. Have mercy on me, Sybil, and tell me what mean these tears!"

Miss Delamere only shook her head despondingly.

"You wound me deeply, Sybil," said her lover; "but I will not urge you further. I shall appeal to your mother."

"Frederic! Frederic!" gasped out his companion, as she flung her arms about him to retain him in his seat: "For pity's sake—for mine—if I have indeed been dear to you,—breathe not a word of this misery to my poor mother,—it would kill her did she know its cause!"

"Torture me not then, my own love!" implored Frederic, as he yielded to the pressure of the beautiful arms which still rested upon his neck, and sank upon his knee beside the couch; "but let me learn from your own lips the cause of this violent emotion. Have you lost a friend? Your fortune? Your gestures deny this. Has any one dared to injure or insult you?" And the eyes of the speaker flashed as he put the question.

A more violent burst of grief was its reply.

"Yes—I have guessed aright!" he exclaimed vehemently, as he sprang to his feet with a flashing eye and a bent brow: "And now, Sybil, I entreat no longer; I *insist* upon an instant explanation of this mystery. As my future wife, I command, in this at least your obedience. Your honor is in my hands, and none shall dare to sully it by a breath."

In a moment, but only for a moment, Miss Delamere, thus adjured, buried her face in her hands. When she withdrew them, she was pale even to ghastliness, as she took a letter from her bosom, in which it had been concealed, and with averted eyes held it towards her companion, who, scarcely less agitated than herself tore it hastily open.

As he hurriedly devoured its contents, the whole frame of Mortimer shook with suppressed rage; and he gnawed his lip as though he would have wreaked that vengeance upon himself which could not be poured out upon his enemy.

"It is a goodly scrawl!" he at length exclaimed bitterly: "The work of a vile incendiary, who has not dared to affix his foul name to the revolting slander. But it is false, false as hell, Sybil!—No tongue has dared to prate as this assassin states—no thought has ever polluted your fair fame. Again, and again I swear to you that it is false! Have I for one moment concealed my purpose in frequenting your house? Is it not notorious throughout the neighborhood that I have been for months a suitor for your hand? Is not your own mother beneath your roof? Out upon such devilish but puny malice—my very heart heaves against the coward lie!"

"How am I sunk!" sobbed Sybil.

"Sunk! Nay, dearest, rather say how are you exalted in my eyes by this jealous sensibility to all that touches your honor. Never to me have you seemed half so noble, but I beseech you, calm your grief, it cuts me to the soul, for it shows me that it is I who have armed this writer with his unhallowed weapon. Yes, Sybil, it is I, who, spell-bound by the happiness of the present hour, have too long forgotten that I have as yet enforced no right to its continuance. It was too much to hope that a meddling world would leave us to our holy and hallowed affection until we had placed it beyond the reach of comment and suspicion. There is a serpent in every Eden, and the crawling reptile has now invaded ours. But there is a remedy, a holy and blessed remedy for the evil, my beautiful

beloved—we will delay it no longer; and the snake will be innoxious when we have robbed it of its venom."

A smile shone through the tears of Miss Delamere, and as again Mortimer resumed his seat beside her, she gradually suffered herself to be consoled by his ardent and affectionate reasoning. Once more the color returned to her cheek and lip, and she hung upon his words with an earnestness that made him doubly eloquent. She said little, but that little sufficed to convince him that he was the happiest of mortals; and as they sat with their hands locked together, and her head pillowed upon his shoulder, he almost blessed the anonymous correspondent who had revealed to him the moral excellence and shrinking delicacy of his beautiful and injured Sybil.

"And now, my own one," he said tenderly as he prepared to depart; "we have each sufficient occupation both for our thoughts, and for our time. You need rest, however, and while you strive to obtain it, I will not lose a moment in seeking out the vile author of this atrocious calumny. Let him not hope to escape. It is not so easy to disguise any handwriting as it may appear to be; there are always some peculiarities, trivial and slight, perhaps, but nevertheless, perfectly susceptible of identification, by which the writer may be traced with proper care and caution; and trust me, your present correspondent shall not escape."

"Frederic," whispered Miss Delamere with an appealing look; "will you consent to make me *quite* happy?"

"Can you doubt it, Sybil?"

"Then love, restore to me that letter, and let me destroy it."

"Do not ask me what I cannot grant. I will not be cheated of my vengeance."

An expression of intense anxiety passed over the features of Miss Delamere; but she instantly recovered herself, and with her sweetest smile she again extended her hand, as she said emphatically: "This is the first time that I have ventured to claim a favor at your hands, and I will not be so denied. To me your present intention brings a two-fold anxiety; First, Frederic, answer me; how can I feel one moment's peace while I know you to be engaged in a search which must at once irritate and pain you, and by which, if you are successful, you only involve yourself in newer and more dangerous difficulties? while, as regards myself, do you imagine for an instant that I can be happy while such a document is in existence? No, until that bitter and blighting scrawl is destroyed, I *must* be wretched; for does it not brand me with disgrace?"

"Enough, Sybil, enough!" exclaimed Mortimer, as he folded her in his arms, and pressed his lips upon her forehead; "You have conquered, and I forego my vengeance."

"My own dear Frederic!" murmured one of the sweetest voices in the world, as the torn fragments of the obnoxious letter fell in a shower upon the carpet; "Now indeed, I know that you love me."

Five minutes afterwards Mortimer was gone; and Sybil, having listened to the sounds of his horse's feet until they were lost in the distance, slowly rose from the sofa, and carefully gathering up the shreds of paper, threw them one by one into the fire which was blazing in the grate; and then having satisfied herself that they were all destroyed, cast one long triumphant look round the apartment, and threw herself again upon her seat.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Several months had, as we have already stated elapsed since the death of Mrs. Mortimer, and Time the great physician of the mind, assisted by one of the most amiable and unselfish dispositions in the world, had restored Gertrude to comparative happiness. Grateful for the protection which had been so frankly afforded to her at a period when it was sorely needed, she had studied to accommodate herself to the exigencies and peculiarities of her aged relative with a good faith which insured her ultimate success. And already the effects of her gentle influence were palpable; not only in the general appearance of the gloomy little house, but also in the manner of its rigid mistress.

The arrival of all the orphan's domestic treasures had at first grievously annoyed and disturbed Miss Warrington; who, as she saw package after package unladen from the heavy road-wagon which nearly blocked up the narrow street, clasped her hands tightly together; compressed her lips until they became almost invisible, and sat bolt upright and speechless; until she comprehended, from the exclamations of her matronly attendant, and the expostulations of the two sturdy porters who were engaged in carrying the things into the house, that not only was the entrance-passage entirely choked up, but that the kitchen stairs, and even the kitchen itself, had likewise been invaded. Then indeed, she recovered in some degree from her consternation; although it was only to express her dissatisfaction in a cold, dry, sarcastic tone, which to poor Gertrude was more painful than the most violent exhibition of temper.

"Really, Miss Mortimer," she said, and not even the tension of her lips relaxed, as she looked her full in the face; "I feel that I have been very inconsiderate. You must have found yourself terribly inconvenienced in my house before your furniture arrived, and I greatly fear that you will even now be at a loss to dispose of it consistently. My passage is scarcely wide enough for a piano; nor do I think that an inlaid bookcase will accord particularly well with the general style of my property. But perhaps you have an idea of moving to a larger residence."

"My dear madam!" exclaimed the orphan, as she sprang forward and seized the reluctant hand of the querulous old lady; "I do not know what to say to you—how to apologise. I was not aware———"

And poor Gertrude, who was already overcome by the munificence of her cousin, and the affectionate letter which had accompanied his gifts, burst into an irrepressible flood of tears.

"Nay, nay, niece, this is foolish," said Miss Warrington less harshly; "I dare say that you

did not expect such an unloading of the Tower of Babel as this," (the good lady's verbal illustrations were usually somewhat confused,) "so don't cry, for that will not clear the passage, and it will be necessary that we should get up stairs to bed. We had better, therefore be thinking of what had best be done. Two cases of books!" she ejaculated after an instant, as if unconsciously; "Who on earth is to read them; and where are they to be put?"

"Please ma'am," said Hannah, intruding just within the door of the room a face heated by exertion, and a stout arm bared above the elbow; "the men can't bring in any more of the things, for there ain't room, unless we take some of them up stairs into miss's sleeping chamber; are we to carry them up?"

"Inquire Miss Mortimer's pleasure," was the unsatisfactory reply, and the discomposed old lady looked stiffer and harder than ever.

"Oh! yes, yes," eagerly exclaimed Gertrude; "anywhere—anything—good Hannah; I will soon unpack the cases, and send them out of the house. Indeed, my dear madam," she added appealingly, as the maid disappeared; "it is those unwieldly wooden boxes which create all this confusion, and when once we are rid of them, you will be surprised to find how little they contain."

"I have long ceased to be surprised at anything, niece," said the still unappeased mistress of the house; "and it is at least fortunate that your huge chests will supply us with firewood for the winter."

At length, when the room of Gertrude had been converted in appearance into a well-packed warehouse, through the civil exertions of the porters, ingress and egress were once more rendered possible, and Miss Warrington unclasped her fingers.

The orphan hailed with delight this symptom of returning composure, and found courage to allude to the future arrangement of her recovered treasures; but vainly did she suggest how admirably the piano would stand between the windows, and how charmingly the book-case would fit into the recess beside the fire-place. Miss Warrington was resolved to consider the introduction of these elegant superfluities as a grievance, and declared, that as she detested music, and never read anything save her Bible, her rooms should not be lumbered by any such useless incumbrances.

Gertrude was silenced. She had intuitively felt from the first, the utter futility of reasoning with her protectress, and the impropriety of thwarting her wishes, and accordingly, she began to consider how she might the most conveniently accommodate those two bulky luxuries in her own small apartment, resolving, at the same time that she would conscientiously refrain from reading in her aunt's presence, or disturbing her by the sound of the instrument.

The sacrifice was a severe one, but the orphan was beginning to be schooled in self-abnegation and restraint, and thus the determination, untasteful though it was, failed to bring a cloud to her young brow.

Such had been the reception of Mortimer's offering; and for some weeks, Gertrude carefully abstained from intruding any of her little possessions upon the notice of her aunt. Through the agency of Hannah, who soon conceived an affection for her young mistress, as she persisted in calling her, the obnoxious packing-cases were broken up, and duly stowed away for winter fuel, and as, with the exception of the piano and the book-case, all the other articles were small, she experienced less inconvenience than she had anticipated, in arranging them in a manner calculated to satisfy her aunt.

The effect of their possession upon herself was most salutary. She no longer felt alone; no longer deserted. Every object by which she was now surrounded spoke directly to her heart, and drew her back again into the past. Her whitewashed walls were gladdened to her eyes by the sketches of the dear old house at Westrum, which had so often fondly occupied her leisure; her toilette sparkled once more with cut glass and porcelain, and as the sunbeams penetrated the branches of the venerable trees before her window, and threw their chequered light upon the table, there were moments in which she almost deluded herself into the belief that she was once more *at home*. And then her books!—there, indeed, her store of happiness was inexhaustible; and they were the more endeared to her by the fact that the fly-leaf of each, bore some affectionate record, and that they thus spoke to her from beyond the grave.

The honest-hearted old woman, who formed in herself the whole establishment of Miss Warrington, was astounded by the magnificence which rendered the apartment of Gertrude so dissimilar to the remainder of the house, and was never weary of examining the elegant futilities with which it was crowded; but, shrewd enough to comprehend that half the annoyance of her mistress on their arrival had arisen from a jealous feeling of the contrast which they would offer to her own faded and bygone treasures, which she had for years been accustomed to regard with reverence, she carefully abstained from all mention of her admiring wonder in her presence.

Thus for a time it would have appeared as though the stately old lady had altogether forgotten the incursion which had been made upon her premises, but it was not so. Her first apprehension had been that Gertrude might pride herself on this acquisition of luxury, by which she was rendered, in a great degree, independent of those about her, and however much she gloried in her own personal independence, she could not brook that the orphan whom she had befriended should thus be enabled to dispense with her good offices,

It was, perhaps a pardonable weakness, and it was, at all events, a very common one. She did not relent, therefore, until she had become perfectly satisfied that, far from presuming on her unexpected good fortune, her mild and gentle inmate had become more attentive, kind, and thoughtful; as though she felt that a tacit apology were needful for the annoyance to which she had innocently subjected her hostess.

Miss Warrington had, however, by indulging the suspicion unwittingly, created a great difficulty for herself; for when strong in her con-

vletion of Gertrude's inmate amiability, she resolved to recant her objections to the due enjoyment of these newly-acquired luxuries, she was at a loss how to make the concession without a compromise of her dignity.

She was revolving the subject in her mind, as she had already done several times before, on a bright summer evening, when, shut into the dingy little parlor, while all was fair and sunshiny without, Gertrude was busily engaged with her needle in the service of her aunt, and during a pause in their monotonous dialogue, a wandering Italian boy took his stand before the house with a barrel organ, and began to play the Barcarole in Masaniello.

As the first bars of the melody met her ear, the hands of Gertrude fell powerless upon her lap, and she panted with emotion. In another moment she sprang from her chair, and rushed to the window, where she stood trembling, smiling, and weeping, in a breath.

"Well, well," said the old lady with a grim smile, which was the most engaging expression of which her countenanee was susceptible; "There is no great harm done if he does see you, for one of those people does not come to Bletchley for twelve months together, so that we may afford to give him a few pence."

But Gertrude did not hear a word. She heard nothing, felt nothing, was conscious of nothing but the sound of music, and this was the first to which she had listened since she had become indeed an orphan. Every pulse in her heart was stirred; the "old familiar strain" had carried her away—away—through time and spaee, and she was quivering with a sense of happiness to which she had been long a stranger, and which she had often failed to feel even when an auditor of the most finished performance.

The sound ceased; the musician was remunerated and the spell was broken. The dingy parlor appeared more dull than ever, and the monotonous needlework more wearisome, but, meanwhile, the grim smile still rested on the features of the old lady.

"You seem uncommonly fond of music, Gertrude," she commenced, delighted at the opening afforded by the appearanee of the Savoyard; "and yet I have never onee heard you touch your piano since it eame into the house."

Gertrude looked up cheerfully, although the tears were still glistening in her eyes, as she replied: "I feared to disturb you, my dear madam."

"Nonsense, nonsense, child," said her companion; "you see even that hurdy-gurdy, or whatever it was, did not disturb me; but, perhaps, you have not room to play in your own chamber. Send for Jones, and let your instrument be brought down stairs. It strikes me that it would stand very well between the windows."

"Oh, how kind you are!" exclaimed the delighted girl earnestly.

"And while he *is* here," pursued the old lady, inwardly moved by this unstudied emotion, "he may as well disencumber you of your book-case: your room is too small to accommodate so large a piece of furniture."

"Oh, how happy you make me!" again ejaculated the excited listener; "and my work-frame, my dear aunt, and my painting-table—will you admit them all?"

"As you will—as you will," was the reply, "but charge Jones to be careful of the walls as he comes down stairs. Nothing tears a house to pieces like moving furniture, and I cannot afford to new paper the passage for the next five years."

Two months after this conversation, it would have been difficult for any one to have recognised Miss Warrington's hitherto dingy little parlor. By impereeptible degrees, a seore of elegant trifles were successively introduced; even a vase of flowers was permitted to stand upon the polished table without comment; for the quick eye of the old lady immediately detected that the careful Gertrude had placed it upon a minute mat of her own working. Ere long, the dull-looking walls were relieved by some admirably-executed water-colored drawings from a well-stored portfolio; and the village carpenter, after a few hints from the fair artist, succeeded in producing some creditably-made frames, which were neatly covered with morocco paper by the same skilful fingers; the dark curtains which fell in gloomy masses like the folds of a pall, were next discarded, and gossamer draperies of spotless muslin supplied their place.

An air of elegance and ease had succeeded to the squalor and desolation which had formerly been the characteristics of the house; and all had been done so quietly, so simply, and so unostentatiously, that even the rigid and indepen dent Miss Warrington almost forgot that she was indebted to another for the increase of comfort about her.

Gradually also, Gertrude emancipated herself from the excessive thraldom which had confined her entirely to the premises of her aunt; and, in her plain mourning-dress, and closely veiled, ventured to ramble about the immediate neighborhood of the village.

Her demeanor was so undeniably correct, that even Miss Warrington herself could advance no valid objection to her enjoyment of this necessary exercise; and, thus, the orphan found herself once more enabled to commune occasionally in solitude with her own thoughts.

That they were generally very sad ones, can scarcely be a subject of surprise; but there were, nevertheless, moments in which the natural beauties by which she was surrounded drew her on from the past to the present; and taught her to feel that life still possessed much of which she had reason to be grateful.

We have already deseribed the approach to Bletchley; but, cheerful and picturesque as it was, Gertrude soon discovered that the village possessed still greater beauties than those with which she had already made acquaintanee; when, turning her back in the direction of the high road by which she had travelled, she wound round the base of the grassy height crowned by the modest church, and found herself surrounded by the original hamlet, upon whose skirt the dull and straggling street, of which she was now an inhabitant, had grown up as its population had increased.

The whole landscape was essentially English in its character. It did not boast one grand or

striking feature; there was neither rock nor torrent, dense forests nor foaming cataract, to be seen on any side; but all was calm, rich, and almost holy, in its beautiful tranquillity. In the distance a chain of undulating hills, clothed with beeches, shut in the prospect; and as she stood and gazed, with all the joy of a liberated captive, and all the enthusiasm of an artist, upon the scene before her, the declining sun poured a flood of glory upon the quivering leaves which glittered like jewels in the light.

The evening wind, as it sighed along the branches, brought with it the odor of the clover and the cinquefoil, which had been mown during the heat of the past day; and the tinkling sound of the sheep-bell on the hill-side. The luxurious lowing of the cattle from a warm, snug-looking, and substantial farm, nestled under the southern slope of the range, was heard at intervals, as, after having resigned their milky hoard, they wound their way to an accustomed pasture, while the song of the nightingale occasionally broke forth, as if in welcome of the coming twilight.

In the bottom of the valley lay a hedge-bordered road, over which the picturesque hay-wagons moved lazily along, to the music of the green and waving corn, which rose and fell with a deep murmur, like the waves of some summer sea, as the breeze passed over it—amid the perfume of the wild-rose and the woodbine, the white clematis and the elder; and crushed with their heavy wheels the transparent and classical cup of the bindweed, which, not content with girding the hawthorn boughs with its fairy garlands, as if to replace the departed glories of their own spring-loving blossoms, trailed its graceful wreaths far across the path; while the spotted fox-glove started up beside the little cress-covered stream that glided noiselessly along, and the bluebell rang its tiny chime like an elfin choir.

From the road which we have just described commenced a slight, smooth ascent, known as Bletchley Green, the little common of the hamlet, whereon the horse of the curate, and the donkey of the cottager, met upon equal grounds. On the verge of the road stood the modest, and once the solitary inn of the hamlet; a plain, unpretending cottage, the extreme ruddiness of whose brick-built front was subdued by a casing of pale-colored cement; the ancient and approved sign of the Red Lion was lettered, not illustrated, on the swinging sign; and a rude bench extended its length along the house for the accommodation of the weary traveller, while a deep trough constantly supplied with water, offered refreshment in its turn, to the jaded steed.

From that point commenced the chief charm of Bletchley Green. The modest cottages of dark gray stone, peeping out from their leafy screens like bird's nests occasionally overgrown by the honeysuckle and the creeping-rose; their carefully-tended little gardens, spreading to the right and left, gay with marigolds, and stocks, and gilly-flowers, among which the bees made constant music as they flew to and fro, sating themselves with sweets, or clustered about the neatly-thatched hives which were ranged in goodly order along the grassy path.

There is something gladdening in the aspect of a cottage-garden, rich in all the usual vegetable produce which helps the poor man's meal; and cherishing all those familiar and old-fashioned blossoms which horticultural societies and scientific florists are rapidly sweeping from the surface of the earth. Certain it is, too, that flowers nowhere prosper so well as under the eyes of the cottagers. Their geraniums, their fuchsias, their hydrangias, even to their pansies and their anemones, are frequently finer than can be found elsewhere. Horticulturists may tell us that the cups of the tulips are "muddy," and that their dahlias are botanically imperfect; I, for one, care not if it be so, for it is not the less a fact that they grow lovingly and sturdily in the cottage-garden, while they often look, in a more richly-prepared soil, and under more scientific tending, as though they had been forced into unnatural uniformity; just as the glad gracefulness of childhood is palpably coerced by the discipline of the dumb-bells and the black-board.

To conclude the digression, however, and to return to the village—Advancing and receding irregularly, now flung back by the rustic builder, in order not to interfere with the growth of a fine old patriarchial ash or elm, and now standing closer to the public path, that the little willow shaded pond within its enclosure might not encroach too much on the convenience of the inmates of the dwelling, the quiet and modest cottages extended along one side of the Green, almost to the crest of the nearest hill; while, on the other, they gave place to grass fields, and patches of wheat or barley; or, still more grateful to the eye during the sultry noons of summer, stretches of mangel-wurtzel, with its large, heavy, dark-green leaves.

But the charm of Bletchley Green was the "Great House," a vast and imposing mansion which looked down upon the hamlet from a slight acclivity. A splendid specimen of the solid architectural taste of the times of the eighth Henry, it spread its lordly terraces, and extended its hanging woods across the whole brow of the ascent, until they were parted only by a low and ancient wall from the grave-yard attached to the little church already named.

The whole scene was calm and beautiful; and as Gertrude at length reluctantly turned away in order to return to her unpicturesque home, she heaved an unconscious sigh; for the time-touched and stately mansion, with its venerable woods, had brought back to her a thousand memories of Westrum, and the other dear old house which had cradled her youth. It struck her, too, as strange, that in that dearth of subjects on which to converse together, Miss Warrington should never have mentioned the near neighborhood of such a residence as this; and the rather, as the whole appearance of the place evidenced its inhabitation. Gentlewoman as she was by birth, even although crippled in fortune, she was decidedly eligible as an ac-

quaintance at the Manor-house; and Gertrude, in her moral solitude, could not forbear a wish that this resource had been open to her.

Again and again her thoughts reverted to that noble mansion and its embowering woods; and the modest tea equipage was no sooner removed in the evening, than, as she resumed her work, she resolved to question her aunt as to its inhabitants.

"Oh, they are rich people, very rich people," replied the old lady quietly; "and far too grand to visit any one in Bletchley. The crimson-curtained pew, which you must have noticed opposite the pulpit, belongs to them."

"Then, they are absent," remarked Gertrude; "for it has remained empty every Sunday since I arrived here. Several times I have determined to inquire the name of its owners, but it has always escaped my memory."

"Their name is Armstrong; and Hannah tells me that they returned home two days ago, after an absence of three months. Here or there, however, it signifies little, for they are seen only at church."

"Are they, then, so very haughty?"

"Yes—no—I really cannot tell how to answer the question. They are free enough with the poor, and let no one want in the village if they know it; but their house is always full of company, and they are for ever driving or riding about the country; but, as they prefer the upper road when they go to the post-town, they never pass this way."

Gertrude sighed. She could not but feel that it *was* mortifying to know that there was refined society within her reach even here, and yet that she was shut out from all hope of participating in its enjoyment. A moment's reflection, however, sufficed to restore her to a more healthy frame of mind; she remembered that her circumstances were changed, and that she could no longer associate with the rich and the happy upon equal terms; and a flush rose to her cheek as she felt how little fitted she was, either by habit or association, to endure the mortification of any other species of companionship.

The subject was, consequently, dropped; for it was one in which the old lady evidently took not the slightest interest, and upon which Gertrude had as little inclination to dwell.

And so three days more passed on, in the same yearisome routine as usual; and it was with delight that the orphan, on the morning of the fourth, hailed the return of the Sabbath. Sunday was to her, indeed, a day of rest and happiness; the holy services in the rustic church, the calm and impressive manner and the simple eloquence of the venerable pastor, the only guest who ever passed the threshold of her aunt, and for whom she had already learnt to feel a reverence and regard, which he repaid in fatherly and affectionate kindness; the respectful and quiet demeanor of the simple congratulation; and that holy calm which ever prevades the country on a sabbath-day—all conspired to make it a festival to the heart of the orphan-girl. Her plain and mourning toilette was soon made; the solitary bell of the low church rang out over hill and valley; and, with her aunt leaning upon her arm, she once more advanced to the narrow pew of which she was a constant occupant.

The infirmities of age rendered Miss Warrington a slow walker, and the services had just commenced when they entered. For a considerable time Gertrude did not raise her head, for she had at once sank upon her knees as she took her place; and when she at length did so she threw back her veil, and remained looking earnestly towards the clergyman, totally absorbed by the pious offices in which she was engaged. It was not until the sermon was nearly concluded that she chanced to glance in the direction of the curtained pew of the Armstrongs; and she almost started as she perceived that she was an object of observation to more than one of its occupants. She instantly withdrew her eyes, but even in that momentary glance she had remarked that it was tenanted by four individuals; an elderly gentleman, elaborately powdered; a portly dame of about the same age, and two younger ladies, apparently their daughters. She perceived, moreover, that with the exception of those of the matron, who was evidently absorbed by the rector's discourse, the eyes of all its occupants were, in their turn directed towards herself.

The fact was, however, a very simple one; as she was in all probability, the sole stranger at that moment in the sacred edifice, and sufficiently distinguished by the simple but striking elegance of her appearance from the rest of the congregation to excite observation; and the only effect produced upon her by the conviction that she had been an object of remark, was her care to avoid all further glances in the direction of the Squire's pew.

Ere long the service drew to a close; and, once more supporting her aged relative, Gertrude left the church, just in time to see the inhabitants of the Manor-House enter their plain but well-appointed chariot, and disappear.

"There go the Armstrongs," said the old lady, as she drew her large cloak more closely round her, and leaned heavily upon the arm of her young companion, while they threaded their way among the graves; "All the petty gentry of Bletchley will now be once more busy with the doings at the Great House; and all the poor secure of help for the next three months. Our good rector always looks cheerful when they are in their places, for they lighten his duties by their kindness to the sick; and so do the schoolchildren, for they are sure of not being overlooked in some way or another."

"Could they have a better or a holier welcome home?" exclaimed Gertrude, as a tear swelled in her gentle eye.

"I don't know," was the matter-of-fact reply; "they must do something, and I suppose their pride suffers less from charity than sociability. At all events, you now know, and have seen all that you ever will know or see of the Armstrongs."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Armstrongs were a good old family, and the Manor-house was worthy of its owners;

although the estate was somewhat shorn of its pristine splendor. Once the lordly domain of Sir Courtenaye Armstrong, to whom belonged alike, mansion, village, wood and hill, it had in process of time passed to the grandson of his niece; who, in order to render himself legally eligible to hold the property, had, by royal patent, assumed the name and arms of the Armstrongs; although the spurs of the brave old knight were not fated to be buckled on by his descendants, who had successively shown themselves rather addicted to the sports of the field than to its perils; while the extent of the property had gradually contracted under the pressure of debts and difficulties.

Enough, however, still remained to render the manor of Bletchley one of the finest estates in the county; and if the present owners were a shade less popular than they might have been among their immediate neighbors, that circumstance might safely be attributed to the fact, that neither by station, education, or habits, were those neighbors eligible to the acquaintanceship to which some among them so eagerly aspired.

But while the petty gentry and wealthy farmers looked with some asperity and indignation upon what they considered as the undue haughtiness of the Armstrongs, the prayers of the needy were secured to them by their unremitting attention to their wants; the schools and the poorhouse were rich with their gifts; and the cottages of the laborer and the peasant gladdened by their benevolence.

The head of the family was an honest, hearty, single-minded, and somewhat eccentric man, who was in perfect good-humor both with himself and all his possessions; and quite satisfied to live and be merry as long as he could, in this best of all possible worlds; and who, as he saw prouder and nobler neighbors gradually rise up around him, and occupy with their more modern mansions, and grace by their more high-sounding titles, portions of the land which had once acknowledged only an Armstrong as its lord, remained perfectly careless as to the exact position assigned to him by county etiquette, on those occasions when the said neighbors, who had obliged him by assisting in the consumption of his venison and claret, in their turn invited him to their tables; satisfied that Lord John, or Sir Harry, were only *parvenus* in the county after all; and that they would have given, and gladly given, no small portion of their broad acres to have felt themselves, as he did, even stronger in the past than in the present, as he sat among the monuments of his ancestors, and remembered that they had been lords of the same soil for centuries.

A good landlord, an indulgent master, and a liberal patron of all the local charities, Mr. Armstrong was permitted to doze away the five-and-thirty minutes generally occupied by the weekly sermon of the rector, in his comfortable and well-cushioned pew, without much comment; while the demeanor of his better half was so perfectly irreproachable, as she sat in the most scrupulously perpendicular position, immediately facing the minister, from whose countenance she never once permitted herself to withdraw her eyes, that she made ample amends for the solecisms of her husband.

Mrs. Armstrong was a portly and comely personage, still possessing some remains of beauty; or rather some trace of the prettiness which had, ere she had scarcely attained her sixteenth year, won the heart of her husband. Fine-tempered and affectionate, it was impossible not to love her; although equally impossible, at the same time, to repress an occasional smile at the little absurdities into which she was continually betrayed by an education barely *ébauchée*, and a remnant of romance which offered a strange contrast with her portly person and faded face.

The girls were well-bred, well-mannered, and well-looking; a century in advance of their parents as regarded knowledge of the world and social etiquette; but gentle, dutiful, and exemplary in all the relations of domestic life; while their only brother, the hope of his father and the idol of his mother, possessed not only a fine person, but one of those upright and noble natures which tend to exalt humanity.

Yielding and indulgent upon all minor points, Ernest Armstrong was firmness itself in all matters of principle and right feeling: incapable of bartering one worthy impulse against personal interest or self-aggrandizement, or of committing one disloyal action for the gratification of a selfish caprice. And yet even he was not without his faults. Who is so? He was aware of both his personal and acquired advantages; and, perhaps, prided himself a shade too much on each. He was ambitious too; and was ever yearning after some vague, shapeless, and untangible vision, to which he was unable to give either a local habitation or a name; but which filled him with vain aspirations after he knew not what, and rendered him less satisfied than he should have been with the actual advantages of his position.

The sun was sinking, and just as its last and ruddiest beam flooded the beach-woods with which the hills were clothed, the wide and lofty iron gates that opened upon the entrance court of Bletchley House were flung back, and Ernest Armstrong galloped up to the foot of the broad flight of steps, flanked with couchant lions, which led to the door of the mansion, and sprang hurriedly from his horse. The accustomed word of comment or direction was unsaid to his smart groom as he strode into the hall; and there was a cloud upon his brow which told that whatever had been his errand it had sped ill.

The last dinner-bell was ringing as he crossed the green, and he at once proceeded to his dressing-room, and made a hasty toilette, ere he joined the family party, which had already proceeded to the dining-room. On his entrance every eye was turned upon him; but the eager inquiry which had risen to the lips of his fond sister remained unuttered, as they caught a glimpse of his overshadowed countenance, and felt that, until the disappearance of the servants, they must abstain from all questioning.

Mrs. Armstrong was in her place at the head

of the table, where she sat smiling at the silver tureen which glittered before her, as she was accustomed to smile on every person or thing which was familiar to her; while "the Squire," as he loved to be called, was as jovial as his wont; and the momentary disturbance occasioned by the tardy entrance of his son once over, he resumed his soup and his subject, without seeming to remark that anything had occurred to darken a brow which was generally as clear and as bright as sunshine.

"They are welcome to all their old castles, say I;" it was thus that he gathered up again the thread of his foregone discourse; "Give me a good, honest, substantial dwelling-house, with well-fitted doors and windows, and only as many galleries and staircases as may be necessary to lead to the rooms. As for your vaults and your dungeons, they may do very well for the dead and the dismal; but again I say, give me a range of cool cellarage, well stocked with generous old wine. I have no taste for such gimcracks, and I hope, girls, that you will never be bitten by this absurd mania for old clothes and old moveables, which seems to be making such progress among us. Nothing but wine and pictures improve by being—what do you call it? Aye, *rococo*—that's the word, and a queer one it is, but nothing that sounded like common-sense would have served to express the tomfoolery of the fancy. Pass the hock, Ernest, after you have helped yourself. *Rococo* chairs, forsooth! weighing half a ton, as bolt upright as a promising militia-man at drill, or carved all over, arms, back, and legs, as if to give you a hint of the tortures of the Inquisition by bruising every bone in your skin. I trust never to see any such worm-eaten enormities in my drawing-room."

"But all those old-world things are so picturesque, papa," said Eleanor.

"Very!" laughed the matter-of-fact old gentleman: "and so is a rock, but it won't grow cabbages; and the moonlight, but it won't force grapes or pine-apples. Believe me, my dear, that the most sensible and rational taste is that which leads people to appreciate all the improvements that are making from year to year, and to encourage the talent and industry that are required to bring them to bear. If people are to indulge in whims of *rococo* and their great-great-grandfathers, everything may as well stagnate."

"And yet, sir," said Ernest, as though the remark jarred upon the current of his own silent thoughts; "there is surely some respect due to the memory of the past—some consideration owing to a long line of ancestry?"

"To be sure there is! *We* should be the first to admit that fact, my boy. I am only quarrelling with the abuse of the virtue."

"Then the principle at least is worthy, even in your eyes, papa," smiled Mary; "and you are candid enough, I know, to concede that this taste for antiquity is at all events a refined one even in its absurdity."

"A refined fiddlestick!" exclaimed Mr. Armstrong good-humoredly; "I am not going to allow you to distort the real meaning of my admission; I venerate the abstract principle, but I detest the finicking demonstrations. I love and reverence tastes that encourage progression, and improve and advance commercial interests, feed the poor and support the artizan. Who ever thought, fifty years ago, of raking refinement out of a garret, and clothing elegance in the faded rags of a dead generation?"

"Still you must admit that there was something fine and chivalrous in the feudal dwellings of the old barons," persisted Eleanor.

"I don't quite understand the meaning of the word, my dear. I am a plain man, and should prefer comfortable to chivalrous, as I read the term, when applied to the building in which I was to live. Stone floors, easements sunk five feet into the walls, and *oubliettes*, may be very romantic appurtenances to a residence, but I am quite unsophisticated enough to be as well pleased with Brussels carpets, plate-glass windows, and conservatories."

"Some castles are very pretty, nevertheless, Mr. Armstrong," softly purred his helpmate; "Only remember the Tower of London! I'm sure when I was a child I used to long to live there."

"Your mother has settled the question now I think, girls," laughed her husband good-humoredly. "Why, my dear, there is scarcely a stone in the whole building that has not the curse of blood upon it! But now that the fruit is upon the table, and the servants out of earshot—Give this fine ripe peach to your mother, Eleanor—tell us, Ernest my boy, what has gone wrong with you?"

"Everything, my dear sir," was the moody reply.

"Why! you don't mean to say that the newcomers who have invaded the neighborhood are likely to interfere with the interests of a family which have been seated in the county for centuries?"

"And yet such is the case, sir. Of our own tenants we are, of course, sure enough; and were the poor voters, my mother and sisters would have secured them; but it seems that, with the yeomen and petty gentry, we are by no means so popular. You do not give sporting-dinners like Lord John, nor attend vestry-meetings like Mr. Hellingham, nor do fifty other things which would bring you into familiar contact with these worthies; and thus they have decided that neither yourself nor your son are 'fit and proper persons to represent them in Parliament.' Half-a-dozen electors, to whom I made known our intention of canvassing the borough, thanked me somewhat supereiliously for the honor which we desired to confer upon them, politely reminding me that, although the name and estate of the owners of Bletchley House were well known to all the county, its inhabitants were strangers in their own land, and gave me civilly to understand that they would have nothing to do with us."

"W-h-e-w!" whistled the old gentleman; "they are inclined to dictate to us our duties, are they? To draw comparisons between us and a brainless young prodigal like Lord John, who so long as he fills his house with noisy parasites, cares little for the kind of society which he ought properly to frequent; and a

mumbling old meddler like Hellingham, who contrives to keep the parish in hot water, about paltry matters which one dip into his own purse would settle amicably at once? Give it up then, my boy; give it up at once, I say. What can it signify to either of us that we earn the privilege of adding two capitals to our name upon the back of a letter, and of being abused in the newspapers for holding our tongues when they think we ought to have spoken, or for having given our opinion when they consider that we should have remained silent."

"Yet to be so thoroughly shelved in one's own county is anything rather than pleasant, sir."

"Why, hang their impudence! so it is, Ernest, and I don't see that we are called upon to put up with it, if you feel any inclination for us to try our strength. We have no reason to shrink before the free eloquence of the hustings; we may not be popular, as you say, but we can have no dirt flung into our faces which we cannot readily wipe off. Do I owe any man a penny? Am I ashamed to look any man in the face throughout the county? Can I not answer boldly to my name in any place, and at any time? What do they mean by my being unpopular? We'll try it, Ernest, we'll try it."

"I trust you will, sir, for there can be no doubt, that you are the only legitimate representative of this borough."

"Or you, my boy."

"No sir, not I. It will suffice my ambition to follow in your footsteps."

The old gentleman smiled affectionately upon his son, as he replied,

"But the idea was your own, Ernest; as for me, I should have lived my life out without caring one straw who won the seat, always provided he were a staunch Tory, likely to do honor to his party."

"You should, however, remember that you owe a duty to the county, sir; all your wealthy neighbors are mere *parvenus* on the soil, while you have only to point to the vaults of Bletchley church to establish your claim, and to justify your position."

"It shall be done, Ernest; it shall be done."

"Then we have no time to lose, my dear sir, for I understand that two candidates are already in the field."

"So much the better," said Mr. Armstrong heartily; "there is no honor in walking over the course, so, early to-morrow we'll commence our canvass. You, girls, must drive into town, mount your smartest bonnets, and lay in a stock of flounces and furbelows, without inquiring too narrowly as to the price; while your dear mother has only to follow up her usual benevolent avocations to serve the good cause more perhaps than we now suspect. There's Jones too, my attorney, as good and as honest a fellow as ever breathed, will help us, heart and hand, I well know, for half a dozen years ago, he talked to me just as you are doing to-day, Ernest; but you were then at college, and I had no inducement to trouble myself upon the subject. Now, however, the case is altered, and I feel that I have no right to shrink from smoothing your path for the future. But who are the declared candidates?"

"Lord John Somers starts in the Whig interest, of course."

"Naturally. You seldom know a duke's son, emancipated from paternal rule, who does not show his independence by opposing his father's political principles, and establishing himself as a man of the people."

"And then—And this is the opponent who is likely to give us the most trouble: there is Sir Harry Vane, Tory to the back-bone."

"Aye, Sir Harry is staunch; it almost irks me to oppose him."

"He has, however, already shown that he, on his side, has no such scruples."

"All the better, my boy, all the better; there is the less occasion for delicacy. And if he only doses his voters with new wine, as he did his friends the last time we dined at The Chase, he will not fail to set their teeth on edge, and deliver them over, sad and squeamish, into our hands."

"Yet there are persons, my dear sir, who prefer thin port and muddy sherry to no wine at all."

"Which means—? Come, speak out, boy, you know that I hate all reservations in a family. Let me understand the drift of your remark."

"Englishmen seldom vote freely on an empty stomach, and prefer a shake of the hand to a touch of the hat."

"The last I will freely give them, but I shall hardly brook to feast the Smiths, Browns, Joneses, and Robinsons, under the roof of my ancestors. If I can compromise the matter by feeding them at the Red Lion—"

"Such an arrangement must not even be contemplated," exclaimed young Armstrong eagerly: "It would swamp us at once. No people are more exacting than voters on the eve of an election, and I, moreover, confess that I was quite unprepared for such fastidiousness on your part, my dear sir, when I remembered how little you have appeared to insist upon your privileges, and to stand by your order, ever since I have been old enough to remark, and to comment upon your mode of life."

"What! Because I am so thoroughly conscious of my true position in the county that I am careless of enforcing its rights, you imagine that I should readily play the host to a mob of semi-genteel, presuming and underbred men, about whom I neither know, nor ought to know, anything?"

"You cannot do without them; and moreover, the election once past, you need no longer annoy yourself or your family by continuing their acquaintance."

"Nay,—hang it!" expostulated the honest-hearted old Squire; "that were indeed a version of 'the orange sucked, we throw the peel away.' Recollect, young gentleman, that the appeal which I am about to make, since you declare that it must and ought to be made, will be addressed, not to strangers, but to my neighbors; men whose forefathers remember mine, and who would justly consider themselves aggrieved, should I carry the matter off in so cool a manner as you advise. It strikes me, Ernest,

that such blind and selfish policy would leave the Armstrong interest at a discount, and somewhat interfere with your own views in the event of my death."

"Well, sir, perhaps you are right, and even in that case you will be no worse off than some of the proudest and noblest of our neighbors."

"Aye, confound it!" conceded Mr. Armstrong, "when a duke's son turns liberal he plays his card with a vengeance. I verily believe that there is not one owner of a brass-plated door in the whole borough who has not, on some occasion or other, found his legs under my Lord John's mahogany. Still, I say, that I dislike the system; not from personal pride as you well know, but because I *do* think, and always *shall* think, that a line should be drawn, and never overpassed upon any pretext, confining each class of society to its proper limits."

"I hope that you do not intend to sport that sentiment upon the hustings," said his son with a smile.

"Confound the hustings!" retorted the Squire, as he filled his fourth glass of port, and held it up admiringly to the light. "Have your own way, however, my boy, and arrange every thing as you think best. I suppose in these reforming days all my old-world prejudices must be laid aside; only thus much I will *not* concede. You and I may make shift to be hand and glove with the male portion of the population, and no great harm can ensue, but I will have no intrusion on my wife and daughters; no Mrs. Tomkins or Miss Simkins introduced into my drawing-rooms. Neither Mrs. Armstrong nor the girls are ambitious of a seat in Parliament."

"Had Ernest included us in his universal-visiting scheme," said Eleanor laughingly, "I should like to have commenced my social crusade by making the acquaintance of a sweet-looking girl in deep-mourning, who sat in the next pew to the rector's last Sunday; I do not think that I ever saw a more lovely face."

"Or a more ladylike deportment," followed up Mary; "Who *can* she be? I never remarked her at Bletchley church before."

"Saunders tells me," murmured the oily voice of Mrs. Armstrong, as she looked up from her plate, where she had been playing with a piece of preserved ginger, and listening with secret dismay to the discussion between her husband and her son; "Saunders tells me that she has been here for some weeks, and that she is the niece of an old maiden lady, a sort of decayed gentlewoman, who receives no one but Dr. Simmonds, and although in straightened circumstances, owns the house she lives in, and is as proud as she is poor."

"What a pity!" exclaimed young Armstrong suddenly looking up; "had she only been an uncle instead of an aunt, she would have had a vote."

"Now, fie upon you for a reereant, Ernest!" said Mary playfully; "here we are talking of one of the sweetest-looking creatures upon earth, and you are coldly speculating upon her maiden aunt."

"You forget that I have never seen this Bletchley beauty, and that we are on the eve of a general election. I promise, however, to favor you with my opinion as to her personal merits before you are eight and forty hours older. Will that satisfy you?"

"Not altogether; as I shrewdly suspect that your decision will be considerably affected by the old lady's politics. If you secure her interest, you will expatiate on the Venus; but should the ancient gentlewoman read you a Whig lecture, you will see everything 'through a glass darkly,' and turn traitor to your own taste."

"In which case I will bear witness against him," said Mr. Armstrong: "for a prettier little sylph never sported bombazine and crape. Poor thing! poor thing! 'tis but a sad dress for one so young, and apparently so helpless. An orphan, I have no doubt."

"If I thought so—" commenced Mrs. Armstrong, and paused.

"Well, my dear, if you thought so, what would be the consequence?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Oh, nothing wrong, you may be sure, my love," replied Mrs. Armstrong, nervously twitching the strings of her cap; "only it struck me that if she really is a gentlewoman, you might not object, although she is poor, to my showing her some civility. I have daughters of my own, and they will be orphans some day, Mr. Armstrong."

"Not yet, my dear; not yet, I hope," said the squire; "but you are quite right. If she should really prove to be a gentlewoman—"

"And if her aunt really has any political interest," broke in his son.

The sisters laughed, and even their father joined in the merriment, as he resumed waggishly:—

"Why, I see no reason to object to your showing her a little attention, if such a prospect does not alarm the girls."

"Nonsense, papa!"

"Very well; the peril be on your own heads. But we must, first, make some inquiries about the young lady."

"Our good rector, mamma says, is acquainted with her aunt. He will be excellent authority," said Eleanor.

"Undeniable. So, you had better question him upon the subject."

"Poor thing," murmured Mrs. Armstrong; "an orphan! I shall be sure to like her, for I am an orphan myself."

"Of some years' standing, my dear," said her husband with a smile; "and probably better reconciled to your fate than this mourning beauty. However, all I have to require is, that you will take no steps in the business until you have consulted Dr. Simmonds. Her appearance is certainly much in her favor."

And the subject dropped. The two girls were anxious to possess a new friend, their mother to do a kind action, and her son to further his electioneering interests.

CHAPTER XXV.

On the following day, all Bletchley was in commotion. The two Armstrong carriages had traversed the village *de bout en bout*, a circumstance which had not occurred within the memory of "the oldest inhabitant;" but even this marvel ceased to be matter of astonishment, or rather, was absorbed in a wonder still more wonderful, when the barouche, which contained the three ladies of the family, was seen to stop at the door of Miss Warrington, and, after a brief parley between the portly footman of the Squire and the mature attendant of the maiden lady, Mrs. Armstrong and her daughters actually descended from their equipage, and entered the house.

What could it mean? Never before had such an occurrence taken place at Bletchley; and, although the "professional men" of the adjoining town, who had "boxes" in and about the hamlet, had long considered themselves aggrieved, yet they had always declared themselves delighted, that the Armstrong family had never made the slightest advances towards an acquaintanceship, which, alike as neighbors and as "professional man," they considered to be justly their right.

And now—when at length the inmates of the Great House had apparently resolved to alter their tactics—How had they commenced? Not by rendering honor where honor might be said to be due, but by making their first visit to an old, impoverished, and uninfluential gentlewoman, who had herself lent a decided aggravation to the case by the fact that, although an inhabitant, and even a householder in the village for many years, she had never swerved from her original determination—not to admit a single neighbor under her roof, save the elderly and widowed rector, to whom she was furnished with a letter of introduction, and whom she consequently considered at once as her friend and her pastor, and Mr. Pilbeam, the apothecary, on the occasion of any indisposition.

Not even the kind attention and sympathy which Mrs. Armstrong had constantly and liberally evinced towards the two invalid daughters of a former curate of Bletchley, elderly maiden ladies, the one deaf, and the other paralytic, and which had been demonstrated in a manner at once costly and delicate, although, in deference to the wishes of her husband, she had never made their acquaintance; had any effect in lessening their indignation, when, as they sat behind the rusty Venetian blind of their solitary window, amusing themselves, as was their wont, by watching every thing that passed in the dullest of all dull village streets, and informing themselves, in so far as their obtuse faculties permitted them so to do, of all the affairs of their neighbors; they detected the arrival of the lady of the Manor with her two blooming daughters, and their actual entrance beneath the roof of the poor and proud Miss Warrington; who, despite all their own advances, still continued as great a stranger to them as when she first took possession of the dingy old house bequeathed to her by her godmother, and became a denizen of the hamlet.

"What's in the wind now?" exclaimed Miss Margery, as with a shaking head, she forced aside one of the laths of the blind in order to obtain a better view of the proceedings across the way; "What's in the wind now?" she repeated, raising her voice to the exact and well-studied pitch which rendered it tolerably audible to her sister; "Is the sky about to rain larks? And are the grandees of the Great House about to favor the gentry of Bletchley with their notice at last?"

"Better late than never," replied Priscilla shrewishly; "though it strikes me that it would have been more becoming had they paid their first visit to the daughters of a former pastor. However," she added, stroking into more approved order the neckerchief of snowy muslin which was primitively crossed over her bosom, and sweeping into a capacious basket a pile of sundries representing needlework; "we must not resent the slight, or we shall get no more game and old wine; though our thoughts are our own, and our feelings upon the subject cannot be altered."

"If you really think they are coming here—" began Miss Margery in her shrill tone.

"*If* I think!" interposed her more captious sister; "There can be no doubt upon the subject to any person of sense, and their having gone first to Miss Warrington's is in all probability a mistake. You really have no proper pride, Margery, or you must at once see the utter impossibility of their visiting any one in the village, and passing us over."

"Well, very likely you are right," conceded the tottering woman so vehemently addressed; "I am sure I do not wish to contradict you, and I was only about to suggest that we had better defer our dinner until after their departure.

"There is some sense in that, at all events," said the conciliated Priscilla, "and as the parlor is tolerably tidy, we have nothing to do but to watch for them."

"Ah! Thompson, how are you?" exclaimed the fussy little apothecary, as he extended his hand to shake that of a portly ex-stockbroker, who, having been nearly "cleared out" on 'Change, had retired to Bletchley with his wife and daughter, to exist as they best might upon the dregs of what was once a snug little fortune; "Gay doings this morning in the village, eh? The Armstrong carriage, I see, at the door of my patient Miss Warrington—Something new, eh? What can be the meaning of it?"

"Her house is her own," growled Mr. Thompson.

"Why, so is yours, and so is mine, but that fact will not answer my question."

"Your house is *not* your own, Pilbeam, you only rent it, and I am in the same case, or the barouche would have stopped at our doors instead of hers."

"What can they care about that, eh? They are not likely to wish to hire the house."

"Pshaw!" muttered the ex-stockbroker, shrugging his broad shoulders, "The ladies are canvassing, that's all."

"Oh! they are, eh? To be sure they are! How dull I was not to understand the manœuvre. But I must just slip back, and warn Mrs. Pil-

beam that she will soon have company, for I have a vote for the borough."

"Oh! you have, have you:" was the surly reply; "Then I won't detain you, or Mrs. Pilbeam may not have time to change her cap before the enemy are upon her, and you can't do less than vote for old Armstrong, you know, when the ladies become personal friends. You must pocket your principles, Pilbeam, or you may chance to damage your practice;" and with this parting courtesy Mr. Thompson moved on.

"Surly old brute!" muttered the dapper little apotheeary as he hastily retrod his steps towards home; "And a constitution like a horse; the man's an eyesore to me."

"What *can* have taken the Armstrongs to old Misss Warrington's?" said the comely widow of a dissenting minister, who had fixed her residence at Bletchley, in order that her gawky son might profit by the advantage of a Wesleyan school established in the village; "I never was so surprised in my life!"

"I'm not," was the concise reply of the young hopeful.

"And why are you not surprised?" asked his mother in amazement.

"Because I ain't."

"Well, so you say; but surely you can give a reason!"

"The pretty girl's my reason," grinned Master Abinadab; "her son's made her do it. It's quite natural."

"Abinadab!" ejaculated the pious relict of the departed preacher, "What *can* you mean?"

"Just what I say. And I only wish that I could go to church every Sunday, to sit and look at her at my ease; for she's the prettiest girl that ever I laid my eyes on."

"Go to church!" almost screamed the matron; "go to church, did you say? This must be looked to. How will the discreet and holy Mr. Longwind mourn over you when he hears that your father's son is on the high road to perdition!"

"You needn't tell him," was the dogged reply; "and if he even mourned in sack eloth and ashes, he couldn't prevent my saying that Miss Warrington's niece is the prettiest girl in Bletchley."

The widow sank back upon her chair aghast. She had never hitherto suspected that the education of her hopeful son was so far advanced.

Little did goodnatured Mrs. Armstrong, or her daughters, suspect the commotion which their advent had created in Bletchley; little did they imagine that their visit to the orphan had deferred a dinner, prompted an impertinence, and alarmed the sectarian jealousy of a Wesleyan mother. And yet so it was; and had I, Asmodeus-like, introduced my readers into the secrets of every family in the village, I could have convinced them that the "sensation," as the French designate an excitement of this description, was universal.

Happily ignorant of the fact, however, the three ladies entered the neat and cheerful little parlor in which Gertrude and her aunt were seated, with a single-hearted desire alike to please and to be pleased; nor did they, in that humble habitation, encounter anything which jarred upon their refinement, or prompted them to regret the kindly feeling by which they had been led to visit it.

Miss Warrington, unaccustomed as she had been for years to receive guests beneath her roof, had, nevertheless, never forgotten she was entitled by her birth to find herself in the most unexceptionable society, and to hold her place even among the most fastidious on the question of family and breeding; nor was the quiet and somewhat stern dignity of her deportment lessened by a slight shade of displeasure at the fact that the ladies of the Manor-house had thus forced themselves upon her acquaintance, despite her declaration that she would hold communication with no one in the parish, save the rector; and that the politeness now tendered had, moreover, been tardy in its demonstration. Indeed, had the visit been made (as we are, however, aware that it never would have been) before Gertrude became her inmate, and had clothed in comfort and elegance the previous nakedness of the land, she felt that her wounded pride would have been too powerful for her courtesy; for nothing is more easily mortified than the self-esteem of genteel poverty; but now, as she glanced round her modest room, she saw little to irritate or to excite an uncomfortable sensation.

Erect, stately, and unbending, there was no shadow of obsequiousness in the welcome which she uttered to her unexpected guests. Had they been the acquaintance of years she could not have exhibited greater ease or self-possession; and while the whole frame of Gertrude quivered with pleasure her aunt remained as perfectly unmoved as though she rather permitted than exulted in the compliment which was now paid to her.

The unassuming manner of Mrs. Armstrong, and the honesty of her nature, were well calculated to remove even the slight feeling of annoyance which the maiden lady had originally been disposed to indulge; and thus, as she listened to the kindly-intentioned but not very profound discourse of her visitor, the fingers of Miss Warrington gradually relaxed their convulsive grasp, her mouth resumed its natural proportions, and even her figure began to lose somewhat of its rectangular rigidity; and meanwhile the three younger ladies were already engaged in cheerful and unembarrassed conversation upon the thousand and one subjects which young ladies love.

The piano, the drawing-stand, and the work-frame, all afforded admirable texts; and before they parted, the happy orphan, who felt her heart once more expand beneath the influence of congenial society, had already initiated Miss Armstrong into the mysteries of a new tapestry-stitch, and promised to assist Mary in a difficult point of perspective.

"I assure you, my dear Miss Warrington," prattled on the good-natured lady of the Manor; "that I am delighted to have a neighbor at last. It has not been my fault that I have been so long without one; but Mr. Armstrong is not

fond of country neighbors, and it is my duty, you know, to consult his pleasure in everything."

"In that case, however, madam—" began her listener, with a sudden resumption of dignity, and clasping of the fingers.

"Oh, I know what you are going to say," laughed the light-hearted matron; "that in such a case I had better not have come here now; but I assure you, that as regarded yourself, Mr. Armstrong had no objection; none in the world; quite the contrary. I am so glad to know you, and he will be so glad to know you; and the girls will be so glad to know each other; that it is only a pity we did not make our acquaintance before."

"Let us understand each other, my dear madam," said Miss Warrington, as soon as the volubility of her companion enabled her to profit by a pause; "I am naturally much flattered by the offer of a friendship totally unexpected and unsought on my part; and I beg you to believe that whenever you feel it pleasant to exchange the luxury of your own home for the modest obscurity of mine, I shall always be honored by your presence, but I never leave my own house; I have not done so for years; never, indeed, since I was left an orphan, and my own mistress."

"How very singular!" said Mrs. Armstrong, with a smile which revealed her still beautiful teeth; "we are only five in number at this moment, and three of us are orphans; for Miss Mortimer, I apprehend," she added, sinking her voice to a whisper, "is also motherless."

"And fatherless," followed up her interlocutor, in an accent of deep feeling which could scarcely have been expected from one so rigid, and apparently so passionless; "Nay, I may almost add, friendless; for my poor Gertrude has no other protector than myself, and at my age, I cannot long expect to be spared to her."

"You are quite wrong, my dear lady, quite wrong," eagerly replied the kind-hearted Mrs. Armstrong; "she has a warm and a sincere friend in Dr. Simmonds. He speaks of her in raptures. And I am certain that when we know more of each other, we shall all be her friends. Only see how Mary and Eleanor are getting on! Now, who would believe that they had never spoken to each other an hour ago! But to be sure, our good rector had already made them acquainted with your charming niece; so I dare say they felt themselves at home with her at once."

Still a shadow darkened the faded brow of Miss Warrington. It would have been easy for a spectator to decide that, in her opinion, the young ladies were "getting on" too fast. They had turned over all Gertrude's portfolios, had ransacked all her loose music, had unfolded her tapestry, and at last appeared inclined to try the tone of her instrument.

Nor was this closing suspicion an erroneous one; for in an another moment Miss Armstrong was seated at the piano, and enabling even the modest orphan to feel that, brilliant and showy as was the execution to which she listened, she could fear no rivalry in that particular accomplishment; in which, thanks to the finished science of Sybil, she was so thorough a proficient, that she had even occasionally glanced at the possibility that, should she ever be reduced to the necessity of eking out her slender income by her own exertions, she might safely depend upon her knowledge of music for a livelihood.

"I have already spoken of myself, Mrs. Armstrong," said the proud maiden-lady at length after an evident struggle with her feelings, and under cover of the noise produced by the nimble fingers of the young musician. "And I am now anxious to speak to you of my niece. I am quite sure that you mean nothing but kindness to both of us; but that kindness may work a vast deal of evil to Gertrude. She is a good girl, a very good girl; she has made me happier than I ever expected again to be in this life; but I know that she is herself unhappy; I know that she must be so under my roof. She has been reared in luxury, and she is poor. I had hoped, and I still hope to reconcile her by degrees to the great change which has taken place. She has good sense, and good feeling, and she will gradually reconcile herself to her fate, if she is left to struggle against it in obscurity; but I cannot answer for the effect which may be produced upon her mind by constant association with companions so differently circumstanced as your daughters. I fear that she will begin to repine, to fret, to grieve once more over all that she has lost; in short, I tell you frankly, that I see nothing but danger and sorrow in the prospect of a friendship with your family."

"Then you do not like us?" asked her visitor, with another sunny smile, which showed how easily and trustfully she anticipated the reply of her companion.

"My only fear," said Miss Warrington, laying her thin hand upon that of her visitor; "is that we, and above all, that she, may like you too much."

"Thank you! Thank you!" laughed Mrs. Armstrong; "all is then as it should be. Have no care for the future. As to your pretty niece, she reminds me of the pretty lady in the song,—

> "Friends in all the aged she'll meet,
> And lovers in the young!"

and, moreover, I do not despair of making you yourself less unsociable than you threaten to be."

"I can exercise no control over my niece in such a case," persisted Miss Warrington, as if unconscious of the closing phrase of her companion; yet, if I can induce her to listen to me, I honestly confess that I shall endeavor to warn her against the perils of an unequal friendship. Gertrude has at once much to learn, and much to unlearn; and as her future life must be passed in obscurity, the sooner she masters her lesson the happier for herself."

"My *dear* lady!" exclaimed the eager matron, how prosily you talk! Just as if it were possible to foretell the fate of a pretty girl. Who knows but she may make a conquest under our roof. All the world are not seeking for money; and where could any man find a sweeter creature? Why, as I look round your snug little parlor, I see a thousand proofs of care and elegance, such as are frequently wanting in a larger

establishment; and you talk of her having a great deal to learn.

"However, we are told you know, that 'no man is a prophet in his own country,' so I suppose I must forgive you. But we have really been unreasonable in our visit; we have stayed here an age, and you will be quite tired of us. Mary! Eleanor! Come, my dears; it is time for you to take leave of your new friend, or Miss Warrington will have reason to suspect that we have an idea of claiming possession of her for the day."

The two girls sprang from their seats, and each possessed herself of the hand of Gertrude.

"Good bye, then, my dear Miss Mortimer, for the present; but we shall hope to see you very soon and very often."

The orphan smiled amid her happy tears.

"And I want to show you to Mr. Armstrong, my dear," followed up the mother; "so you must not disappoint us. What say you to dining with us to-morrow? Now, don't tell me that you are engaged, for I will not believe a word of it."

"Indeed, Madam," replied my heroine—for radient as Sybil may appear to many, Gertrude *is* my heroine—"I had no intention of volunteering so wild a fable. An engagement, since my arrival at Bletchley, has hitherto appeared to me as unattainable as a meteor; but I am dependent upon the will of my aunt, and must first obtain her sanction, before I gratefully accept so delightful a proposition."

For a moment, Miss Warrington resumed her most rigid perpendicular, and looked the very condensation of a thousand refusals. She was human; and it was impossible quite to forget that she had been an inhabitant of the village for more than twenty years, and that this was the first occasion upon which she had been honored by the countenance of the owners of the Great House—a favor for which she was, moreover, shrewd enough to perceive that she was even now indebted to their admiration of her young relative. But in the next instant her pride came to her aid, and resolved not to allow them to perceive and to despise her egotism, she again unbent, and deferred the question to her niece, declaring that she had not the slightest desire to control her wishes.

"Then all is arranged, my dear Miss Mortimer," said the good-natured Mrs. Armstrong, giving a hearty shake to the hand which she had already taken in the full confidence of success; "And as you may find it pleasant to become better acquainted with your new friends before you are introduced to the rest of the family, the carriage shall be here for you at five o'clock. Nay, not a word of objection, my dear Miss Warrington, you know that our little village, pretty and snug as it is, does not boast even a fly, and therefore you must let me have my way."

Resolved to victimize her own feelings even to the end, and disarmed by the cordiality of her visitor, the maiden-lady forbore all further utterance of her objections; and after a few more parting compliments, the Armstrong barouche drove from the door.

"Why, it can't be possible!" exclaimed the shrill voice of Miss Margery Bayliss, as the long-tortured lath of the Venetian-blind sprang back to its place, "They are not coming here, after all!"

"They may please themselves," was the angry retort of Priscilla; "*We* want no patronage; *we* are gentlewomen born, and need not condescend to any body. I dare say the mutton is boiled to rags."

"Really, Mr. Pilbeam, you are a great deal too bad!" said his pretty but peevish helpmate; "There go the Armstrongs; actually past the very door, and it is quite clear that they never meant to come here at all; and now I may go and undress again; and put away your best coat, that you have been rubbing to pieces against the back of your chair for the last two hours. You are always trying to give me as much trouble as you can; thinking, I suppose, that with five children, and helping you to make up your medicines, I have not enough to do."

"It is not my fault, my dear. You know as well as I do that I have a vote."

But he argued in vain; for the irate beauty had already left the room in high displeasure.

"Aye, they may look about them as they drive along," said the precocious Master Abinadab, as he watched the departure of the ladies of the Manor; but it's no use, for, with all their flowers and furbelows, they'll never be able to hold a candle to Miss Warrington's pretty niece."

And there was also another who followed them with her eyes, as the carriage rapidly disappeared; and that other was Gertrude. Stationed behind the muslin drapery of the window, with a beating heart, and a glowing cheek, when she could no longer hear "the wheels of their chariot," she sighed, as though they bore her new-found happiness away with them. Again the past had come back upon her; again she felt that even for her there might yet be some sympathy in store: and then she slowly turned away from the casement, and her eye fell upon the upright figure of her aunt.

"When you are quite at leisure, Gertrude," were the first words which fell upon her ear; "be good enough to gather together all those ends of worsted. If Hannah attempts to sweep them up, I shall have my carpet scraped threadbare."

She was obeyed. The heart-chilled orphan quietly dropped upon her knee, and picked up, one by one, the bits of German wool which Miss Armstrong, in her zeal to learn the "stitch," had scattered upon the floor. Tears rose unbidden to her eyes; the illusion had vanished; and the cold, bare, shivering reality was once more before her. The unexpected deportment of her aunt during the visit of their unlooked for guests had surprised and delighted her by its quiet dignity, and she had, for a time, forgotten that it was not the ordinary mood and manner of her aged relative; but merely a reflection of former years and of former habits, which she would inevitably lay aside, (as the barrister lays aside his wig, and the dramatic queen her diadem,) so soon as its assumption became needless. Still, it had unconsciously, even

to herself, increased her respect and veneration for the withered and desolate woman to whom she was indebted for a home, and when she had risen from her knee, and carefully deposited the offending shreds in the litter-basket which stood beside her work-table, she approached her affectionately, and said in a subdued voice—

"You are not displeased, I trust, my dear madam, that I have accepted the invitation of Mrs. Armstrong?"

The old lady coughed slightly, and clasped her hands tightly together, ere she replied, "Displeased! Oh, no; I have no right, no wish, to feel displeased; but I would much rather that it had not been given. Visiting is expensive amusement, Gertrude; very expensive amusement; and you cannot afford to visit. However, you know best. But I confess that I should not, under such circumstances, like to squander upon an evening's pleasure as much as would support me for a week at home."

"Nor would I do so, my dear aunt," was the meek reply, "for my conscience would upbraid me, bitterly upbraid me, were I guilty of so great a folly."

"And are you ready to suffer the mortification of exhibiting your rusty mourning among the gay dresses of your new friends? Are you brave enough to be pointed at as the poor orphan that Mrs. Armstrong and her daughters have taken under their protection?"

"No, madam," said Gertrude, proudly; "I can boast of no such courage; nor am I, as I trust, called upon to make so great a sacrifice of right and honest feeling. Had I ever dared to confide to you the amount of generosity exhibited towards me by my too liberal cousin, you would be aware how little I have to shrink from any contact, even with the elegant and wealthy family with which I shall so soon be brought in collision; while the second, and far more bitter mortification to which you allude, can never overtake me while I am the inmate of your house, and the daughter of your adoption."

Even Miss Warrington was moved, and her thin lips quivered for an instant; nor was it until she had recovered from this unwonted emotion that she resumed:—

"My house and my adoption are, however, very small matters in the eyes of the wealthy, Gertrude, but that signifies little; I only fear lest they should soon become so in your own."

As she ceased speaking, the orphan was on her knees before her, her mild eyes swimming in tears, and her lips fastened upon the withered hands which were clasped upon the old lady's knee.

"My only protectress, and with one far-off exception, my only friend," she murmured, "have you, indeed, so poor an opinion of the heart, so little confidence in the gratitude of the forsaken and abandoned being to whom, unknown as she was, you so frankly and cordially offered alike a home and a refuge from the world which had cast her off?"

"No, no, Gertrude, you mistake me," replied Miss Warrington, as at length, fairly overcome, she bent down, and pressed her lips upon the pale brow of the earnest girl. "It is not because I doubt, but because I have learned to love you, and am jealous of your affection, that I spoke thus. Dry your tears, and forget what has passed. I believe I now know you thoroughly."

"And for ever," said Gertrude solemnly; "and in order to prove to you that you do me no more than justice, I will at once renounce this new acquaintance, which has excited your apprehensions. Half-a-dozen lines to Mrs. Armstrong will suffice, and I will write them now—this moment."

"I no longer apprehend anything, my dear, and I strictly forbid the sacrifice," replied the old lady. "You say that you can visit these people without expense, and without becoming weary of my poverty, and, therefore, so let it be, Gertrude. You are young, and heaven knows that the life which you have hitherto led at Bletchley has been dull enough; this is your only prospect of a little change, and you shall not throw the chance from you. Bless me!" she continued, looking at her watch; "it is close upon four o'clock, and we have not yet dined! Wipe your eyes, my dear, and ring the bell for Hannah."

CHAPTER XXVI.

It would be difficult to describe the feeling of triumph and exultation experienced by Miss Delamere when she became fully assured of the success of her unworthy and unwomanly act of duplicity. After so long a period of suspense; after so unwearied an exertion of all her powers of fascination and address, she was at length, at the very moment in which she had began to despair of ever accomplishing her object, about to see all her hopes realized, and all her aspirations fulfilled. She had no time, or even inclination, to congratulate herself upon the fact that she owed her triumph to the fine sense of honor, and upright principle of the man who was to become her husband. She felt only that she had not striven in vain; that she had not suffered any obstacle to deter, or to impede her in her pursuit; that now, at least, she had sown the seed of policy in good ground, and that her resolute perseverance had overcome all impediments, and would produce a rich harvest in the future.

But, amid her exultation, there was, nevertheless, one harrowing recollection, which, like the skeleton of the Egyptian banquets, constantly obtruded itself on her most sunny visions. Sybil still remembered that she was not yet the wife of Mortimer; that she was not yet *safe;* that, until their hands had met at the altar, a thousand unforeseen and inexplicable chances might, despite all her precaution, overthrow the brilliant edifice of her hopes, and that even the delicate and fastidious sense of honor to which her lover had sacrificed all his doubts, all his misgivings, all the entreaties of his mother, and all the quasi-claims of his cousin, might, should it once more be called prematurely into action, prove the most dangerous and insuperable bar to their union.

"'If 'twere well done, 'twere well it were done quickly,'" murmured Sybil to herself. To be wrecked in sight of shore, were to render ruin

en fold more bitter of endurance. There must e no more idle vacillation of manner on my art. I have awaited sufficiently long already crisis which I was, after all, eventually com-elled to create. His last words have given me right to act freely and energetically, and I ust exert that right. He loves me, thus much, t least, is certain; loves me, and wilfully blinds imself to the fact that he is about to place in ly hands, not only the happiness of his life, but ven his freedom of action, and liberty of will. Ie sees in me only a beautiful and gifted wo-an; and this is as it should be. He believes, oo, that he has probed my heart to the very ottom, and has found there no other image han his own," and a scornful smile rose to her p. "And what see I in him? *That*, at least, e has *not* divined. A superb edifice of human-ty, it is true, but built up upon a most fragile oundation: a superstructure of pride, and ego-ism, and vanity, decked out by the *prestige* of a andsome person, and hedged in by what the vorld calls honor—sensitive, and nice, and jea-ous honor. The world loves phrase-making, nd is satisfied by seizing generalities; but did t search the human spirit to the core, how vould it marvel when it discovered out of what oor and pitiful materials some of its most vaunt-d qualities are compounded! How I loathe hose soulless and nerveless beings who are con-ent, in the struggle of their kind for precedence, o sink down tamely to the very bottom of the vell of mediocrity, and to abide there without a murmur, content to see from their dreary pit he half-dozen stars, or the one struggling sun-beam, which, more in scorn than kindness, pe-etrates at times the depths of their voluntary larkness, until the rope of chance drags them hence to exhibit their weakness to the daylight. And what is Mortimer, but one of these—an un-table trembler, whose nature has been smooth-ed into symmetry and polish by prosperity, as the pebble is rounded and varnished by the tide that laves it, a man whose will can be governed by the first comer, as the vane is governed by the wind? Even now I cannot trust him, but look back upon the past, and tremble. Has not his heart yielded before his self-love? Have I not won his affections by pandering to his va-nity? And to-day, even to-day, at the eleventh hour, though I hold his plighted faith, might not one whisper suffice to overturn all my efforts? Let but that whisper reach him, and not even the spells by which I have made him captive would be strong enough to bind him to me—my reproach would be silenced by allusions to his wounded honor. It is not of me that he would think in such an emergency, but of himself. I see and feel all this, and I have no longer time to hesitate; either his fate is in my hands, or mine in his. We are both gamblers, who have placed our all upon a throw, but he handles the dice like a froward child, and it were degrading to be foiled by so poor an adversary."

Who that looked upon that beautiful and radiant woman, as she sat with her cheek pil-lowed upon her small white hand, and her large eyes bent down, and veiled by their long dark lashes, to all appearance absorbed in a tranquil and tender reverie—who could have suspected the deep and concentrated passion which even, at that very instant, was laboring in her bosom? But as the grove and the garden flourish in rich luxuriance, and garland with their perfumed greenery the base of Etna, while the lava-flood boils and burns within its crater, so did the gorgeous loveliness of Sybil Delamere veil the deformity of her moral nature.

And yet it had not always been thus. Only a few short years before, and she had been beautiful in mind as well as in form; but now the hot iron of the world and the world's vices had seared her heart, and had made her what she was.

Poets and romancers delight to paint the love of a woman's spirit in rainbow tints. The rhythms run more glibly, and dance along in softer cadences, when they embody joy, and grace, and harmony: It is more pleasant to describe Arcadia, than to borrow images even from the Pandemonium of Dante himself. But no true woman's love ever yet ran through all its course in sunshine: many and many a dark shadow falls upon the stream-clouds, sometimes weeping themselves away in innoxious tears to be forgotten when shed, but often—how often!—big with storm, and lurid with the lightning-flash.

Some escape the tempest, and learn to look back with a smile upon its perils: others fail beneath the trial, and are overwhelmed; while the bolder and the more desperate ride upon the wreck, and, like the syrens of old, lure others to the same ruin.

Some such reflection as this floated across the mind of Sybil as she at length looked up, and her proud lip wore an expression of bitter self-reliance which betrayed the working of her secret spirit. She had forgotten, she knew not for how great a length of time, that she was not alone; and now, as she glanced towards the *fauteuil* of her mother, she saw Mrs. Delamere with the usual novel in her hand, but with her eyes fixed upon the ceiling, and evidently as completely absorbed in thought as she herself had lately been.

"You must wear a gayer aspect than you now display at my approaching marriage, my dear madam," she said, startling her companion by the suddenness of her address.

"I thought that all was at an end," was the faint reply; "I confess that I had lost all hope. However, you know best, Sybil."

"All would, indeed, have been at an end, had your conjecture been a correct one," said Miss Delamere, forcing a laugh; "but surely you should have had more faith in my—what shall I call it? my fate, my star, or—if the plain term will not shock you—my management."

Mrs. Delamere sighed.

"'One swallow,' say the proverb mongers," pursued the younger lady, "'does not make a summer,' nor, believe me, does one failure make a defeat. I was yet young enough to strive, and I have striven; I vowed to succeed, and I have succeeded. I am loved, mother, loved as I have never before been."

"And you, Sybil; what of yourself?"

"Of me!" echoed her daughter, with a second ringing laugh, which sounded hollow and un-

natural; "I made no vow to feel, as well as act. I had much to revenge; much to repair; I shall soon have done both; but I have played only with my head; my heart was no party to the game."

"Can you always silence it? If not——"

"If not, I can stifle its rebellion; the task will be no new one."

"And have you told him *all?*"

Miss Delamere started in her turn.

"Do you ask me if I am mad? If I have poisoned my own draught, and fired my own roof-tree? Do you not know that we are almost penniless, and that Mortimer is our last hope?"

Tears, large and silent coursed each other down the pale cheeks of her listener.

"No," pursued Miss Delamere, in an accent so resolute that it was almost harsh; "I have *not* told him all, or a few months hence we should have been beggars, and, moreover, he has no suspicion that our apparent wealth will, when he seeks to grasp it, be converted, like the fairy gift of the nursery fable, into leaves and ashes. Nay, do not look so scared; I have overcome more serious difficulties than this, and I have no inclination to shrink before my last trial. He is too sensitive, too tenacious of the world's opinion to be trusted with a secret like mine, which he shall never know or learn, until the knowledge must be borne."

"And Sybil——"

"I am aware of all that you would urge," pursued Miss Delamere with undisguised impatience, "but, in my case, such scruples could only be misplaced. I have read Mortimer to his heart's core, and I have not now to learn where he would fail. Fear nothing for the future; once his wife, I shall be able to mould him to my will—he is insufficient to himself—but this is a fact which no man will concede, even to his own reason, and in the solitude of his own thoughts, like the wind-harp, he does but give out the sounds awakened by an extraneous influence."

"Surely," murmured Mrs. Delamere, with a slight shudder; "these are dangerous sentiments for one about to become a wife!"

Sybil smiled bitterly.

"Is it dangerous for the traveller to perceive the gulf which he has to pass, or the precipice he is about to skirt? Should I be safer were I to close my eyes to the probabilities of the future? I have not now to learn that when a man really loves, he does not content himself by casting before his mistress, as Raleigh did, the mantle from his shoulders, but prostrates at her feet, alike his tastes, his prejudices, and his will. You will tell me, perhaps, that Mortimer has done all this, and you will be right; but beyond even this there is yet a step. Touch, though never so lightly, the sense of honor upon which he prides himself, and, at whatever cost, he will immolate all other considerations to that one phantom. And now, answer me, am I in a position to volunteer the revelation you seem to consider fitting?"

Mrs. Delamere was silent.

"Let me but retain my secret," continued Sybil, evidently rather communing with herself than addressing her companion; "and Frederic Mortimer shall not long remain the inert and vacillating being he has hitherto shown himself. There are some natures—and such is his—which cannot exist without extraneous support; and although, like the vegetable parasites, they may blossom while entwined about the sustaining props of a hardier plant, and assume at least a semblance of vigor, yet, when left to their own poor resources, they either grovel along the earth, and become sullied by the dust with which they blend; or, in endeavoring to elevate themselves for a season, only exhibit their intrinsic weakness, and become the sport of every breeze that passes over them. This has so far been his career; his aspirations are noble, but they evaporate in words; his strength exists only in his egotism; he is like one of those incongruous pictures which we sometimes look upon without well knowing whether to sigh or to sneer; a grand outline marred by the minor touches. Had he not been a weak man he might have been a great one."

For a few moments she was silent; and it was with a smile of haughty bitterness that she at length rose from her seat and resumed:

"I have now proved to you that my study in his case has been a profound one; that I shall do nothing rashly; but that I have even formed projects for the future which are at least partially unselfish. Now, however, when the moment for action has arrived, I must think only of myself. I have already suffered enough, more than enough; I will be no willing victim a second time. Yes," she added, with flashing eyes and clenched hands, as she paced the apartment passionately; "I have lived to listen to words which told me but too plainly the height from which I had fallen—to find myself considered merely as a coveted toy, where I had once been an idol—to see myself compelled to repay insult only by a smile—and shall I not be revenged for this? shall I tamely brook the degradation from which I may free myself by my own efforts? Little do they understand the nature of Sybil Delamere who believe it possible. As the wife of Frederic Mortimer I may defy even *him;* and I will defy him, aye, to the very death!"

"Sybil—my dear Sybil—what mean you?"

"You would know my meaning? Listen, then. Recall the past; live over again for an instant the last few years; remember how *he* loved me—how he pursued me—how he flung everything at my feet, and asked me only to stoop and gather up the offering.—You cannot have forgotten all this, for not only every memory, but every fact of our present existence is linked with those days—and now learn that it was to renew his suit that he was lately here——"

Mrs. Delamere leaned forward in her seat with eager eyes and parted lips.

"Yes," continued Sybil in a hoarse whisper, as she paused before her mother; "Yes—he sought me once again; but not as formerly—not with sighs, and protestations, and entreaties; but boldly, lightly, and unblushingly; with the eye of a conqueror, and the lip of a libertine——"

What more she might have added is uncertain, for as the last words escaped her quivering lips, Mrs. Delamere fell back insensible upon her cushions.

For a few moments Sybil remained looking upon her unhappy mother, without making one effort to restore her to consciousness; although the flush faded from her cheek and her clenched fingers relaxed. The storm of passion which had shook her spirits to the very centre, had, for a time, crushed even her powerful energies, and rendered her reckless of everything around her. Ere long, however, she recovered her composure, and without summoning other assistance, at length succeeded in restoring the scattered senses of the wretched Mrs Delamere; which she had no sooner effected than she asked bitterly—

"And now, Madam, have I not silenced all your scruples, and satisfied all your objections? Would you still ask me to trifle with my last prospect of social redemption? Have I not sufficiently expiated the past to have some claim upon the future? And shall I not more honorably fulfil my destiny as the wife of Mortimer, than as the mistress of Sir Horace Trevor?"

Mrs. Delamere swept her trembling hand across her eyes; they were hot and tearless; she had previously suffered deeply for years, but the iron which had hitherto only seared her spirit, had now entered her soul. She made no reply to the harsh questionings of Sybil, nor did there need any; for, regardless of their reception, Miss Delamere had no sooner given them utterance than she turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Now *do* listen for five minutes, Ernest, while I tell you all about Miss Mortimer," said Mary Armstrong, as with one arm about the neck of her brother, she bent over him while he ran his eye along a list of names, spread on a table before him.

"I know all that you have to say," he replied with an impatient smile; "she is very pretty, and very bashful, and blushes beautifully; and is quite delighted by the condescension of the ladies from the Great House."

Mary laughed. "You have made a wretched guess. Pretty you knew she was, for you had seen her at church; but as for the rest—"

"Richards," murmured the young man, still intent upon his task; "We are sure of him, I think; he is a tenant of our own. Richards, twenty-six."

"She is not a whit less at her ease with strangers than Eleanor or myself."

"Indeed! all the worse, perhaps, both for her and her friends. Thompson—oh, aye, Thompson of River farm—doubtful, I fear; for I know that he is as obstinate as a mule, and as wrong-headed as—"

"Ernest, you are too bad. I have a great mind not to say another word."

"You could not oblige me more, for you see that I am fully occupied already. But, by the bye, what about the old woman's interest?"

"You must canvass her yourself, for we were by far too well engaged even to think of this horrid election."

"How very provoking!" exclaimed young Armstrong; "But you women are always useless in matters of importance. Why did you not take me with you? While you were turning the head of the niece I should have managed the aunt. Collins?—was it not Collins, Mary, who had an execution in his house last winter?"

"To be sure it was. Do you not remember that papa became security for the debt, and how grateful he has been ever since?"

"I thought so; then I may fairly calculate upon him. Collins, twenty-seven."

"Well," said Mary desperately; "as I see that you are determined not to listen, I shall tell you no more about Miss Mortimer, but leave you to form your own opinions to-morrow."

"And why to-morrow?"

"Because she dines here."

"Dines here? Impossible."

"Impossible as you may think it, she does dine here; and, moreover, the carriage is to be sent for her."

"Then we are sure of her interest."

"I was not aware that she had any."

"But her aunt must, as a householder, and the dinner to-morrow secures it."

"Well, upon my honor, Ernest," said Miss Armstrong; "you are a perfect recreant. Why, even papa himself would be more gallant. But I warn you not to calculate without your host, for Miss Warrington appears to me to be a very impracticable old lady."

"Oh, never fear; I'll exert myself, and flirt with the niece."

"I am not quite sure that you will find that task so easy as you appear to imagine."

"Very likely; but in a good cause I am prepared to go great lengths; and as she is really very pretty, I'll sacrifice myself without a murmur."

"Papa will be infinitely indebted to you."

"Of course he will," replied the young man, extending his arms in a long yawn, which he terminated by drawing his sister close to him, and pressing his lips upon her cheeks; "and to tell you the truth, Moggy, I shall not be altogether sorry to compensate myself by a little fun for this weary work; for, after all, it *is* weary work; and were it not that I expect Somerville down in a day or two to back me, I should almost feel inclined to give it up in disgust; but Somerville is a famous fellow, and an old hand at canvassing."

Mary made no reply, but a vivid blush stole over her cheek and brow.

"Well, and now, as it appears that I must hear all you have to say about the little cottage-maiden," he pursued after an instant's silence; "pray favor me with it at once. You found her very pretty, very gentle, and very captivating, it seems."

"We found her what we certainly did not venture to anticipate," replied Mary, rallying

from her momentary confusion, "a finished gentlewoman."

"A Bletchley gentlewoman, of course?"

"You are too provoking, Ernest, and I shall leave you to make your own discoveries."

"Thank you; but just now I have not time to venture upon any; so shall content myself should the fair Sylvia prove as lovely across a dinner table as she does at a distance, with cautioning Somerville, who has a strong dash of sentiment in his composition, not to fall in love with her. He is fond of 'Love in a cottage,' and 'Love among the roses,' and all that sort of thing; and should he become thralled by her bright eyes, he will reserve all the smiles and flatteries which he has promised to diffuse liberally among the electors' wives and daughters, for her especial benefit, an arrangement, Miss Moggy, which would materially affect the success of our canvass."

"And you expect him in a day or two, did you not say?" Mary ventured to inquire, as she turned aside, and affected to be busily engaged in removing some withered leaves from a plant which occupied a *jardinière* near her.

"In a day or two," acquiesced her brother, with another formidable yawn; "and I heartily wish that he were here now. Do you know, Moggy, I had no idea that the Armstrongs were so unpopular about Bletchley."

"I am sure they ought not to be so," replied Mary, somewhat indignantly; "both papa and mamma are a sort of Providence to the poor; there is no distress which they do not seek to alleviate; no sorrow which they not soothe. If I were papa, I would not even seek to stand for their stupid borough."

"Come, come; we must have no treason in the camp," laughed Ernest; "remember that you ladies are our light troops, and that we expect good service from you all; aye, even Miss—— what did you call your new wonder?—even she must be made useful."

"What nonsense you talk, Ernest; one would imagine that we had picked up some poor little peasant, toward whom no ceremony need be observed."

"Ceremony! why surely you do not mean to imply that much of that frigid commodity will be required in the future acquaintanceship with which your newfangled fancy has provided the family!" said young Armstrong with a somewhat contemptuous smile, which so irritated Mary, that she turned on her heel and left him, declaring, as she reached the door, that she would no longer encourage such ill-timed and misplaced impertinence.

"Why, you cannot surely be angry in earnest, my pretty Moggy?" he expostulated.

"Not angry, but sincerely pained," she said steadily. "Is it because Miss Mortimer is poor, Ernest, that you should thus persist in a tone unsuited to the occasion? However, I have already wasted more time with you than I can well spare, and I will now leave you to your more congenial employment."

"Not with a frown at all events. Give me at least a kiss before you go."

Mary was not inexorable; she lingered for an instant, and as her brother whispered in her ear, "To oblige you I will even promise to fall in love with your *protegée*;" she could no longer retain her displeasure, but shaking her finger at him, said laughingly, "Always in extremes as usual; I have an equal horror of Scylla and Charybdis, so if you seek to please me, you will steer a middle course.

And with these words she disappeared; while young Armstrong, returning to his seat, soon lost all memory of the discussion over the important list of voters which he had been previously studying.

"Well, well, we must make the best of it now," said Mr. Armstrong, when informed by his wife of the invitation which she had given to Miss Mortimer; "but you have exceeded your commission, Charlotte. You know how carefully I have eschewed the petty gentry of the neighborhood, and now you have saddled me with a woman from Bletchley."

"She is so pretty," expostulated his good natured helpmate.

"So much the worse; these pretty underbred young women play the deuce in a family, especially where there is a grown-up son. Besides, a month hence we shall have the house full of company, and if you are to be consistent, you will be compelled to introduce this girl to people who will be as little pleased with her as she will be at her ease with them; by which means you will succeed in annoying all parties."

"But the girls like her so much—"

"Of course they do; young folks are always delighted with a fresh face, and have no objection to a foil," said the squire; "but I detest the principle. It is at once unfair and unhandsome."

"I'm sure, if I had thought that you would be angry—"

"I am not angry, Charlotte, but I like every thing in its proper place, and this poor girl will be out of place here."

"Somehow or other," said Mrs. Armstrong, who was not fastidious in her familiar phraseology, "Somehow or other, my dear, I think you'll change your mind when you see her."

"I hope I may," was the abrupt retort.

And he did so.

On the morrow, when Gertrude entered her aunt's little parlor, simply attired in a plain close dress of black crape, with a single white camelia half hidden among her luxuriant hair, even the obtuse Miss Warrington could not help thinking that she had seldom seen anything more beautiful than the gentle orphan; who, with eyes sparkling with anticipated happiness, and cheeks slightly flushed, appeared only anxious to conceal from her protectress the extent of her new-found joy.

"Why, you look like an angel, Gertrude!" she exclaimed involuntarily.

"May I always so look in your eyes," was the meek reply; but at that moment no thought of vanity mingled with the heartfelt and innocent delight of the fair girl. It was not that she had forgotten the past; it was not that she had ceased to mourn in secret over her buried hopes; for alas! the memory of suffering is like the poisoned bale, which when opened and examined, spreads pestilence over all with which it

comes into contact; but she was young, and she had been living for months in an ungenial and chilling atmosphere.

Grateful, deeply grateful, as she felt to the aged relative who had received and cherished her, they had scarcely a thought or an impulse in common; differently educated and differently constituted, they had neither a taste nor a habit which could assimilate; and the unhappy girl was hourly pained by the conviction that neither time nor circumstances could enforce a greater congeniality between them.

Naturally open-hearted and confiding, Gertrude was compelled to exercise a constant restraint over herself: for she had once discovered that her nature could never elicit any sympathy from that of her aunt. Even her advantages of education and refinement, instead of proving a source of consolation, were, in her peculiar position an aggravation of suffering, and a cause of trial. Like all persons who have outlived their particular epoch, and who are unable to comprehend the progress which has taken place about them, Miss Warrington looked with suspicion and distrust upon all that she was unable to bring down to the level of her own understanding, and became irritated by every appearance of superiority; while destitute, save in rare moments of excitement, of both tact and sensibility, she frequently wounded where she believed herself to be simply uttering the merest common-places; and withered the young and sensitive nature of her niece by an antiquated display of worldly wisdom, as mistaken in its expression as it was repugnant in its principle.

No wonder, then, that Gertrude looked forward with her first feeling of recovered happiness to any congenial companionship. Had she been less nobly endowed by nature, or less pure and lofty in mind, she might have recurred to the chilling inference of her aunt, that she was about to be looked upon as "the poor orphan whom Mrs. Armstrong and her daughters had taken under their protection," but no such suspicion darkened the spirit of the orphan. She had been accustomed from her girlhood to meet the world upon equal terms; and she was unconscious that it could ever be otherwise, or that her altered fortunes might affect the feelings of others towards her. Had she, indeed, learned this bitter lesson, it might have dimmed her eye and paled her cheek, to reflect that she was about to brave such an ordeal; but strong in her honest single-heatedness, no misgiving came to mingle with her delight; and as she alighted at the door of the Manor-house, she thought only of the kindly words and smiles with which she had been bidden there.

When she reached the stately drawing-room, into which she was ushered by a venerable, gray-headed servant, she found it tenanted only by Mrs. Armstrong; whose greeting, smiling and courteous as it was, was still somewhat constrained. She was trembling, poor woman! lest her lord should not like Miss Mortimer so well as she herself did, and was consequently afraid of making too much progress in their acquaintance.

But, although the conversation languished, Gertrude found ample amusement in admiring the fine oak-pannelling of the spacious apartment, with its delicate carvings and grim old family portraits. To her such a room was fifty-fold more attractive than any modern saloon, tricked out with the myriad costly baubles which tell no tale of the past; and her bright eye wandered hither and thither, from the steel-clad cavalier to the wigged and frowning judge; and from the prim and powdered dowager to the bland and graceful maiden, undisguised even by the mass of hair and plenitude of petticoat which half concealed her age; unconscious that her hostess was ill-at-ease, and anxious only to find herself once more in the society of the two amiable girls who had penetrated like sunbeams into her dreary home.

She was standing, wrapped in admiration of a fine full-length, by Reynolds, of the late proprietor of the estate, upon which the last ruddy tints of the setting sun were lingering in a blaze of glory, when the door suddenly opened; and, as she turned with a throbbing heart to receive, as she believed, the greeting of her young friends, she found herself confronted by a slight and handsome man, whose extreme likeness to the portrait by which she had been attracted, caused her inadvertently to start; nor was she singular in her emotion, for the surprise exhibited by the intruder as his eye met hers, was equally apparent.

In the next moment, however, he advanced; and his bow was at once respectful and courteous, as Mrs. Armstrong exclaimed in a tone of undisguised relief, "Oh, I am so very glad that you are come, Ernest, for the girls are sadly late to-day! Miss Mortimer, my dear, Mr. Ernest Armstrong, my son."

Gertrude curtseyed, and resumed her seat while the young man, who had promised to sacrifice himself by flirting with the cottage-maiden in order to secure her aunt's interest for his father, was evidently at some loss how to commence his undertaking. He had, indeed, previously seen her more than once, but never as he saw her then; her graceful and delicate figure revealed in all its symmetry by the soft drapery of her transparent dress; her fair brow crowned with a diadem of sunny hair; and her whole appearance indicating the elegance and refinement which are attainable only by the well-born and the well-bred.

There is a description of beauty which speaks only to the senses; and which, pleasant as it may be to look upon, creates no diffidence in the spectator; and such was the beauty which Ernest Armstrong had prepared himself to meet, from the few and imperfect glimpses which he had occasionally obtained of Miss Mortimer. He had anticipated, also, the blush and flutter of an inexperienced girl suddenly launched into a sphere of society unsuited to her habits; and he was comparatively amazed to find himself in the presence of a beautiful and high-bred woman, at once modest and self-possessed.

One glance sufficed to show him all this; while every word she uttered only increased his admiration. The sunniness of her smile, the softened brilliancy of her speaking eyes, the varied expression of her lovely and animated

countenance, and the rare and beaming charm of intellect which diffused a new beauty over what was already beautiful, together with those transient shades of melancholy which her early trials had rendered a portion of her nature; all combined to bewilder his imagination and to fascinate his feelings. His mother had, indeed, found a diamond in the desert.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Armstrong, encouraged by the evident pleasure of her son, resumed her usual composure. Where Ernest, with all his fastidiousness about women, took little pains to conceal his admiration, she could no longer doubt that his father would be equally satisfied that her discrimination for once had not been at fault. Perhaps she might have been less satisfied with her own generalship could she have known, that already, although half-an-hour had not elapsed since the introduction, her son was secretly lamenting the unlucky chance which brought Henry Somerville, the most popular man in London, to the Manor-house, before he had secured the claim of previous acquaintanceship with the beautiful young stranger. And never would Ernest Armstrong himself have so heartily rejoiced to learn that Henry Somerville was already engrossed with a passion for his sister Mary, as he would have done could it have been whispered into his ear at that moment.

Unconscious of the affect she had produced, and wholly absorbed by the happiness of once more finding herself in congenial society, the heart of Gertrude beat calmly, and a bland smile played about her lip. The sisters, on their entrance, welcomed her with a warmth which even satisfied Ernest; and although the old gentleman at first met her with a cold bow, and a grave courtesy which was almost chilling, his brow soon relaxed; and as he led her to the dining-room, his eye rested upon her beaming face a moment longer than it need have done.

"Have you yet commenced your flirtation with the pretty villager?" asked Mary maliciously, as she followed in the wake of her mother, who had taken the arm of Mr. Somerville, leaving her daughters to the escort of their brother.

She was answered only by an impatient "Pshaw!"

"Remember that her aunt must have some interest in the borough," followed up Eleanor gaily; but Ernest made no retort.

"Do you really not admire her?" asked Mary anxiously.

"Do we admire the angels!" demanded her brother in reply; "I can scarcely believe her to be human."

"My *dear* Ernest!" expostulated both the girls somewhat alarmed, "what *can* you mean?"

"To 'fool you to the top of your bent,' what else?" said the young man, making a violent effort to restrain himself. "Do you not know that both my head and heart are now too fully occupied by votes and voters, to have much attention to spare, even to so pretty a girl as your village divinity?"

Reassured by this reply, the sisters seated themselves at table; Mary, in quiet gladness, beside the brilliant Somerville, and Eleanor near her new friend. The meal passed in unusual cheerfulness, for Mrs. Armstrong was silently congratulating herself upon the evident satisfaction of her husband; while the Squire himself, startled out of his ordinary exclusiveness by the beauty and elegance of his fair guest, and gratified by the arrival of his son's friend to share the fatigue of the approaching canvass, was full of jest and merriment.

The spirits of Gertrude rose under the influence of so genial an atmosphere; and the winning sweetness of her manner, combined with the cultivation of her mind, won upon all around her, although by no means in an equal degree; for, long before the evening came to a close, Ernest Armstrong was what is commonly called "over head and ears in love" with the beautiful orphan.

Although accustomed from his boyhood to frequent the society of his sister's friends, among whom were many richly endowed alike by nature and by fortune, Ernest had never, hitherto, evinced so decided a preference for any one of the fair girls with whom he was brought into contact, as to justify his father in the fondly-indulged hope that he would contract an early marriage; nor had even the raillery of the old gentleman upon a coldness which he declared to imply a degeneracy unpardonable in an Armstrong, produced the slightest effect.

Happy in his family, and devotedly attached to his sisters, Ernest enjoyed the passing hour without attaching any importance to the smiles which were lavished upon him on all sides; returning to the domestic circle, after every temporary absence, with all the cheerfulness and buoyancy that he had quitted it.

Under these circumstances, however he might regret the apparent insensibility of his son, Mr. Armstrong, nevertheless, consoled himself by the belief that the natural ambition of Ernest would effectually protect him from all danger of forming an unequal, or what he would have designated, an unworthy marriage; and was fain to be satisfied to see year after year go by without any change in the young man's pursuits or wishes. Assuredly the idea was not likely to cross his mind that the village of Bletchley was destined to produce the fair one who was fated to teach the hitherto insensible heart of his heir that, like those of other men, it was formed of "penetrable stuff," and he consequently saw no danger in the bright eyes and ruby lips which had, nevertheless, so soon succeeded in thawing the aristocratic ice of his own nature; for, with all his home-joviality, Squire Armstrong was deeply imbued with that ancestorial vanity so common among our old English families; and looked upon his genealogical tree as the noblest possession of his race.

And yet, whether it were the novel manner of Gertrude's introduction to his domestic circle, or that she, in truth, possessed all the personal and moral attributes which were calculated to thrall his fancy, it is certain that she almost instantly effected an extraordinary revolution in the sentiments of Ernest Armstrong. For the first time in his life, he became aware that even his affection for his family, and that yearning after some as yet unexplained good for which he

d panted from his boyhood up, did not suffice t satisfy all the cravings of his heart, in which eper and softer feelings were nestled, which d never, hitherto, been awakened from their rt. Unconsciously, even to himself, he had obably formed a *beau idéal* of female perfection hich all his previous experience had failed to alize, and which was now suddenly placed fore him; for it is certain that every mind entes its own fabric of brightness; every imagination combines its own vision of beauty; and ery taste establishes its own rule of harmony. he world is full of loveliness, but that loveliness ects different persons in a different degree; a cumstance whence must be deduced the fact, at scant justice is frequently rendered to the ractions of some very handsome women, while se of others excite the greatest enthusiasm in e same individuals.

Thus it chanced that in Gertrude Mortimer re combined all the peculiar excellences hich were essential to the taste of Ernest Armong; who, affectionate rather than impassionc could see no cham in a beauty devoid of ttleness and repose, and who was a stranger that exaggeration of sentiment, and impetuosit of feeling, which are as brief as they are demonstrative. His temperament partook rather the genial warmth of the sunshine which lgers were it glows, than of the fiery lava hich consumes all over which it passes, only to lurate into stone as it flows onward. His ttes, save such as led him to covet advancent and the world's plaudits, were simple and rined, and there was a depth in all his feelings hich, although difficult to fathom, rendered m equally beyond the power of common ents to ruffle or disturb.

To love, with such a man, was to love earnestland well, and the fact that he had attained l four-and-twentieth year without even adtting to himself a preference, far less a passion, as a sufficient proof that he was not to be misl merely by an excited fancy. Accustomed to alyze and to reflect, he readily detected the se-seeming of the designing, and the artificial; vile he was keenly alive to all that was sincere, l great, and beautiful. Mature in mind, beuse alike self-governed and persevering, he uld appreciate the mental and moral qualities others, at the same time that he possessed in uself every necessary attribute to grace and dden domestic life.

Such was the heart which Gertrude was destted, unconsciously, to win,—poor Gertrude, o had been slighted and abandoned for a recious and worldly coquette by one who ould have known and prized her better; but l human beings always pursue the fitting path, ts world would become a paradise, and we ould be apt to forget that there is a brighter d beyond.

Little dreaming that the happy evening which e had spent in the midst of smiles, and flowers, l music, was to form an era in the existence c one at least of the party, she consequently ok leave of her friends at the Hall with a ddened and a grateful heart, over which no gle shadow reflected to mar its joy, and on her r neward drive poured out her spirit in thankfulness to Him who had raised for her so bright an oasis in the desert of her blighted existence, and looked with renewed cheerfulness upon a future from which she had hitherto shrunk with a feeling of desolation and anxiety.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The time, meanwhile, was passing very differently with Sybil. Like Gertrude, she had been cradled in luxury, and, like her, she had experienced a reverse; but there ended the parallel. The trials of the orphan had been totally independent of her own actions, while the brilliant Miss Delamere had recklessly rushed upon her fate. Born in the midst of affluence, she had been the child of care and affection, and happiness appeared to be her birthright. The passionate caresses of a weak and indulgent mother, and the ill-judged admiration of a short-sighted father, proud of her beauty, and lavish of his praises, had early taught her the secret of her childish importance, while the uncalculating expenditure by which she was surrounded, imbued her with a selfishness that, even in her girlhood, became the mainspring of all her actions.

To desire was, in her case, to possess, and to possess was ere long scarcely to enjoy. Unconscious, or, still worse, careless of the wants of others, poverty was to her an empty sound; and human suffering the invention of romance, or the heirloom of a race distinct from that to which she appertained, and consequently, beyond the pale of her sympathy. Her eyes were never pained by the dismal spectacle of penury, nor her ears importuned by the wailings of the unfortunate. Her sky was all sunshine, and she never paused to ask herself over whose devoted head the clouds had lowered which were swept from her own horizon. If she ever wept, the tears were those of a susceptible vanity, so easily wounded as to be seldom beyond the reach of the most puny weapon; for she had no other sorrows, and as her whole existence was concentrated in self, so she had no grief to give to the woes of those less richly dowered.

In one respect, however, this self-adulation proved her friend; for anxious to shine in that world which was the worshipped idol in her luxurious home, she devoted herself with the pertinacious earnestness which formed a strong feature in her character, to the various studies which were rather suggested than urged upon her. In every showy accomplishment she soon excelled; and, overwhelmed by the delighted encomiums of her exulting parents, she learned to appreciate the increase of attraction which she thus secured, and turned eagerly to newer and more difficult attainments.

These she mastered in their turn, to a degree which rendered her what she had always panted to become—the envy of her own sex, and the admiration of the other; and the petted, overdressed, and jewel-laden plaything of the drawing room; the wilful, capricious, and haughty idol of the nursery; and the pains-taking and persevering tenant of the schoolroom, found her-

self at eighteen "the observed of all observers." Something was, however, still wanting, and for the first time in her life she found *that* something beyond her reach, and discovered that she was not all-powerful. Surrounded by the costly appearances of wealth, the reputed heiress of thousands, and the belle of every ball-room; gifted alike by nature and by fortune, Sybil Delamere aspired to exalted rank, and deemed no station too lofty for her merits. In vain did suitors present themselves, to whom even her anxious and doting father could advance no plausible objection; their addresses were repulsed with scorn; and the haughty beauty at the age of five-and-twenty found herself still Miss Delamere.

It is true that she had nobles in her train, but among these some demurred to her pedigree; others to her undisguised coquetry; and others again, (the weakest of the tribe,) to her somewhat ostentatiously displayed acquirements. She was a delightful companion in a ball-room, a charming acquaintance in a crowd, but none among them wooed her as a wife. They enshrined their idol with the most delicate flattery, but they left her upon her self-erected pedestal.

Nevertheless she untiringly pursued her object. Wealth could not win her, for she was unconscious of its value, never having felt its want; of superior talent she was jealous; for in her inborn selfishness she loved it only as a means, not as an end; while to the gentler and purer charm of genuine affection she was altogether insensible—she sufficed to herself. Every action, every word was measured, and adopted to the one engrossing aim of her life—a marriage of vanity, and nothing appeared impossible to her imperious and ambitious spirit.

Handsome, witty, and self-possessed; as she disgusted one set of admirers by her insolent assumption, she saw new lovers ever ready to chain themselves to the wheels of her chariot, and at length, among the crowd of her admirers she numbered Sir Horace Trevor, a baronet of ancient family and large estate, who, captivated by her beauty, and the admiration of which she was everywhere the object, laid himself and his fortunes at her feet after the brief acquaintance of a month.

Assuredly such a marriage was far from realising the long-indulged visions of the spoiled beauty; but as he whispered his hopes into her ear during the pause of a quadrille, she suddenly remembered that her youth was ebbing from her, and that she had attained the sober age of twenty-five.

What marvel, then, that she answered by a smile?

A few months subsequent to this engagement, Sybil lost her father; nor was it until upon his death-bed he revealed the fact, that she became aware of the hollowness of her position. She had, indeed, long been standing upon a sand-heap, which was rapidly crumbling away beneath her.

The principal of a mercantile house which had for several generations ranked as one of the most wealthy in the country, Mr. Delamere had sacrificed to ostentation and self-indulgence so large a portion of his capital, that he found it necessary to enter into extensive and hazardous speculations in order to retrieve his falle fortunes; but, naturally sanguine, reckless, an indolent, he had by such means only increase his difficulties, and now, in his last hour when he should have put from him all though of the world, and the world's vanities, h found himself compelled to humble his proud spirit before the wife whom he had ruine and the daughter whom he had deceived; an to confess that he had for years existed upo the credit so long and so laboriously create by his predecessors, while he was, in fact, a most a beggar.

He told his tale, and died.

With what feelings it was heard by his ap palled and helpless wife, it were idle to attemp even for an instant, to describe; while upo Sybil it produced no more powerful effect tha surprise. To her the idea of approachin poverty could only convey a mass of vague an undefined images; she attached no tangibl meaning to the word. Her father had de clared, while the large tears fell slow and col upon his wasted cheeks, that thenceforwar there remained nothing to his family save th strictest necessaries of existence; and Syb with a smile, had bidden him cease to griev for this at least, as they should be rich enoug with these.

And if the dying man, even amid his blin and doting adoration of his brilliant child marvelled despite himself, for a moment at th cheerful self-abnegation of one who had neve hitherto displayed so holy and beautiful forgetfulness of her own interests, the mistake was happy one, and served to smooth his downward passage to the tomb; for even he, in such a hour, ceased to remember that his prized an pampered Sybil numbered among the necessaries of every-day life equipages, and jewels and piled carpets, and silken draperies, an all the gaud and glitter of fashionable existence.

But even had Miss Delamere been enabled t form a more correct estimate of the essential of life, she would still have regarded with per fect philosophy the change which had s suddenly come over her fortunes; for she re membered her engagement, and consequentl felt herself free from all apprehensions for th future. Sir Horace Trevor was sufficiently wealthy to render such a circumstance unim portant, and she never reflected for an instan that the ruin of her father could affect her ow prospects.

Nor was her trust in her lover ill-founded The baronet, of course, learned, with the res of the world, that the apparently gigantic wealth of Mr. Delamere had been a mer splendid fallacy; but he was too thoroughly subjugated by the fascinations of his affianced bride to see in such a circumstance any reason for liberating himself from his engagement and thus, although when the affairs of th deceased merchant were wound up, amid which the personal debts of Sybil herself furnished no inconsiderable item, and that it was ascertained how very limited a sum remained fo the maintenance of the widow and her daughter

rither the vain and weak mother, or her child, onsidered it necessary to make the retrench- nts which their altered means suggested; rely satisfying themselves with such as were forced upon them by their mourning state, d retiring to one of the country residences Mr. Delamere, which, by the zeal and self- votion of some of his tried friends, had len saved from the wreck of his property, d there surrounding themselves with the luries and comforts to which they had been ustomed.

Under these circumstances it is scarcely neces- ry to explain that the capital, which, pru- ntly administered, might at least have insured the survivors a modest existence, became pidly diminished in amount; but still no at- mpt was made by either to defer the impend- g ruin.

Mrs. Delamere, who had throughout her ole life, been accustomed to depend on others, andoned the care of her future career en- rely to Sybil; who, strong in her prospect of on becoming Lady Trevor, scorned to admit e possibility of any change in their mode of e.

Had not their equipages been reduced from ree to one?—their establishment from half- dozen lounging and powdered footmen, to a itary male attendant? Had they not with- awn from the gay world into an almost total itude?

To the supine and sorrowing mother, such guments were unanswerable, and with a total norance of business she rapidly satisfied rself that it was impossible to accomplish re; and as she glanced from her crape and mbazine to the glowing countenance of Tre- r, and the evident composure of Sybil, who d voluntarily assumed all the responsibility their position, she ceased to trouble herself on the subject.

Thus the year of mourning passed by; and th it passed away also an important portion the means upon which they had now to de- nd for their subsistence; but this considera- n appeared in no degree to influence the oceedings or feelings of Miss Delamere. As e period arrived at which the widow could ce more appear with propriety in the world, e took active measures to dispose of the etty villa, which was their last home of rly days, and having succeeded in securing eligible purchaser, completed the sale under r mother's sanction; and forthwith busied rself in appropriating the proceeds to the rangement of a hired house in an unexcep- nable part of town, whence her marriage ight take place without derogation, either to r own consequence, or to that of her bride- oom.

Wearied of the monotony of the country, d glad of any change which promised amuse- ent, Mrs. Delamere looked on in silence; and hen she once more found herself in the midst accustomed scenes and familiar faces, she lt no inclination to question the prudence by hich her individual comfort was thus en- nced, while Sybil herself, delighted to be ce more restored to congenial habits of dissi- pation, and to become anew an object of adula- tion and envy, closed her ears alike against the warnings of friends and the sneers of enemies, and plunged recklessly into the torrent of fashion, which received her upon its surface, as it is ever willing to do every brilliant bubble, so long as it is able to support itself by its own buoyancy, content to take its revenge upon its hollow mockery when it bursts.

Sir Horace Trevor was assiduous in his hom- age; somewhat weak, and undisguisedly vain, the lounger of fashion, who was about to sacri- fice what the *roués* of society call their freedom to the charms and fascinations of Miss Delamere, was too proud of the admiration elicited by his affianced wife to find any time, or to feel any inclination to censure the wanton improvidence which was necessiated by its indulgence. Per- haps he might have desired to see the accom- plishments and attractions of the beautiful co- quette more immediately exerted for his own gratifications; but be this as it might, it is at least certain that none could have discovered such a feeling in his manner; and that, although the name of the brilliant Miss Delamere was oc- casionally coupled at the clubs, or on the mall, with those of more than one of his most familiar friends, (and that not always with the degree of respect and caution due to a betrothed wife,) he was still to be seen at her side, alike in pub- lic, and in the luxurious semi-solitude of her home, as attentive, as devoted, and as absorbed as ever.

The season was nearly at an end. London began to yawn from its suburbs to its very cen- tre. That minute portion of its denizens who insolently call themselves "the world," were hurrying either to their estates in the country, or to display their wearied glories in foreign courts; the matches which had been arranged during the turmoil of the last three months, were publicly heralded in the "Post," for the edifica- tion of the vulgar, and were already engrossing the inventive faculties of milliners, and employ- ing the technical talents of the law. It had been, as was generally allowed by the privileged, an "unusually good spring;" tradesmen were calculating their gains, and mothers smiling over their triumphs. There had been no important deaths "to plunge half a dozen noble families into mourning," and people had nothing left to do but to rush abroad and become voluntary exiles for the remainder of the year, or to stay at home and "dullify."

Sybil, like the rest, was somewhat worn and somewhat withered by the ceaseless race of dis- sipation; but this was not all. Among the "fashionable departures for the continent" figured the name of Sir Horace Trevor—Trevor, the ob- sequious suitor, and the affianced bridegroom— Trevor, the bewailed of the clubs, and the mourned of the dandies—Trevor, the quasi-ben- edict! What could this mean?

Suffice it that he was gone, and that there was joy and gratulation at the hearth of his venerable father. It was evident that, be the cause what it might,—and the secret had been, for a wonder, marvellously kept—his marriage was at an end.

In another month, Mrs. Delamere and her

daughter left town, and in three more they were domesticated at The Grange.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The little French clock in the morning-room of Miss Delamere had chimed twelve, and was still ringing out the simple and pretty air of *Charmante Gabrielle*, in that clear and almost unearthly harmony which seems as if created by the movements of a fairy dancing over a peal of silver bells; but its music had evidently no charm for the ear of its brillant mistress. Attired with a care and coquetry which betrayed her determination to enhance to the utmost the value of her personal attractions, there was, nevertheless, a cloud upon the brow of Sybil which accorded ill with the festal character of her dress. And well might it linger there, for she felt that the next few hours must decide her fate.

As yet Mortimer had not disappointed even the slightest of her anticipations. She had played her game skilfully and boldly, and the stake was almost won. But there was still a difficulty to overcome; and even she, self-sufficing as she was, shrank before it. She had yet to tell him that she was a beggar! True, she had smiled when her mother alluded to this necessity, and declared the matter unimportant; but when she compelled herself to look closely, and to remember the circumstances under which they had originally met, and the false seeming by which she had maintained her brilliant position, her heart almost failed. Had she not already found it necessary to urge forward her marriage by an expedient which even she herself blushed to recall, although she would not have hesitated to repeat it had there existed need for such a measure? And had she not ventured upon this expedient from a knowledge of the susceptibility of her suitor in all that regarded his honor? Here at least she had possessed a strong conviction to work upon; but in her present extremity she was less assured. Of the fervent and almost blind affection of Mortimer she could not entertain a doubt; but she was nevertheless aware that he had wooed and won her under the impression that she was as wealthy as himself; and she could not foresee the effect likely to be produced upon his mind by the discovery of so vital an error.

For the first time in her life she felt that she had overacted her part, and voluntarily plunged into a sea of difficulties. It was, however, too late for repentance, for she could no longer conceal the real circumstances of her position.—Mortimer had already spoken of the necessity of summoning a professional friend for the purpose of preparing the marriage-settlements; and she was well aware that a lawyer was not to be blinded like a lover. Moreover, her pecuniary resources were almost exhausted; she had no longer an instant to lose: all the splendor and indulgence by which she had surrounded herself were about to vanish like a dream; and she bitterly felt that youth and hope would alike pass away with them. All further attempt to disguise her actual situation was impracticable and even fertile as she had proved herself hithe to in expedients, she was compelled to admit th fact. Nothing was left, therefore, save to avo her utter want of fortune to Mr. Mortimer, an to trust to fate and her own fascinations to a complish a new triumph.

Upon one point alone she was decided—sh must not—she dared not—tell him the truth she knew too well that his rigid sense of righ would revolt against the persevering falsehoo and dishonesty of her past conduct; some fabl must be invented to amuse him, and to interes his sympathies in her behalf; he must not b suffered to suspect that he had been duped.

Such were the reflections of the female Ma chiavel, who sat surrounded with luxury, an herself the brightest object in that sunny sum mer-room, awaiting the advent of her suitor and well had she calculated her influence ove his mind. "Every thing by turns, and nothin long," the very "Cynthia of the minute," sh was aware that her strong hold on Mortime was her infinite variety, which amused hi imagination while it bewildered his judgment Tears had served her well upon a former occa sion, but then it was the fond and sensitiv woman shrinking from the first faint breath o blame, and tears were the natural and fittin concomitant of such a grief. Now, it was he pride, not her delicacy, which was in arms She must show him that she would rather resig even his love than her own self-respect. Il must find her with a dry eye and an apparentl settled purpose, however that purpose wa actually destined to be shaken by his expostu lations. But, confident as she was in he powers of dissumulation, she was yet terrified lest, by so utter a change in her worldly cir cumstances, those expostulations should be with held; and now, in her solitude, there was n acting in the terrible emotion which bathe her brow with chilling damps, and made he pulses throb.

A rapid step in the hall, and the hurrie opening of the door of her apartment, ere lon startled her into the renewed energy of purpose and as Mortimer approached her with joy beam ing in his eyes, she extended her hand, an struggled to smile a welcome.

The quick glance of affection was not, how ever, to be cheated by the compelled wreathin of that pale and trembling lip; and it was wit great alarm that Mortimer inquired into th cause of so violent an emotion.

"Alas, Frederic," replied Miss Delamere, s she averted her face, and breathed a sigh whic appeared to heave a weight of woe from he oppressed bosom; "No wonder that I ar wretched, when I am called upon to commun eate to you that which will, in all probability separate us for ever."

"What can you mean, Sybil?" was the anxiou retort of the bewildered Mortimer; "surel your anonymous persecutor has not dared agai to invade your peace? Speak, I entreat of you and leave me now at least, free to unmask th cowardly assassin, who is amusing his foul leis ure by undermining our happiness."

Sybil shook her head, and remained silent.

"If the law can reach him,"—pursued Mortimer indignantly.

"Fate, not malice, is our present enemy," said Miss Delamere with a second sigh. "There is no foe to combat, no adversary to overcome. I believed that all my trials were at last over; that all my visions were about to be realized; but I deceived myself. Strong in your affection, I had forgotten that chance and change are the governing principles of this life, and I have been suddenly awakened from my delusion. While I was dreaming in fancied security of a future of peace and love, insured by your affection, destiny was at work to falsify all my provisions. Perhaps I was not worthy of so much happiness; in any case the illusion is dispelled, like many by which it was preceded. I appear, and have long appeared, to live in a world of shadows. No sooner seek to grasp them than they elude my touch. You know not,—may you never know!—the trials which I have passed, gaily as I may seem to defy fate; but for this blow I confess that I was totally unprepared!"

"Sybil, you torture me!"

"For your sake and for my own, I will at once speak plainly," said Miss Delamere, while her fingers wandered, as if unconsciously, among the luxuriant hair of her listener, and parted the wavy curls from his hot and throbbing forehead. "Our contemplated union is at an end. We may, we *must* be, still dear to each other, Frederic; but we can be no more than friends. The property of my father was placed in the hands of trustees, one of whom has absconded, carrying with him all the funds upon which my father and myself were dependent for our support. The other was a mere cypher, from whom nothing can be recovered, nothing hoped. Like myself, he entrusted all to his colleague; and like ourselves, he is also a very heavy loser; but he has other resources—we have none. Utterly in his power, through the confidence of my misguided father, and the faith reposed in him by his co-trustee, his evasion is our utter ruin; and all this—the blight of two lives, and the wreck of one fabric of happiness such as the world has seldom ever dreamed of, has been conveyed to me on a single page—in a few formal lines of condolence and information. Of myself I dare not speak. It is only in my own heart that I am conscious of the amount of suffering which I am called upon singly to endure." And as she ceased speaking, the head of Sybil sank upon the shoulder of her lover, and he felt the shudder which passed over her whole frame.

"And is this all?" asked Mortimer, as he clasped her to his heart. "Is this the mighty and insurmountable obstacle which is to sever us? Surely Sybil, you wrong me by such a doubt, and you have never understood the nature of my love. Did you for a moment suspect that I valued you for your power of adding to my wealth, or for anything save your own dear self? How little do you yet understand a passion like mine! Learn to know me better; and to feel that I rather rejoice at this sudden reverse of fortune which makes you more entirely my own. Are you mourning over your loss of influence? Have I not enough for both of us? What have you lost? Will not our home be that of your mother, and am I not rich enough to maintain you in comfort and opulence to which you have been accustomed? Fie upon you, Sybil; you have never yet understood me. Now, indeed, we shall be everything to each other, you will be all my own; all your happiness will be in my keeping and believe me, I will prove worthy of the trust. Our mutual affection will never be endangered by a diversity of interests; but doubly united by affection and by marriage, we shall have but one heart and one soul. Oh, my beloved Sybil!" he added passionately; "this calamity alone was needed to show you all the extent of my attachment; and far from deprecating its occurrence, I welcome it as the blessed means of proving to you the sincerity of an affection which can end only with my life. Henceforward I shall remember that I won you when you were wealthy and independent, and when I could offer you no equivalent for the position which you occupied save a devoted heart. There will be no drawback to my happiness in the suspicion that you loved me for the paltry possessions which I inherited from my ancestors; while I shall feel with honest pride that I am the source of all your future enjoyments; and you cannot guess the luxury of such a conviction, while you, on your side, will now be equally assured that I loved you only for yourself, undazzled by the fictitious splendor in which you have hitherto moved, as in an atmosphere peculiarly your own. Say, dearest, is it not well worth while to lose something of the world's wealth to secure so proud a feeling?"

"But I am literally a beggar, Frederic; these empty gauds by which I am now surrounded, constitute my whole fortune, and my mother's."

"And we could have dispensed even with these, dear Sybil," replied Mortimer, as he strained her to his heart; "Such love as ours is independent of the vanities of society. Now, indeed, I feel that I have a worthy stake in the world; that I am no longer a mere unit in the countless crowd of my fellow-men, but a responsible and important member of society, with others dependent upon me for support and happiness.—You shall see how this conviction will operate upon my hitherto listless character; you shall learn how deeply I feel the holiness of my earthly mission; and you shall do me justice."

Was the renewed shudder which passed through the veins of Miss Delamere one of compunction, as she listened to this impassioned reply? Who shall say! She had prepared herself to exert all her powers of fascination, all her arts of coquetry; but the fervent honesty of purpose by which she had been met negatived all her plans. The victim was self-bound to the horns of the altar.

"Frederic," she at length murmured fondly; "I scarcely know how to thank you. *You*, indeed, then love me for myself. *You* are above the vicissitudes of fortune; and it is at last my happy fate to be really valued for my own sake. Oh, did you know, could you guess, how thoroughly you have, by this noble self-abnegation, redeemed all human nature in my eyes, I think that you would not regret the sacrifice which you are making, great as it is. You know not

what I have suffered since the arrival of that fatal letter. My reflections were horrible! Warned by the past, I did not dare to hope that even your affection—and believe me, when I declare that I nevertheless did justice to its sincerity—I did not dare to hope that it would withstand such an ordeal. You had sought me when I was surrounded by all the comforts, and by many of the luxuries of life; and I have been taught bitterly to feel how much a mere common character is influenced by such accessories. Existing in a paradise of hope, cradled in the most delightful visions, living only in the prospect of a future fraught with love and happiness, the terrible intelligence of ruin seemed at once to sever me from every thing which I had learned to prize, and doom me to life-long wretchedness. O, I have indeed felt within the last few hours how short a step it may be from joy to despair; and how, while we possess the one, we should prepare ourselves against the tortures of the other."

"My poor Sybil!"

"Yes, pity me, Frederic. pity me; for I have lived a year of torture since yesterday. But I will dwell upon this miserable subject no longer. You love me; and I have now nothing to regret, nothing to apprehend. You are my world; and although I shall give myself to you far otherwise than I hoped, I have no fear that your affection will be diminished by my misfortunes. Nay, I could almost forget the humiliation of my own pride to thank destiny for a blow which has elevated me in my own eyes, since it has failed to lessen me in yours."

"It is not in the power of fate to do so," replied Mortimer earnestly; "I have enough for both of us, and therefore let not the hateful consideration of money occupy your thoughts for an instant. It can be no obstacle to our happiness. I can restore to you the opulence which you have lost, and maintain you in the station to which you have beeen accustomed. You shall have nothing to regret. In your mother I shall find a new parent, and in yourself possess all that I can covet in this life. Do not, therefore, wrong my affection by grieving over an inevitable misfortune, but rather tell me when you will give me a legal right to repair it."

A thick and stifling sob rose to the throat of Miss Delamere. Even she, callous and selfish as she was, was nevertheless overcome for an instant, and felt abashed before the dupe whom she had made. But the pang of compunction passed as rapidly as it had risen; the game was now indeed, in her hands, and the recompense of all her efforts within her very grasp. Her tears fell warm and fast upon the hands which clasped her own; but as their impulse remained unsuspected, this womanly gushing out of sensibility only endeared her the more to the infatuated Mortimer.

"All shall be as you will," she whispered, as she passed her hand across her eyes, and then swept back the clustering curls which had half veiled her countenance; "All—for henceforth I can have no will, no hope but yours."

"And you will promise to weep no more, my best beloved?"

Sybil shook her head with a faint smile.

"Let this be your first act of wilful obedience," said Mortimer fondly; "for it is impossible to talk of the future while I see you steeped in tears. And now let us be more just to ourselves than we have hitherto been, since the world seems inclined to treat us roughly, and leave us to be the architects of our own happiness. I give you a fortnight, Sybil, a whole fortnight, to prepare for the awful event which we have deferred too long already. Nay, no disclaimers! I feel inclined to be arbitrary, and I will not concede another day, not another hour. You see therefore, that you have no regrets."

"But I have much to arrange; much to retrench."

"We will do all in good time; but for the present, we must have no retrenchment, no alteration. Your mother will need to be surrounded by familiar objects, and to indulge her usual habits, during your absence. In losing you she will already have lost too much. Leave The Grange, therefore, without one change which may imply that you abandon it for ever. Would that we could also leave Mrs. Delamere in happy ignorance of what has occurred, but that is I fear, impossible!"

"As yet," faltered Sybil, "she knows nothing; for I confess that I did not dare to acquaint her with the truth, while there existed probability that I should yet have more and darker news to tell; nor indeed, even had I wished to do so, could I have commanded sufficient self-possession to render such a tale intelligible."

And herein, at least, Sybil was partially sincere, for Mrs. Delamere was ignorant of the new expedient contemplated by her daughter, and could not consequently have comprehended the condolence of Mortimer had he deemed it fitting to offer them; but as such was far from his intention, Sybil gladly saw herself freed from this last peril, and acquiesced in the suggestion that no suspicion of her heavy trial should be engendered in the mind of the unhappy lady, promising, with one of her most eloquent and winning smiles, that all her discourse with her mother should turn upon her approaching marriage, and the bridal arrangements necessary to its speedy completion; while so gentle did she show herself, and so impassioned in her expressions of gratitude and affection, that the deluded Mortimer at length parted from The Grange convinced that hitherto his had been a barren and a vain existence, and that now only he was about indeed to live.

How thoroughly do human beings allow themselves to be cheated by false-seeming! As the floating corse, borne onward by the current, although it still wears the semblance of mortality and possesses a fictitious motion due to the action of the waves upon which it rides, is not the less a corse, sustained upon the surface by its own innate corruption, and incapable of voluntary movement; so is the vice which drapes itself in graceful sophistries equally foul, although it craftily retains the likeness of society convention. The figure is perhaps a strong one but not the less appropriate; for the decay ha

been gradual and certain in both cases, and the mockery, both physical and moral, alike hollow and false.

Alas, for Sybil Delamere! The child of love and prayer, how she had fallen from her high eminence! By how many slow and almost imperceptible steps had she been advancing on her downward path! How little do women, while venturing upon their first act of levity, anticipate the remorse and wretchedness to which they are about to subject their after-life, and in what a tissue of duplicity and untruth they are about to involve their future actions; striving in vain, moreover, to believe that a trifling dereliction from duty and high principle cannot condemn them even while they are compelled to feel that it indeed does so, in the very mystery by which it is necessary to shroud it; and above all, in the consciousness that they have become less pure in their own eyes!

And then—after that first step—what an unloiling of the silver cord of purity and peace is essential to guide them through the labyrinth of their faults and follies, until at length, the bright and precious help exhausted, they have to toil alone and unaided even to the close of their dark, and false, and unloved career!

Far, very far, had Sybil progressed in this bad pilgrimage. Cunning as the serpent, she was also as beautiful; but if, like the reptile, she had been compelled to cast the glittering skin which veiled her moral deformity, how would those who loved her now have shrunk from her fatal fascination!

But the glory of loveliness still beamed about her, and Mortimer was destined to be its victim.

CHAPTER XXX.

In the society of the family at the Manor-house, Gertrude had found a resource and a comparative happiness, for which she was deeply grateful. Contrary to her anticipations also, Miss Warrington, while declining the somewhat languid overtures of Mrs. Armstrong on her own account, and remaining firm in her determination not to cross any threshold in the character of a guest, offered no opposition to a friendship which she could not conceal from herself might ultimately become of essential service to her almost friendless niece; and thus, as the virtues and accomplishments of the orphan developed themselves to her new acquaintance, the intercourse between the families became more intimate; the passion of the young heir continuing unguessed at alike by its object, and those around them.

To Gertrude herself, the future presented no vision of affection. She believed her heart to have been exhausted in the past; and even when her thoughts rested on Mary Armstrong, and he who soon afterwards became her declared suitor, she wove no web of fancy for herself, in which she too was to be loved and won.

The ceaseless attentions of Ernest Armstrong, the more welcome perhaps that they were unobtrusive, and only to be estimated by their perseverance, solaced her pride and soothed her feelings; but she attached to them no importance whatever, considering them as the mere kindly demonstrations of an amiable nature, intended to beguile her into a temporary forgetfulness of her desolate position. And in this spirit alone did she receive and respond to his anxious and earnest devotion; grateful that she was no longer able to say in her solitude, as she had once said, that she had ceased to be an object of interest to any, and was destined to tread the path of life without one kindly hand to thrust aside the briars with which it was overgrown.

But beyond this point the thoughts or feelings of Gertrude never wandered; the image of her cousin was still enshrined in her heart of hearts. To her he was faultless as in those early years when, with her head pillowed upon the knees of her loving aunt, she listened to a thousand oft-told, but never unwelcome, legends of his infancy and boyhood; and there were yet moments when a weight of bitter regret settled upon her spirit, beneath which she felt shrunk and prostrate. It is true that she strove against a weakness which revolted her own reason; but these dark periods of memory affected alike her health and her temperament, and brought many a cloud across the horizon of her existence. Sometimes, in order to emancipate herself from a moral thrall at once painful and unavailing, she endeavored to recall all the sufferings to which the vacillation of Mortimer had exposed her; all the circumstances of which she had been made the victim, all the incidents wherein her pride had been wounded, or her hopes slighted. But the heart has a logic of its own, and the culprit was arraigned at the bar of her partial judgment only to be acquitted.

Yet still she struggled against a weakness which would ere long, should Mortimer indeed become the husband of Miss Delamere, degenerate into sin. But would he do so? was the ever-recurring interrogatory which, as this thought arose, she addressed to her eager and swelling heart. Had not her dying aunt linked the hand of Frederic with her own?—Had she not expired in the belief that her last prayer was to be accomplished? Did she not know how devotedly he had once loved the gentle mother whose every thought was for him? And could it be that a stranger, the love of a stranger———

At that phase of the silent argument, however, Gertrude paused to weep. She remembered the fascinations of that stranger, and the enthusiastic character of her cousin. No, no, there was no hope. Sybil was the star of Frederic: the "bright, particular star," fated to rule his destiny. She had come, none new whence or why, to accomplish her mysterious mission; she had come, and conquered, and her own duty was simply to submit.

Such was the state of Gertrude's mind, when, as she was one morning busily engaged in giving the last touches to a masterly sketch which she had made of Bletchley church for Eleanor Armstrong, while Miss Warrington was occupied with the daily paper, the solitary luxury in which she indulged, she was startled by an exclamation from the old lady, which was

immediately followed by her reading aloud the paragraph by which it had been called forth.

"Listen, Gertrude," she said, in that accent of quiet complacency in which elderly persons are wont to indulge while promulgating any species of news; 'On Tuesday morning, at the parish church of Westrum, by the Rev. James Ingatesby, Frederic Mortimer, Esq., of Westrum House, to Sybil, only daughter of the late William Delamere, Esq.' So your cousin is married, you see, and married without having the civility to apprise you of it beforehand."

But Gertrude made no reply. The pencil dropped from her hand, and it was only by a fearful effort that she preserved herself from fainting. All was then indeed over. The prayers of her dying aunt, the hopes of long years, her silent but deep affection—all had alike failed. As she saw herself definitively and forever separated from her cousin, the love which she had done so much to overcome welled up afresh, and she felt as though she had just listened to her death-warrant.

It was in vain that she sought to disguise her emotion. Pale, panting, and bewildered, she gazed hopelessly around her, but every object appeared to swim before her eyes; she tried to think, but a mist was over her spirit, and she could not combine the images which were floating across her brain.

Her aunt again addressed her, in all probability upon the same subject, but although she heard the voice she could not connect any meaning with the sound, and, at length, conscious that she could not much longer support the constraint under which she was then suffering, she murmured a few disjointed and almost inaudible words, and tottered from the apartment.

When the dinner was announced, Gertrude was still in her room, where she was found by the servant who went to summon her, stretched lifeless upon the bed.

Painful, very painful, were the solitary hours which she spent in that narrow and cheerless chamber; only the less wretched, however, that they *were* solitary. There she had leisure to contemplate all the circumstances of her position, to weep over the memories of the past, and to shudder at the dreariness of the future. How had she deceived herself, in believing that she had almost succeeded in overcoming her affection. How bitterly was she taught to feel that there is a depth in the human heart which, once stirred, is long, very long, ere its waters again subside!

Encouraged for years by her fond but incautious aunt to believe that she was the destined wife of her cousin, she had cherished the illusion until even reason had failed to convince her that it was dispersed, and it had required no less than its present final conformation to enable her to comprehend the truth. Vainly had she imagined that she was prepared to hear of his marriage, and to reconcile herself to think of him, henceforward, only as the husband of another.

Gertrude was merely tasting the bitter experience of a fact which all of us have, at some time in our lives, been fated to acknowledge; that, however we may deem ourselves prepared for an impending evil, and however we may have argued ourselves beforehand into befitting resignation, its advent usually finds us as powerless and as prostrate as though it had been utterly unforeseen.

Poor girl! the strongest link in her existence had been rudely and abruptly rent asunder. It was Frederic who was the one bond between her and the past, and now she must remember him, and love him only as the husband of Sybil; of that Sybil who had come between her and happiness, and rendered her an outcast from the home of her youth. To her, Frederic could be nothing now, nothing save a sad memory. All his thoughts, all his cares, all his tenderness, must, henceforth, be devoted to the woman whom he had taken to his heart. She only had now the right to watch over him in sickness, to weep with him in sorrow, and to soothe him in disappointment. And how would she fulfil her holy mission?

"Oh, well, well!" murmured Gertrude to herself, as the question rose in her pure heart, "she *must* do so, for Frederic loves her!"

And, then, her own hot tears rained down to feel that another had usurped the blessed duties which she would have performed so zealously. She thought not of sharing the brilliant fortune of her cousin, of indulging in the luxuries which it would command, or of claiming her share in the sunny hour of his existence; she dwelt only upon *home*, upon the chances and changes which might come even to him, and on those moments when the tenderness of a wife transcends all other consolations.

Vainly, however, did she dwell upon these thoughts: the conviction soon followed, that for her no such hallowed duty was destined, but that Frederic was lost to her forever; nor could she now, without guilt, even encourage a wish that it were otherwise. Had she been told a week, only a week beforehand, that his marriage was irrevocably decided, she believed that she could have schooled both her heart and her reason into submission. Had he written her a few lines of kindness and affection, she believed that she could have reconciled herself to what he would then have once more assured her was to him an earnest of happiness: but to learn that all was over through the cold medium of a public print, to feel that she had been forgotten while her whole heart was full of his image; this it was, as she fancied, which made the blow so heavy to be borne; and so she tried to cheat herself into the belief that she loved him less, even while she felt that she could not deceive herself.

No, struggle as she might with her own weakness, she could not be so deceived. She, indeed, prayed for his happiness, but still not for his happiness *with another*. The desire of possessing the affections of the being whom we love is one of the strongest feelings implanted in the bosom of humanity.

Even with the most pure and perfect attachment, there mingles more selfishness than we are willing to acknowledge: we love its objects not only for *their* sakes but for our *own*; the most heroic devotion fails to divest us of this egotism; in serving, soothing, and saving

those we love, we are also protecting our own interests, which, by an exclusive affection, we have bound up so intimately with theirs, that we can no longer separate them: cleave the trunk, and the branches wither.

To this it may be answered, that there have been instances in which a total self-abnegation has been exhibited, and where, in order to secure the happiness of one party, the other has resigned all claim to an affection which had once been the day-spring of existence. But who has read the heart which so foreswore itself? Who has witnessed the struggle of a declining passion, paling under the conviction that this sacrifice was,—mutely, perhaps, and reluctantly, but still that this sacrifice was,—covertly desired of them? Who has seen the blood-drops start from the brow, and the damps of death bed upon the clammy palms grasped together in despair? Who has watched the slow breaking of the wounded heart which resigned its treasure, not in obedience to its own impulses, but beneath the influence of a bitter pride, which, when it had given ALL, would not suffer that *all* to be tolerated where it should have been prized? And who, we ask finally, has followed that blighted and withered victim to its closing hour, without feeling convinced that "the silver cord was loosened, and the golden bowl was broken," which had knit and filled the two natures thus unnaturally severed, before the act of self-abnegation was accomplished. The wounded heart flies to the thicket to die: the outraged and disappointed spirit plucks out its own spear.

Let the world read matters as it will—and "he who runs may read"—there is yet a volume which it cannot unclose in its reckless haste and egotism, without pausing longer than it is prone to do, ere it can hope to comprehend its pages—the weary but glorious volume of the human heart; weary, because it holds so much of woe—glorious, because it contains so much of hope.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OH, the first withering of the young and devoted heart, how utter, how irremediable it appears! Every link of hope and memory alike snapped at once; the past a blight, the present a pang, and the future a blank! Life has indeed deeper and deadlier miseries in store, but none so keen—none so overwhelming, none so bitter,—the waters of Marah sear the soul over which they flow, and the trace of their passage is never blotted out! Time and change are alike powerless to renew the freshness which they have marred.

The heart may, after a while, take another impression; it does, it must; for the wear of the world hardens the spent fire to lava, and new idols will be wrought out of the wreck of the first destruction, but it is no longer the same worship. The chrine has been desecrated, the veil of the sanctuary rent, and where all was once uncalculating trust and tenderness, have grown up doubt and dread—those noisome weeds which stagnate upon the pool of egotism, and foul the waters beneath. *Self* struggles to the surface; self, which had hitherto remained dormant, and folded in the angel coil of peace and joy, and no sooner claims its place than it mingles palpably in the after-devotion over which it originally poured forth all its energies upon its object without one ungenerous reservation.

Life! what is the luxury of thy banquet when this one cup has been drained and thrown aside? Ambition waves aloft its golden vessels, wealth tips its goblets with jewels, pleasure rears its tankard with roses, and sensuality crushes into its capacious bowl the juice of the purple grape until it overflows; but the vase which was garlanded with hope, lighted by sunshine, and hallowed by the heart's best and holiest affections, can be fitly replaced by none of these; only one such draught can be ever drained; and when that one has been dashed with the bitterness of disappointment, the tide of existence may indeed moisten the lip, but it can never again warm the heart. The bland outgushing of the spirit's spring has hopelessly wasted its pure current on the desert-sands.

Too proud, nevertheless, to yield to the influence of a neglected passion, Gertrude struggled resolutely against the wretchedness which swelled her young and desolate heart almost to bursting. She forgave Sybil. How could she do otherwise when she remembered that she was now the wife of Frederic? But she could not bless the arrow by which she had been stricken. Again and again she read the solitary letter with which her forgetful cousin had cheered her exile, and she could not mistake the implied proposal that she should again seek home beneath his roof. But when? Alas, she understood it now! When Sybil should be installed in the place of the beloved aunt who had made that home a paradise—when Sybil should head the board, and fill the chair which had once been hers—when another voice should command, and another will control, where she had swayed so gentle a rule that obedience seemed but a dearer privilege. No, no: it could not be. Gertrude looked round her modest chamber, and breathed out a low and fervent thanksgiving that she had another and a calmer place of refuge.

Perhaps it was well for her that she had to strive also against the suspicions of her anxious hostess, whose blunted sensibilities, although they were unequal to sympathise with what she regarded as the mere nervous absurdities of fanciful and pampered young people, were not, however, sufficiently obtuse to deaden the curiosity which led her to seek an immediate cause for their development; and thus Gertrude soon discovered the necessity of controlling her feelings in the presence of her aunt, and of checking the tears which, at intervals, rose to her burning eye-balls. And the task was a hard and a bitter one; for like many other well-meaning, but ill-judging persons, Miss Warrington no sooner heard the apothecary who had been called in, declare that his patient was simply suffering from moral depression and debility, and required only amusement unattended

with exercion to restore her to health, than she installed herself daily for hours in the sick-room, where, in default of other subjects of conversation, she descanted perpetually on the very themes which the poor girl would fain have avoided, and that which a voluble pertinacity which rendered their exhaustion hopeless.

"It is fortunate, however, Mr. Pilbeam, very fortunate," she said upon one occasion, as the apothecary seated himself by the bed-side, and strove to rally the spirits of Gertrude by an assurance that, in a short time, she would be enabled to leave her room; "very fortunate, indeed, that there is really no danger, for I should scarcely have known how to act, had you given me cause to apprehend the contrary. A month, or I may say only a week ago, I could have written to apprise her cousin, who is her nearest relation—for I am but her great-aunt, and should, consequently, have declined all responsibility in such a case; but, at this moment, I don't know where to find him, as he is just married, and is probably on his wedding-tour. In my time, people were satisfied to remain at home on such occasions, to feast their tenantry, and keep open house, but now they consider it correct to run away from their friends, as though they had done something that they were ashamed of."

"*Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis*, eh?" interposed the apothecary sententiously, with a condescending smile.

Miss Warrington was silenced for a moment, and at once bewildered and displeased, but she soon recovered herself, and resumed:—

"Such being the case, we do not know where to address him. However, as Gertrude is better, we can afford to wait until he is again at Westrum. As for myself, I confess that I felt little or no alarm at her illness, for on the day of her arrival here, I remarked to Hannah that I did not believe she had an ounce of blood in her veins, and even now she looks better than when she first came to Bletchley."

"You may be quite easy upon the subject, my dear madam; in a few days we shall have Miss Mortimer in the drawing-room. But we must be careful to protect her from all unnecessary excitement, as her nerves are evidently very susceptible."

"You would rather, perhaps, that she should not yet see the Miss Armstrongs, who have called every day, and are half offended that I have not allowed them to come up stairs?"

"On the contrary, my dear lady, on the contrary," briskly exclaimed Mr. Pilbeam, who would rather have risked a relapse in his patient than the chance of displeasing the family at the Manor-house; "their visits can only be beneficial to Miss Mortimer, as I understand that they have already become very intimate. A great privilege that for the young lady, my dear madam; a very great privilege, and not extended beyond herself as regards this immediate neighborhood. You gave your interest to 'Armstrong and independence,' of course, Miss Warrington?"

"I gave it to no one," was the tart reply, as the clenched fingers of his interlocutor became blenched by the violence with which they were interlaced.

"No—eh? Well, you surprise me!" was the composed rejoinder. "All Bletchley took it for granted that you had supported him. However, it seems that he has succeeded without you, for he is *in*, I hear. Some rumor to be sure, of bribery and that kind of thing, but it is of course all local gossip, and as I often say to Mrs. Pilbeam, when she occasionally reports these small matters over our tea-table, *tempus omnia revelat*—at all events, I never give an opinion; no professional man should, eh?"

There was no reply.

"And now, my dear madam, I will take my leave," said the dapper little apothecary, resuming his hat and cane; "and I trust that, by the termination of the honey-moon, my fair patient will be in a fit condition to pay her bridal visit. Nothing like change of scene and cheerful society in such a case; eh, my dear Miss Mortimer? What say you to my prescription?"

Gertrude said nothing. Her mightiest effort at endurance and self-control would only enable her to torture her faded lips into a ghastly smile, as she took the hand which he extended on his departure, ere she turned her weary and aching head upon her pillow, and strove to escape at once from the light of day and the sound of human voices.

But no such escape was to be hers. Miss Warrington, excited by her own unusual activity and deeply offended by what she considered as an undue presumption on the part of Mr. Pilbeam, whom she detested both for his babble and his bill, no sooner heard the street door close behind him than she continued to vent her hoarded ill-humor upon Mortimer; and poor Gertrude was compelled to endure all the outpouring of her wrath.

"The accidental allusion to your cousin's marriage, my dear," she resumed, as she installed her perpendicular person, according to her own idea of comfort, in the large arm-chair just vacated by the diligent apothecary; "reminds me—I say nothing of myself; I am an old woman, and the days are past when it was considered necessary to show any regard to the feelings of such useless individuals as old women, when they chance to be poor—but it reminds me, as I was about to say, that Mr. Mortimer has treated you with great disrespect, in not writing to inform you of his intended marriage. He might be very much engaged; I dare say he was; people generally are, I believe, at such times, but still half-an-hour might always be spared for such a purpose. I confess that I feel very indignant at so singular and marked a slight; for it is a slight, Gertrude, look at it as you will; you may be poor, but you are as well-born and as well-bred as himself, and he has no right to look down upon you."

"Indeed, my dear aunt, you mistake him," faltered the poor girl, tortured to the very soul, "Frederic is incapable of such a feeling."

"I am glad to hear it," replied the old lady, in that provoking tone which implies a resolute opposition of sentiment; "very glad, for it would degrade him, not you. But be this as

it may, his conduct has been very extraordinary. He should have remembered that his parents had no right to educate and rear you like a duchess only to leave you to starve at last."

"Spare me, I entreat of you," exclaimed Gertrude piteously: "Did you understand the nature of Frederic, you would feel how impossible it was for him to act otherwise than he has done!"

"Well, my dear child, do not agitate yourself," replied the old lady, somewhat alarmed by the violence of her emotion: "we will say no more upon the subject. I understand it all now—the lady was jealous of your pretty face, and perhaps she was right. But keep up your spirits, and that pretty face may stand your friend yet."

Oh, are these not the trifles which make life difficult to bear,—these puny, pigmy miseries, which, like the knife of a surgeon, rend open again and again the wound which might have healed before its appointed time? To the first evil they are as nothing in proportion; and yet how many who struggle manfully against the crushing fall of the mighty mass, and strive, languidly perhaps and wearily, but still resolutely, to save some fragment from the wreck, are disheartened and bruised anew by the perpetual droppings of the loosened pebbles! How justly has it been said that—

"'Tis trifles make the sum of human things!"

and yet, upon those trifles is hinged the whole peace of our existence.

Day after day, almost hour after hour, did these corroding conversations occur, until Gertrude, who would fain have herself forgotten all beyond the narrow circle of her present home, more than once found herself upon the very point of confiding to Miss Warrington the bitter but still cherished secret of the past, in order to silence her for ever More than once did the confession tremble on her tongue, but as she raised her eyes to the rigid and passionless countenance, and then dropped them upon the compressed and bony fingers before her, the blood rushed back upon her heart, and she continued to endure in silence.

Not even the persevering affection of the amiable inmates of the Manor-house could counteract the evil effect of this constant demand upon her fortitude. She gradually withered, until even Mr. Pilbeam himself began to apprehend that the disease which he had at first treated so lightly, was in fact too deep-seated to be overcome; and thus impressed, he ventured to suggest to Miss Warrington the necessity of an immediate change of scene. Better, as he shrewdly and philosophically decided in his own mind, if she must die,—and die he had by this time become convinced she would—that it should be anywhere rather than under his hands.

It was easy to suggest such an arrangement; and in former years, it would have been equally easy for the orphan to have acquiesced in it at once; but now she instantly negatived the proposition; for she had begun to comprehend the nature of that poverty which so pertinaciously intrudes its gaunt hand, close-clenched, before the moral vision of the needy, and compels them to feel their helplessness.

Happily, however, Providence had watched over the gentle and uncomplaining victim of misfortune,—that blessed Providence which is by the thoughtless miscalled chance, or fate, or accident, but which still beautifully and harmoniously pursues its holy way, thwarting the provisions of the evil minded, and smoothing the rugged path of the stricken and the feeble.

It was but on the morrow after the medical fiat had gone forth, that Mary and Eleanor Armstrong once more arrived at the modest dwelling of Miss Warrington, laden, as was their custom, with fruit and flowers; but also, on this occasion, radiant with delight. Mr. Pilbeam had just left the Manor-house, where, in answer to the earnest inquiries of the Squire for his fair favorite, he had reiterated his opinion of the necessity of an immediate change of air and scene, and they had come as ambassadresses from their mother to claim the society of Gertrude for a few weeks.

The cheeks and brow of the sick girl flushed with happiness for a moment, but in the next instant the glow faded, and her heart sank. She felt that she would rather be left free to indulge her sorrow, than compelled to make a renewed effort for existence. She was perishing then, she knew, slowly but surely; and could she only have escaped the unintentional persecutions of her aunt, she would have rejoiced to linger out her remaining days in peace and solitude, and gradually to emancipate herself from every earthly affection.

It is certain that there is a strange fascination in the idea of death to the young who are subdued by a lingering sorrow. The stronger and sterner interests which link man to the world in riper age are still unknown to them. That second life, if so it may be termed, which, like Minerva, springs in all its power from the brain, and teaches its due, or at least enforced, subordination to the heart, has not yet commenced. The chain of roses alone has withered, and it is sweet and soothing to hope to perish with them; while, by a strange contradiction, it is only when the links of iron have been forged, and their weight is felt, that the shackled captive revolts against release, and clings to his rusted fetters.

Under this impression of hopelessness, Gertrude urged the utter impossibility of contending in her present state of weakness, against the stir and bustle of an establishment like that of the Manor-house at a period so exciting as the close of a successful-contested election; but her objection was instantly met by the assurance that all the local duties of hospitality contingent upon that success had been already fulfilled, and that early on the morrow both Mr. Armstrong and his son would depart for town.

"Thus, you see, my dear frightened Gertrude," said Eleanor persuasively; "that you will be as quiet with us as in your own tranquil home, for our party will consist only of my mother and ourselves, and Mr. Somerville, who, for some reason which Mary can perhaps explain, appears at the present moment to have a

decided disinclination to visit London. As for Ernest, he too from some unaccountable cause, seemed this morning to share the sentiment of his friend: but he could not, of course, be excused, so go he must, and will; but he bade me not forget to say that it was he who gathered the grapes, and selected the flowers which we have brought, in order that you might be assured how truly he sympathizes with the rest of his family in their anxiety for your recovery. So now we have only to obtain the consent of our kind Miss Warrington to this little arrangement, and to carry you off to-morrow so soon as we have taken leave of papa."

It was impossible to resist the earnest kindness of such an invitation; and accordingly, on the following evening Gertrude found herself established under the hospitable roof of the Armstrongs, and surrounded by the most affectionate attentions. The effect of so genial a change alike upon her health and spirits was great and rapid; and if her heart was occasionally wrung by the spectacle of Mary's radiant happiness, as she contrasted it with her own forlorn condition, she found support and comfort in the knowledge, that her struggles were unguessed at by those about her; and exerted herself to secure her secret so successfully that there were even moments in which she ceased to feel its weight.

Thus three weeks passed over, and Mr. Pilbeam himself began to feel that his visits were becoming supererogatory, as he saw an occasional bloom once more suffuse the pale cheek of his beautiful patient, and a light dance in her eye; but like Mrs. Armstrong, he stringently objected to her return home until her health should be more unequivocally restored; and Gertrude, although she still endeavored to discover a thousand reasons for terminating her visit, was in reality happy to find that they were all overruled in turn. To Eleanor she had become almost essential; for the whole time and attention of Mary were engrossed by Somerville, who had proved so efficient an auxiliary during the election, that he had won the heart of the Squire as well as that of his daughter; and thus the two younger girls were seldom separated, and all the various attainments of the orphan were in time discovered and estimated by her amiable but less gifted friend. Arm in arm they wandered through the richly-wooded grounds of the Manor-house, or loitered upon the border of the graceful little stream which laved their boundaries; and Eleanor learned to love and appreciate a host of natural beauties upon which she had previously looked almost with indifference.

There is always a world of poetry lying dormant in the breast of a young pure girl, which it requires some extraneous circumstances to develop; and so was it with the friend of Gertrude, who soon began to marvel that she could so long have remained careless, if not insensible to the loveliness of all about her.

"Why is it, Gertrude," she asked, "that I never felt thus before?—That I never, until I knew you, could appreciate these marvellous mysteries of nature? I loved the country, but only for my own sake; only because I breathed a purer air, and enjoyed more liberty than in town; that I delighted to pluck the flowers, and to bask in the sunshine, and to indulge in the merely material pleasures, which are impossible to a London life. It now seems inexplicable to me that I should have been so blind."

"And yet it is not so," replied the orphan with a sad smile; "it is only those who have suffered, or who have looked upon suffering, who can make companionship with nature; who can hear voices in the woods, and reap hope in the glorious spectacle of a sun-lighted sky. Look you, Eleanor," she added with emotion, as they entered a small garden-pavilion overhung with trailing plants, and seated themselves upon its rustic bench: "Look only here. Do you mark how these lovely but frail Banksian roses wreathe themselves fondly about the lattice-work which they almost conceal; so is the world garlanded with hopes as bright and as unenduring; and yet we would not rend away those scented blossoms, because we know that in a few hours they must fade; neither would we forego those hopes, although we know that they may end in disappointment. Nay more, we do not uproot the tree, when its bloom is scattered, for we await the season which shall renew its blossoming—while, with the human heart, Eleanor, with the human heart, there is no second harvest, although it still beats on, as if in disdain of the blighted past."

"Gertrude, you are wrong to dwell upon such thoughts. You see that I can weep with you, but you are still to blame. You have, indeed, lost the friends of your childhood, but you will, you must, make many, many more."

"Forgive me," said the orphan with a slight shudder: "at least it is not to you, to whom I owe so much of happiness, that I should talk thus. But you know not, Eleanor,—and may you never know!—how hard it is to lose all—all; and to begin your life anew, without one tie of kindred or of kindness."

"Our conversation has taken a sad turn," interposed Eleanor, hastily wiping her eyes: "and you are not so wise a monitress as usual. Lesson me no more lessons to-day, fair Mistress Gertrude, but rather let me twine this lovely branch of roses in your pale hair. There, is it not glorious? Five sister-blooms in one rich cluster! And now, to read you another and more cheerful homily than your own, I will tell you that they look like the blossoms of a newer and a fresher hope, flowering about the cold memories of other joys."

And as she concluded her graceful task, she once more drew the arm of her friend within her own, and they quitted the pavilion.

An unusual stir, as they approached the house, prepared them for some arrival; and they had scarcely entered the hall, when Eleanor was in her brother's arms; but he held her there only for an instant ere he turned to greet her companion. Beautiful as she looked, however, as she stood before him with extended hand and smiling lip, her simple white dress displaying to advantage all the symmetry of her frail but graceful figure, her bonnet in her hand, and her luxuriant hair still garlanded with the flowers which Eleanor had twined about it, the young

man could not suppress a start as his eye fell upon her. The expression of her face was so languid, the outline of her always delicate features so much sharpened, and her whole appearance so strongly indicative of suffering, that he felt a pang at his heart, and a vague terror, which he dared not to trust himself to define.

For the first time, a suspicion that Gertrude was the prey of some secret sorrow, against which she had struggled until her strength had failed beneath the conflict, pressed upon his spirits; and as the idea grew in strength, despite all his efforts to suppress it, he began to comprehend the extent of his feeling towards her. What would he not have given at that moment to have possessed the power of reading her heart, and of soothing her sorrows, be they what they might; but this he knew to be impossible; and thus he spoke to her only of her sickness, of her recovery, and of his gladness on finding her a guest in his father's house; while Gertrude, unsuspicious of the emotion which rendered the expression of even these commonplace greetings difficult to him, simply thanked him with her sad sweet smile; and hastened to her apartment, in order not to restrain, by her presence, the mutual communications of the family.

CHAPTER XXXII.

After the return of Ernest Armstrong, the house gradually became filled with company, and it required all the resolution which Gertrude could command to enable her to endure this constant demand upon her energies, without falling back into her original depression; and yet, strange to say, she no longer felt an inclination to return to her desolate home. Too sadly aware that Miss Warrington was more than reconciled to her absence by the reflection that it decreased the expenses of her narrow household; and once more habituated to the voice of sympathy and kindness, she shuddered as she remembered that the day must soon come in which she should once more be deprived of all this luxury of affection, and when her restored health would no longer afford her a pretext for extending her already lengthy visit.

The bustle and movement consequent upon the influx of visitors wearied and saddened her; but she found an equivalent in the perpetual and brotherly kindness of Ernest, who, pleading the necessity of Eleanor's more general attention to their other guests, was constantly occupied in securing the comfort and amusement of the orphan. Nor was he diverted from his work of sympathy even by the smiles of the high-born beauties which now graced his mother's drawing-room, or the example of his own sporting companions; who, on their return from shooting, fishing, or boating, divided their remaining time between billiards and flirtation.

And all these attentions were so carefully as well as so zealously proffered, that they excited no remark even among the idlest and the most sarcastic of her associates. The beautiful invalid, with her pale brow and her dovelike eyes, was known to be an orphan, and a portionless one; while Ernest Armstrong was one of the best matches in the country; and consequently not one of his friends could for a moment believe him to be mad enough to dream of marrying her. The idols of the world must have hands of gold, even if they have brows of brass, and feet of clay; and the divinity of every other shrine is looked upon as an object of false worship. No, no; young Armstrong might waste his time in dangling about a pretty girl who was going to her grave, and thus show the Lady Janes, and the Honorable Miss Lucys, that he was not a marrying man—which, by the way, was rather clever on his part—but beyond this, of course there was nothing to be said; and so the "capital match" was left in peace to follow the dictates of his own heart and his own reason.

Mrs. Armstrong, meanwhile, was so perpetually occupied in doing the honors of her house, and in taking her share in every conversation that was going on about her, however unintelligible it might actually be to her limited capacity, that she had not a moment to waste in conjectural speculations; while Mary, happy in herself and in all around her, became egotistical in the very joy of her heart, and limited all her interest to her own narrow circle. Perhaps there were moments in which Eleanor felt startled; but she, too, believed it to be impossible that her fastidious and ambitious brother could scarcely love the niece of old stingy Miss Warrington; and she had, moreover, become so sincerely attached to Gertrude, that she would not be convinced.

And Gertrude herself, even while she was grateful, deeply grateful, for the unwearied and gentle kindness of which she was the object, never for an instant conjectured that it had another source than the generous pity of one who was alike blessing and blessed, to a suffering fellow-creature. She only felt that she was no longer alone in the world; that there were now two beings to whom her sufferings were not indifferent, and who would mourn over her were they to terminate as she had once hoped. She even looked upon the smiling face of Mary, and the beaming countenance of her destined husband, without remembering her own blighted hopes; and although a dark cloud at times settled upon her spirit, it seldom lingered. A resigned and placid melancholy had succeeded to the irritation of feeling to which she had previously yielded; and she had almost taught herself to believe that "it was well for her that she had been afflicted." She knew not that a great moral change was taking place within her, by which the image of Mortimer was fading more rapidly from her heart than time could have effaced it.

It chanced that on a sweet autumnal morning Gertrude found herself alone in the music-room, where she had been engaged in tuning Eleanor's harp; and having completed her task, she stood for a time at one of her low windows opening to the lawn, until at length, feeling invigorated by the soft balmy wind which was wakening the leaves to that low, luxurious, and mystic whisper, which seems to speak to us in the lan-

guage of another and a more harmonious world, she stepped out upon the velvet sward, and bared her brow to its influence.

The sound of distant voices and ringing laughter reached her from the open windows of the house, and jarred with the soft serenity of the scene on which she looked; and in order to secure a more perfect sense of solitude, she strolled onward under the flickering shadows of the shrubbery, and followed with a languid step, the windings of a flower-bordered path, which led to an eminence commanding a view of the village of Bletchley, and the surrounding country.

Light, fleecy clouds were flitting across a sky of intense blue, tempered, however, by that slight purple mist peculiar to autumnal atmosphere; the little stream at the bottom of the valley was sparkling and shimmering along its narrow channels; the fields were alive with reapers; the low, gray church, half buried in ivy, had just caught the full radiance of the midday sun, and looked as though it were wreathed with emeralds; the leaves of the sallows, which at intervals skirted the water, danced merrily on their flexile stems to the music of the current over which they hung; children called to each other as they sported among the husbandmen; the lowing of the cattle rose from the luxuriant meadows; the birds were loud among the branches, and the butter-flies fluttered from flower to flower; in short, it was one of those days so beautiful and so rare in our capricious climate, when Nature seemed to have donned her richest garb, and the whole earth to revel in a sense of its own beauty.

For a while Gertrude stood entranced, tears filled her eyes, but they were tears of gratitude and praise. Soon, however, she became conscious that she had overtaxed her strength, and slowly descending the height, she diverged towards the garden pavilion, in order to rest for a time before she returned to the house. The creeping roses, honeysuckles, and clematis, by which it was overgrown, had been suffered to run wild, and nearly obscured the entrance; but putting them aside, Gertrude stepped lightly across the threshold, and started with mingled surprise and annoyance, to find herself intruding upon the privacy of Ernest Armstrong. A bright flush rose to the cheek of the young man as he bounded from the bench upon which he had been seated, and suffered his book to fall from his hand in his eagerness to welcome her.

"Gertrude—Miss Mortimer—" he exclaimed, as he sprang forward to lead her to the seat which he had just abandoned; for, in her embarrassment, she had continued standing upon the same spot, without making an effort to advance: "Miss Mortimer here,—and alone! By what happy chance—"

"Forgive me, Mr. Armstrong," faltered Gertrude, as she sank exhausted alike by fatigue and distress upon the bench; "I did not mean to invade your privacy. I thought you were with your friends."

"I dare not flatter myself that you sought my society," he said, looking anxiously upon her; "but, surely, Gertrude, you are ill, or unhappy! What has happened?"

"Nothing, believe me, nothing; but I have been imprudent. I have ascended the mound, forgetting that my strength is not equal to the exertion; and I came here to rest awhile. Pray, forgive me."

"Surely, you jest," was the impetuous reply. "Oh, Gertrude, if you could only guess how I have sighed for this moment—this moment of happiness—when I may assure you of all my respect—all my regard."

"I have long felt, long acknowledged it," murmured the fair girl, as she looked up gratefully and confidingly.

"Would that the conviction had served me better!" said Ernest, still retaining her hand; "would that it had induced you to confide more fully in a friendship in which you admit that you have faith. Gertrude, you are not happy. You have a hidden sorrow. I have long been convinced of this. Your painful illness has been an effect, not a cause. Seek not to deceive me. To common observers, you may, indeed, be only an invalid crushed by mere physical ailment; but to me, you are the prey of a deeper suffering."

The orphan answered only with her tears.

"Gertrude," persisted the young man, as he seated himself beside her; "you have given me a right to consider myself your friend; give me likewise cause to feel that I, indeed, am so. Remember that you have become the adopted child of our house; that we have all learned to love you. Have I, then, no claim to ask for some answering trust? Perhaps I may be indiscreet; but did you know how cold every tear that you shed falls upon my own heart, you would forgive me."

A sudden faintness came over the orphan. She began to understand him—to understand herself, and she trembled at the revelation. She strove to withdraw her hand; she strove to rise and escape, but her agitation was too powerful.

"Gertrude!" exclaimed her companion reproachfully; "you do not do me justice."

"Oh, recal that accusation for pity's sake," faltered the stricken girl; "I know and feel that you are, indeed, my friend."

"And is that all, Gertrude? Is that all which you have felt and known? Have I, indeed, made myself so little understood? Or is it that you are indifferent to an affection which has now become to me a principle of existence?"

The orphan buried her face in her hands, and the hot tears streamed through her fingers.

"It must be as you will, Gertrude," said Ernest, as he started from her side, and paced hurriedly across the narrow floor; "but you know not how devoted a heart you would reject—you know not the depth of the affection which you would throw from you—you cannot guess the treasure of love which I have hoarded up only to cast it at your feet; you may be loved again, but never, never again as now."

Gertrude looked up in alarm; her heart beat violently, and the tears were arrested in her eyes.

"No, no," she exclaimed passionately; "You mistake yourself, Mr. Armstrong, and imagine that the generous sympathy which you have felt for me has grown into affection. But this cannot, must not be. As yet we are almost

strangers; you are the only son of wealthy and powerful parents, while I am poor and friendless. You are full of life, and hope, and happiness, while I am already faded and crushed by trial and misfortune. How would your proud father brook such a marriage? Forget that you have ever conceived so wild a thought. Be just to yourself, and leave me, at least, the consolation of feeling that I have not lost a friend."

"You reason, Gertrude," said the young man reproachfully, "you reason coldly, where you should only feel. You disdain the heart which you have made your own."

"Do not mistake me," sobbed the orphan; "I am already sufficiently unhappy. But remember only my position and your own. Remember the friendship and affection which have been lavished upon me by your family, and then ask yourself if I could indeed listen to you without ingratitude? Deeply, very deeply, do I feel my obligation for such a proof of your regard; but I beseech you, if you would not expose me to the most bitter self-reproach, to bestow the warmer feelings of your heart upon another."

"Enough, Miss Mortimer," said her companion haughtily; "I will endeavor to obey you. I have, in truth been worse than blind not to comprehend that your affection has been already bestowed elsewhere. I have now only to apologise for my presumption, and to wish you a happier fate than that which I would have secured to you."

As he ceased speaking, he seized his hat, and rushed from the pavilion.

As he disappeared Gertrude made a movement as though she would have detained him, for at that moment she felt as though she was once more about to become an alien from her kind. She was at last conscious that even while she believed herself to be living upon the memory of the past, she was in fact learning to love Ernest Armstrong, a lesson in which she had progressed but too well, and now she saw herself again thrust back upon the desolation of her own heart. The impulse was, however, only momentary, her better principle retained her in her seat: she might be wretched, but she would still continue blameless; she would not repay the trusting friendship of a whole family by bligthing their proudest hopes; and thus, her extended hands were withdrawn, her laboring sobs were suffered to have way, and finally, her head sank upon the rustic table before her, and she wept as those only can weep who see all the hopes of their existence shivered about them.

Forgetting alike where she was and the time which had elapsed since she left the house, she remained for more than an hour sunk in a torpor of grief which scarcely allowed her to retain the faculty of thought. She only knew that she was wretched, very wretched; she only felt that her last luxury lay in the hot tears which were coursing each other down her pallid cheeks, when she was suddenly startled by the sound of a deep sigh immediately behind her.

She turned in alarm, and saw Ernest Armstrong standing a few paces from the bench upon which she was seated.

"Gertrude," he said with deep emotion; "tell me the truth. I left you angry and miserable but my anger could not last, nor can I longer endure my misery. As you hope for happiness in this life, be frank with me. Have I a share in those tears?"

"Mr. Armstrong," faltered the orphan, as she extended to him her trembling hand; "should I be worthy of all the friendship which you have shown to me for so many months if I could have witnessed unmoved the displeasure with which you lately quitted me? Oh, surely surely you at least should know me better?"

"And what more, Gertrude?" asked Ernest, again seating himself beside her: "Have I returned only to receive so formal an assurance as this? Do you believe me to be so weak, so frivolous, so unworthy, as to have sought your love without long and earnest reflection? Only tell me that it is not given to another, and even although it should not yet be mine I will await your will; I will trust to time, and to my own devoted affection, for ultimate success. I will struggle to deserve your preference, and to secure your happiness. I will be everything that you shall seek to make me."

"I dare not listen to such words from your lips, Mr. Armstrong," murmured Gertrude, as she endeavored to rise from her seat.

"You shall not leave the pavillion, Gertrude, until my question is answered," said her companion resolutely; "This day, this very hour, I must know my fate—and then, Gertrude, then, you will have made the happiest man on earth, or—we meet no more."

"Meet no more!" gasped the orphan, unconsciously echoing his words in an accent of such heart-struck anguish as rendered all further explanation superfluous.

"You are mine—deny it not, Gertrude, you are mine," murmured the delighted young man, as he suddenly clasped her to his bosom; "Nay chide me not—I will—I will release you—but no disclaimers—reason as you will now, and I will listen; I have not loved you in vain, and all else I can support. Why do you turn away in displeasure, Gertrude? Are you offended by my joy? Nay, do not leave your seat; I will abandon mine, if you condemn me to so great a sacrifice, but do not drive me from you. See, I have even released your hand. What would you more?"

"Listen to me," said the weeping girl, struggling against the emotion which had dyed her cheeks and brow with a crimson blush; "Weak and unworthy as I feel such an avowal to be, I will no longer deny that—that——In short, Mr. Armstrong—"

"Call me Ernest."

"In short," pursued the orphan, heedless of the interruption; "unconsciously, oh, believe me, most unconsciously, I have treacherously repaid the kindness of your family, by suffering myself to feel—to feel as I should not have done towards one for whom they have higher and prouder hopes."

"They all love you, Gertrude."

"But will they continue to do so when they learn how ill I have requited their friendship?"

"Will they not be indebted to you for my happiness, which is their first care?"

Gertrude shook her head despondingly. She had already learned a bitter lesson in the world's lore, and she remembered that she was poor and powerless.

"Sceptic!" smiled her more sanguine companion, "have you not faith in my influence over the family which you appear so much to dread? I am aware that my good father will look grave, and talk of expedieney, and prudence, and all those matters of which elderly gentlemen are accustomed to make bugbears to the young; but I shall appeal from his head to his heart, and I have never yet made such an appeal in vain. He already loves you as a child; so, away with these puerile fears. Is it your fault if you are dearer to me than all else on earth? Are you to blame if you are lovelier and more estimable than others of your sex? Trust me, the day is not far distant when all under our roof will bless you for having rendered it both holier and happier."

"I will endeavor to believe so," murmured Gertrude with a faint smile; "but until I am welcomed by Mr. Armstrong himself, this subject must never be renewed between us. To-day, I must remain at the Hall, for I feel that I have not strength to encounter the fatigue of a removal, but to-morrow I shall return to the humble home which I ought never to have quitted; and then—" she concluded with a burst of tears, which she strove in vain to suppress; "then it will depend upon your father if I ever again become his guest."

Ernest was about to expostulate, but as he looked into the eyes of his companion, he read there a determination against which he felt that it were vain to contend; and, accordingly, he raised her hand respectfully to his lips in silence.

"And now, leave me," said Gertrude imploringly; "if, indeed, you love me, leave me alone to think. I have need of thought; alas! I fear, too much, but, at least, spare me all further self-reproach."

"Do you regret my happiness?"

Once more she smiled through her tears, and he felt that he was answered.

"And you will wear this rose for my sake, Gertrude, will you not?" whispered the young man tenderly, as he broke away a branch of the flowering parasite which trailed across the entrance of the pavilion.

"I will, if you obey, and leave me now."

"I am gone," was the murmured reply, and still he lingered.

Five minutes more wore away, and then the blooming branches were hurriedly thrust aside, and he sprang lightly into the sunshine, looked back for a second into the depths of the rustic apartment, and disappeared among the tall shrubs near its entrance.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Ernest had no sooner departed than Gertrude sank upon her knees. Divided between happiness and self-reproach, she had no longer power to trust to her own strength. What had she done?—and what was she about to do? She felt bewildered and alarmed. How little had she understood the nature of her own feelings; how little had she been prepared for the ordeal through which she had just passed! That she should have permitted herself to love Ernest Armstrong, appeared to her at one moment as monstrous; she who knew the ambitious views of his family, and the lofty aspirings of his own nature. And she had been doing this while she believed herself to be still weeping over the smouldering embers of a scorned and now sinful attachment. The new phœnix had risen from the ashes which she had deemed extinguished forever.

She passed her hand over her throbbing eyeballs, as though she sought to awaken from a wild dream, but all was still vivid in its truth. The branch of roses lay on the table beside her; the book, upon which Ernest had been engaged when she entered, remained where it had fallen from his hand; strive as she would, there was no room for doubt.

Ere long her thoughts wandered to Mr. Armstrong, and she trembled as she reflected upon his probable indignation: while, solitary as she was, and although no eye was upon her, a blush of mingled pride and shame rose to her brow as she pictured to herself the reproaches which he would fasten upon the penniless orphan, who had accepted his hospitality only to blight the prospects of his son; and she bowed her head, self-convicted, and would at that moment have gladly forgone all her newly-born hopes of happiness to escape his just rebuke.

Gradually, however, her reflections became less gloomy, and she raised her drooping head, and pillowed it upon her arm, as she wiped away the intrusive tears which were still coursing each other down her cheeks, and fastened her thoughts upon Ernest, and the affections which he had vowed to her.

Was she, indeed, so very much to blame for having failed to remain insensible to such a passion? Had he not devoted himself to her in misfortune and in suffering? Had he not extended to her the hand of friendship, when that of the world was closed against her? Was he not all that the heart of woman could covet in him she loved? And all these questions were answered with a throbbing pulse, until she became almost acquitted in her own eyes.

But Gertrude had still another doubt, another pang to combat. The more perfect she taught herself to believe Ernest, the more a sense of her own unworthiness fastened upon her. While he had bestowed on her all the fervor of a first attachment, she had requited it only by the gift of a worn and heavy heart. In every phase of the transfer it was unequal. On his side were worldly independence, social station, and an entire and devoted passion; on hers poverty, obscurity, and blighted hopes.

As this conviction grew upon her she wept over herself, for she felt that she was indeed a bankrupt in all that makes life brilliant, and a thousand times did she upbraid herself for the selfishness which had led her to listen to the addresses of such a suitor.

Repentance, however, came too late, and ap-

rehensive that, should she longer delay her eturn to the house, her absence might create ome alarm as to her safety in the mind of Eleaor, Gertrude, rousing herself from her abstracon, smoothed the tangled hair upon her brow, athed her swollen eyes, and carefully lifting ie cherished rose branch, which had been the rst gift of love from the table, folded her hawl about her, and turned slowly in the diection of the hall.

What a change had taken place in her whole estiny during the last few hours!—what a hange in all her feelings! She scarcely knew whether to rejoice or to mourn on finding that ie had voluntarily flung from her all the old ssociations of years, and was almost ready to sk herself if, indeed a new scheme of happiess could grow out of the ashes of the past. loreover Gertrude, meek as she was, possessed, evertheless, a proud spirit; and when she reiected upon the time in which her hand would ave been eagerly sought, while now it could arcely be that her alliance would be more han coldly welcomed by the family of Mr. rmstrong, while it might be even scornfully ejected, tears of wounded feeling rose to her yes, and she felt tempted to recant her concesion, limited as it had been.

But where is the young heart which does not eawaken to the touch of hope? Where is the rave so deep that no flower will spring upon s surface? Gertrude remembered her last ome, her blighted visions, her crushed affecions: she recalled to her mind's eye the dreary oof, and the ungenial society of her aunt; and nce more she smiled as the attachment of Erest Armstrong rose before her; an attachment hich had scorned to yield before difficulty and elf-sacrifice; and again she resolved to leave er fate in his hands.

All these internal combats nevertheless weakned both her mental and physical strength, nd she became convinced that, even had not a ense of propriety dictated the measure, an imediate removal from the exhausting gaieties of he Hall was necessary to the preservation of er convalescence, while her absence would end to test the consistency of her suitor; and t was accordingly with a firm resolution to arry out her project of departure, that she at ength reached the house, pale and languid, nly to be tenderly chidden for her imprudence n wandering out alone in her then state of veakness.

The announcement of her intended return ome on the morrow, elicited still more remontrance. Eleanor could not spare her; Mr. Armtrong, on his arrival, would be annoyed to find hat she had left them before her health was horoughly re-established; Mary revealed the ecret of a projected fishing-party, where she ffectionately assured her that she would be inlispensable, a declaration in which she was warmly seconded by Somerville; and the old ady insisted upon several points, so strangely nvolved, that it was difficult to comprehend heir bearing upon the case. One individual nly remained totally silent throughout the whole discussion, and that one was Ernest: he eard even the guests of his mother join in the general entreaty, and saw tears of gratification stand in the soft eyes of the fair girl as she replied to each appeal; and still he sat by, apparently engaged with a newspaper, and without uttering a sentence.

At length Eleanor, distressed, and almost annoyed, to find all her endeavors fail in changing the resolution of her friend, suddenly turned towards her brother for assistance, exclaiming eagerly—

"Am I not right, Ernest? Do you not consider Gertrude very imprudent to leave us yet?"

"If you really desire my opinion," was the reply, and to every eye, save one, it was calmly and almost indifferently uttered; "I consider that if Miss Mortimer conceives it to be necessary and right to return to Bletchley, she should be left free to follow the dictates of her own judgment; but should she happily see cause in an hour or two to alter her opinion, she knows how much she has it in her power to oblige us all."

"And yet you persist, Gertrude," said Eleanor reproachfully.

And Gertrude did persist; and the following day saw her once more an inmate of the humble dwelling of Miss Warrington; enduring, as best she might, the condolences of her companion upon her pale cheeks and nerveless step; her inferences as to their cause, and her regret that she did not possess more self-command.

Gertrude blushed as she listened; for, naturally ingenuous, she felt that she was guilty of tacit deceit in thus indulging her aunt in her erroneous lamentations. Yet what had she to tell? That Ernest Armstrong loved her? Of what avail were such a confidence, when out of that passion there might grow nothing save mortification and disappointment to herself? Better, far better, that the worthy old gentlewoman should cling to her first illusion, than that she should be enabled to break up new ground, and imagine fresh subjects of grievance. Even in the solitude of her chamber, moreover, the orphan no longer found peace. In weeping over her sorrows she had experienced that strange sad luxury which, by some occult dispensation, those who mourn deeply ever feel when alone with their affliction; but now that most bitter of all sufferings, suspense, was her daily and hourly companion; a suspense rendered doubly difficult to bear, as it involved at once her happiness and her self-esteem.

During the last eventful evening at the Hall, she had found an opportunity to forbid the visits of Ernest; and with a right-minded delicacy, had also interdicted all correspondence until the decision of his father should have been made. In vain did the young man expostulate upon what he termed the overstrained and unnecessary cruelty of this arrangement: Gertrude was firm.

"Should Mr. Armstrong consent," she said meekly; "the privation will ultimately have been unimportant; should it prove otherwise, we have already met too often, and I owe it both to you and myself to terminate our intercourse at once."

Strong in her sense of right, to this resolution

she adhered; and, finding that it was in vain to oppose her will, Ernest could only declare a determination in his turn to proceed at once to town in order to have an immediate interview with his father, and by these means shorten the period of their separation.

Thus the orphan found herself once more almost alone; for although she had become more dear than ever to the friends whom she had left, they were less able than before to devote a portion of their time to her. The duties which the presence of their numerous guests imposed upon them, and which was rendered still more imperative by the sudden and incomprehensible desertion of Ernest, confined them strictly to their immediate circle; and, had it not been for the kindly messages, and affectionate notes which constantly reached her, Gertrude might have found some trouble in reconciling herself to the conviction that the old Hall and its warm-hearted inhabitants still remained in the neighborhood.

Moreover, long and weary days went by, and there were no news of Ernest. He had failed, then, and he left her to divine that failure in his silence. Once more she was scorned—once more her heart was widowed; and she, who had believed for many many months of heaviness that she could never love again, had suffered herself once more to hope only to be once more deceived. Such was at last her firm conviction; and although she wept over the loss of such a heart as that which she had won, she did not yield, as on a former occasion, to this new weight of woe. Her woman-pride nerved her to support the trial with dignity, and there were moments in which she found herself mentally consoling Ernest under a disappointment which she considered as inevitable. And then she glanced at her own future existence, when all should be indeed over between them; but the anticipation chilled her, and she closed her eyes as if to shut out the vision. Enough that it was hers to live and suffer; he, at least, might soon again be joyous and happy as she had first known him. A thousand cares, and avocations, and hopes, would wean her from his memory; and he would be restored to his family and to himself, when she was—forgotten!

Such a consolation fell cold upon her heart, as the night-dew upon grave-flowers; the blossoms might revive beneath its influence, but the dark tomb felt it not; and so time wore on, until three weary weeks had expired, and the faint hectic which had almost disappeared from the cheek of the orphan began once more to tinge the delicate skin; a low cough was occasionally heard to escape from her pallid lips; and the cold moisture which bathed her brow at intervals rendered the long and flexile tresses by which it was shaded languid and dull.

To Miss Warrington these changes were imperceptible; but Mr. Pilbeam was more clear-sighted, and he ere long began to insist with extreme pertinacity upon her instant return to the Hall. Gertrude was, however, inflexible; attributing her weakness to the extreme sultriness of the season, and the difficulty which it induced in her breathing; while, to her infinite relief, she found herself supported by her aunt, who, having become sufficiently attached to her society to find her renewed solitude irksome, strongly opposed her removal.

Baffled at the cottage, the little apothecary seriously alarmed for his patient, and not altogether indifferent to the *eclat* of a visit to the Hall, when it was known throughout the neighborhood that Miss Mortimer was no longer its inhabitant, hastened to tell his tale of fear, and hint his wishes to Mrs. Armstrong; but once more he was destined to disappointment. The good old lady shed a shower of tears as she learned the relapse of her favorite; Eleanor turned pale, and clung to a chair for support while Mary loudly and earnestly expressed her grief; but beyond these demonstrations of interest and affection, none of them progressed. In vain did he declare the necessity for an immediate change of air and habits; in vain did he remark how wonderfully beneficial her residence at the Hall had proved upon a previous occasion; in vain did he imply the expediency of her instant return; he was listened to with consideration and anxiety, but all his strategy proved fruitless; and at length, feeling that he had no right, and should, moreover, be very impolitic to endeavor to force upon the mistress of the house a guest who had, from some cause or other, evidently ceased to be welcome beneath her roof, he reluctantly rose, and took his leave, although not until he had promised to give Mrs. Armstrong constant intelligence of his patient.

Mr. Pilbeam ruminated as he descended the hill on his return homeward, upon the probable cause of so marked and unfavorable a change. It was true that all the ladies of the family had deeply felt his communication, but they had studiously confined their comments upon Miss Mortimer to the subject of her illness; and they had evidently avoided with the greatest care all reply to his inferred proposition. What could it mean? Mrs. Pilbeam, called to the council in his surgery, while he prepared sundry mysterious medicaments of divers colors, dropped or poured from tall, capacious looking glass bottles with ground stoppers and gilded etiquettes, into little slim phials of two or three inches in length with long labels, neatly inscribed and folded suspended from their necks; and, then, having corked them carefully, passed tham across the counter to his anxiously listening helpmate, who concluded the operation by crowning them with head-pieces of bright scarlet paper, which she trimmed rapidly and neatly round the edge with a huge pair of scissors—Mrs. Pilbeam, however elucidated the mystery at once.

It was, she declared, precisely what might have been expected. What could the Hall people want with poor Miss Warrington's niece, but to make use of her? And what use could she be of now, when they had a housefull of friends to amuse them? She couldn't help saying, however, that she was very glad of it; for when people set themselves up to be better than other people, it did them good to have their pride pulled down; though she must confess that she was very sorry the poor girl fretted so much, although, if there was no sickness among the gentry, Mr. Pilbeam would be reduced to

practise upon his parish poor, which was neither pleasant nor profitable; so, that everything was for the best after all.

The busy apothecary listened, nodded, mixed and labelled assiduously, until his daily duties were completed; occasionally venturing upon an inference, or uttering a regret that his own popularity might be, perchance, diminished at the Great House by this untoward event; and, finally, satisfied that his quick-witted wife had solved the enigma, protested with an anxious sigh, that he trusted he should be able to support the system of his patient until the departure of the Hall-guests made her return there desirable to the family.

"You know, my dear," he concluded; "that before the visit of Miss Mortimer, I had never been called in by the Armstrongs, except to attend the domestics; and I made a great advance when I exchanged the servant's hall for the drawing room, eh? and that it is which makes this business doubly vexatious, and really very detrimental to me. Who can tell what good fortune might have occurred, if the poor thing had been allowed to remain where she was, eh? An accident, or an attack of fever, might have induced them, when I was on the spot, to employ me, instead of sending off an express to the town, as they have always done. But I do believe that I was born to be unlucky."

Be this as it might, and certainly the worthy apothecary's position was sufficiently obscure to prove that he was at least no inordinate favorite of the blind goddess, it is certain that before noon the next day, all the magnates of Bletchley were aware that the proud Miss Mortimer had been made to understand that there was not room at the Hall for her, while the grandees from London were there; and great was the gratulation of the maiden sisters, and the minister's widow, when the secret was confided to them.

As to the Misses Bayliss, they declared their conviction, that poor Miss Warrington's still poorer relation might make up her mind that she had seen the last of the Hall; as, indeed, it would seem that she had done, by her fretting herself ill again; for, of course, the Armstrongs could hardly be so barefaced as to have her up there again directly their house was empty; and then in the spring they would be off to town; and by the time they returned, they would have forgotten all about her.

Nothing could be more feasible or more rational; nor did Getrude herself venture for a moment to entertain a different opinion. They *would* soon forget her. They *would* leave Bletchley early in the spring; for she had been present when the arrangement was made, and had even been urged to join their party. They *would* abstain from seeking her society before their departure. And thus, from very different premises, and with very different feelings, the same conclusion was attained.

Gertrude was wretched, for she was hopeless; but even this hopelessness served to sustain her. As she had nothing now to anticipate, so also she had nothing to fear. Her fate was accomplished. And yet, she felt that one parting explanation might have been vouchsafed to her; and her pride was wrung, that although the letters of Eleanor, after having reached her at long intervals, and then ceased altogether, had seemed to announce a cessation of all friendship, the daily present of game, or fruit, or flowers had never failed. It was as though they had withdrawn their regard, and now conceded only their compassion.

The sensitive delicacy of the orphan was deeply wounded; and while her aunt constantly expatiated upon the persevering attentions of her new friends, the unhappy orphan turned sickening from the dainties for which she was indebted to them, and suffered the most rare and beautiful flowers to wither for want of attendance, or banished them from her room upon the plea that they affected her breathing. There was, however, one faded rose-branch which she cherished, although color and scent had long since departed from it; her heart was not yet so full as to shut out that cherished memory.

Become too feeble to walk unattended, Gertrude was soon compelled to content herself with the air which she could procure through an open window; and there she remained seated for hours, with a book or a needle in her hand listening abstractedly to the economical dissertations of her rigid aunt, and lost in a maze of painful thought.

She was so sitting upon one occasion, on a sweet evening, when the glow of the setting sun shed a golden glory over her pale features, and glistened amid her long languid curls, looking rather like a seraph than a mortal, and thinking, as was her habit, of the quiet grave which would so soon bury alike her and her griefs, in all the luxury of solitude; Miss Warrington having left the room upon some household duty; when she suddenly became conscious of a thick and hurried breathing, which betrayed that some stranger had paused beside her. Easily alarmed, she was about to retire, when a light form bounded through the gate of the little fence and in the next instant, before her tottering limbs had power to second her will, Ernest Armstrong stood before her, his eager hands grasping the window-sill, and his fine countenanee glowing with joy and animation.

"Gertrude, my own Gertrude," he exclaimed passionately; "We have conquered! At last you are mine. My father has sent me before him to prepare you for his visit. He comes to embrace his new daughter."

The orphan gazed fixedly at him for an instant, and then fell back upon her seat speechless and powerless. She had struggled against her despair, but she had not strength to support this sudden revulsion of feeling. With the quick glance of affection, Earnest at once discovered the error of which he had been guilty in the happiness of his own heart, and, in another moment, he had sprung into the apartment, and was at her feet.

"What have I done, Gertrude?" he whispered tenderly; "Speak to me, dearest, and assure me that the past is forgiven; that the silence which you enforeed upon me, has not led to a doubt of my affeetion; that I am welcome, even although I may have been long in coming. One word, Gertrude, only one, if you still love me."

Gertrude strove to utter the assurance that he asked, but her pale lips trembled without regaining the force of utterance; and then it was that, surprised at her prolonged silence, the agitated young man looked more earnestly upon her, and recognised the ravages which the last few weeks had made in her whole person.

The shudder which passed over his frame alone betrayed his wretchedness, but it was eloquent—for a moment, he feared that he had returned *too late*—and he eagerly fastened his eyes upon her wasted features and sunken form, as if to ask himself whether, indeed, there were yet hope.

After a time, however, his anxious and affectionate devotion appeared to call back the fleeting senses of the orphan, and a convulsive sob announced her return to consciousness. A deep blush rose to her faded cheek as she found herself in the arms of Ernest, and her first impulse was to liberate herself; but the clasp of affection was not to be so readily flung off, and it was with increased tenderness that Ernest appealed to her feelings, to her fidelity, and to her justice.

"You have doubted me, Gertrude," he murmured reproachfully; "you have doubted me, or I should not find you thus. I can read hours of misgiving and of reproach upon the pale brow that rests so languidly upon my shoulder. When I approached the window, I saw you as radiant as ever, and little did I suspect that it was the mere cheat of a mocking light. Why have you been thus ungenerous towards me? Did you not know that when, for the first time in my life, I pleaded with my father, I was pleading for the happiness of my whole life—nay, for that very life itself?—And did you, indeed, judge so poorly of me as to believe that I would be worsted in such a cause?"

A faint and timid smile rose to the lip of the orphan.

"Time has passed, I know it but too well," pursued Ernest, "since the cruel moment in which you banished me from your presence until I could return with my father's sanction to our marriage; and you are also quite aware that my father loves you, but, nevertheless, his ambition—his vanity—call it what you will—had led him to form other projects for his son, and you must, therefore, forgive him, even though he should have exhibited such pertinacious reluctance in yielding to my prayer. Believe me also, dearest, when I assure you that your dignity has never been compromised, even for an instant; it could not be, for that dignity was also mine. As regarded your birth, there were, of course, no scruples, for therein we were equals. You see that I am frank with you, Gertrude; for we love each other, and I feel that I have no right, as certainly I have no wish, to mislead you. The difficulty was at once less in importance, and more powerful in effect. You are as well aware as myself that the Armstrongs were, some generations ago, the most wealthy family in the country, and my father had encouraged strange visions that I was destined to restore their ancient affluence by what the world calls a fortunate marriage; but I knew too well that this was a popular misnomer, as it is commonly understood, and that my happiness must have a more solid and tangible foundation. In short, we discussed the matter until he became convinced that I had reason on my side, and now, I transgress no duty in telling you that I am all your own."

"And shall you, indeed, never regret so great a sacrifice, Ernest? Shall you never weary of your poor penniless bride?" asked his listener tenderly.

"Do we weary of the air we breathe, Gertrude? Are you not the one thought, the one interest of my existence? In losing you, I should have lost all that rendered life endurable. But this fear is past, and now I have only to entreat of you to take more care of my happiness than it is evident you have done of late; for, truly, dearest, you are sadly changed."

"I know it," said the pale girl, as she swept her languid hand across her brow; "I am, indeed, as you remark, sadly changed, but joy is a skilful physician. You are here, and all will soon once more be well with me."

For the first time the enraptured lover ventured to touch with his lips the forehead which reposed upon his shoulder; and he did so unchidden, for the strength of the orphan was ebbing rapidly beneath the conflicting emotion of the last half hour, and the heart of the young man heaved as he watched the color rise and fade, in rapid alternation upon her cheek.

It was consequently, almost with a feeling of relief, that he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, and while Gertrude instinctively withdrew herself from his hold, he hastily rose from his seat, and stood beside her. In the next instant, Miss Warrington entered the room, and an exclamation of surprise escaped her lips as she remarked the presence of the intruder.

"I owe you a thousand apologies, my dear madam," said Ernest in reply, as he advanced towards her with extended hand; "I feel that I have been guilty of a most unceremonious entrance beneath your roof, but I trust that you will pardon the indiscretion when I tell you that I came here to claim my bride."

"Your bride, Mr. Armstrong!" echoed the bewildered old lady, as she sank almost as breathless as the orphan herself, into her accustomed arm-chair: "Beware, young gentleman, how you jest with a Mortimer. *I* am old, and powerless, it is true, but Gertrude is not altogether friendless, and she must not be made the sport of idle vanity."

And as she spoke, her tall figure grew yet taller; while the fingers generally so tightly clasped, were extended and outstretched as if in warning.

"You wrong me, Miss Warrington," was the proud reply; "I come as a suppliant, not as a jester, and I am even now momentarily awaiting the arrival of my father to second my suit. I love, and have long loved your niece, and she has condescended to return my affection; family affairs, with which I will not weary you, have detained me some time in town, and I regret to perceive, that during my absence the health of Gertrude has not progressed as I had hoped. She has, however, promised me that she will exert all her energies to recover strength, and we must trust that care and zeal will aid her

successfully in the effort. And now, my dear madam, do you still refuse your hand to your new nephew?"

The astonishment of the stately old lady, far from diminishing, only increased with every word to which she listened; but as she saw the meek and appealing eyes of Gertrude fixed upon her, she almost unconsciously placed her hand in that of the young man who stood respectfully before her, and drew a long breath as though she would have heaved a heavy weight from her breast.

"You have told me nothing of this, Miss Mortimer," she at length said in her most sententious tones; "and you have been wrong. I am your natural guardian, and could not have objected to this marriage, provided it be, as I trust it is, welcome to Mr. Armstrong's family; for otherwise I at once refuse my sanction, and eannot countenanee the visits of this gentleman."

There was no opportunity for either Gertrude or her lover to reply to this solemn announeement, for the words were still upon the lips of Miss Warrington, when a carriage stopped at the door, and the Squire was announced. Vainly did the poor girl endeavor to rise from her chair to receive him; the throbbing of her heart was so violent, that she could only clasp her hands together and gasp for breath; but she soon overcame this undue emotion, and pride lent her strength, as Mr. Armstrong turned from the ceremonious greeting of the maiden aunt, to welcome him, if not with complete composure, at least with perfect self-possession.

There was a slight, a very slight shade of constraint upon the brow of the Squire, which did not escape the anxious eyes of Gertrude; and perhaps it was fortunate that she remarked it, for it gave her nerve, conscious, as she was, that she had used no unworthy means to secure the affection of his son. He, however, seated himself beside her, after having given a nod of intelligence to Ernest, who was eagerly watching his movements, and kindly taking her hand, expressed the regret which he felt at her altered appearanee.

"We have all been in error, my dear Miss Mortimer," he pursued, although with visible effort; "and that mad boy yonder not the least. What business had he to agitate and harass you with his foolish fancies when you had no strength to spare? And what business had you to listen, when you should have been thinking of your health, and endeavoring to take care of yourself? Oh! my pretty Gertrude," he whispered more affeetionately, as he saw the large tears swelling in her eyes; "what business had I, old fool as I was, to suppose that I knew better what was good for him than he did himself? However, as we have all been wrong, we must all endeavor to be wiser in future. You will not find Ernest half so troublesome, now that he is sure of having his own way, while your little heart will be at ease, and that will prove the best medicine in your own ease. As for me, Gertrude, you must forget that I did not do justice to your merits at once, as perhaps I should have done; for I have had to contend against a host of old hopes, and of old memories, by which I have been haunted since his boyhood. How say you, madam?" he added, addressing the old lady; "As we have each made some sacrifice should we not each also make some eoneession?"

"My dear Sir," broke in the happy Gertrude; "how can I reply to such unhoped for indulgence? But, indeed, indeed, I am not unworthy of it. I have long despaired in silence, without one feeling save that of gratitude towards yourself. I did not dare to hope, but I at least avoided all self-reproach."

"I know it, my dear young lady, I know it," was the cordial rejoinder; "Had it been otherwise you would not have been the little Gertrude who robbed us of all our hearts. And the more I look at you, the more I feel disposed to admit that Ernest is right, and that you will, after all, bring him the best dowry."

"I am acquitted, then, in your eyes at least, Sir," said the young man with a triumphant smile.

"Fully—honorably acquitted, and I receive with joy to my heart and home the daughter you have selected for me."

And as he spoke, the kind old Squire folded the agitated orphan in his arms, and kissed her with paternal tenderness.

"To-morrow," he pursued, after the pause of a moment, during which no one made an effort to break the silence; "to-morrow Mrs. Armstrong and the girls will be with you early; nay, they wanted to invade the carriage tonight, when they learned my errand; but they had grumbled so much for the last few weeks at what they were pleased to call my unkindness, in debarring them from the society of their favorite, that I resolved to punish them for their want of obedience, and so, in spite of all their reproaches and entreaties, I set forth alone, as the young gentleman opposite had done before me, although I suggested that we should travel in company. So you see, my pretty Gertrude, that you must put on all your best looks to receive them, or incur the risk of undergoing a course of Mrs. Armstrong's dietiug, and nursing, and warning, when you may pass your time more pleasantly."

"And Eleanor, and Mary? Do they really still love me?" asked the orphan with emotion.

"For Eleanor I can answer at once," smiled Mr. Armstrong; "as for Mary, her love appears to be monopolised by Somerville, but I dare say that you will nevertheless be able to come to an understanding. And now I must take my leave, and so, moreover, must this young gentleman, who has agitated you more than enough already, and against whom I shall request Miss Warrington to close her doors if he does not conduct himself with becoming prudence; for as he has insisted upon giving me a daughter, so in my turn, I shall insist that she be taken proper care of."

Ernest would fain have expostulated, and turned an imploring look from his father to his hostess, but he met with no encouragement from either. Mr. Armstrong, vanquished alike by his affection for his son and his regard for Gertrude, had succeeded in overcoming all distaste to their

marriage, and had consequently not seen without alarm the fearful state of weakness to which she was reduced, while he instantly felt the necessity of protecting her from all undue excitement; and thus it was evident that he anticipated no opposition to his will, as he avoided the eye of the young man like one who would admit no further discussion upon the subject; while Miss Warrington, half bewildered, and half alarmed at what was passing about her, felt like a person under the influence of an agitating dream, and was looking anxiously for the departure of her self-constituted guests.

There was accordingly no appeal, and with a parting word which lasted throughout a somewhat lengthy and explanatory leave-taking between the sententious old lady and the simple-maunered Squire, Ernest was compelled at last to relinquish the hand which had been confidingly abandoned to him, and to follow his father to the carriage with as much philosophy as he could command; nor was it until the sound of their retreating wheels convinced her that they were indeed gone, that Miss Warrington turned towards her niece with wonder and reproach alike upon her lips; but her words fell powerless on the closed ear of her companion. The reaction of feeling had consumed her small remaining amount of strength, and the orphan lay back insensible in her chair.

With eager but mistaken zeal, Miss Warrington and her handmaiden hastened to arouse the exhausted girl from the perfect repose of mind and body induced by the syncope into which she had fallen, and to convey her to her chamber, where, at her earnest request, they left her to reflect upon all the unhoped-for events of the last few hours. And very strange, almost too strange for sober self-gratulation, appeared the total change which had supervened in all her feelings. Again and again she asked herself if it indeed were true; if it were not merely a cheat of her wandering reason? But again and again she was enabled to recall every word and almost every look; she seemed still to feel the pressure of the old man's lips upon her cheek, and the warm clasp of the hand which had so long been closed over her own, and she smiled the heart's smile as every succeeding moment strengthened her consciousness of the truth. She who had been so long an outcast, was then, indeed, at last to know the blessings of domestic affection; to be called by the endearing names of daughter—sister—wife! to see herself the object of care and tenderness, and love, when she had taught herself to believe that from all these holy privileges she was inexorably shut out. Her sense of happiness became almost painful. She had learned to support suffering, but she was feeble as an infant under this new sensation. The very silence appeared vocal to her, and the air laden with gentle voices, and the evening twilight bright with kindly smiles. Her narrow room was peopled with joyous visions, and her solitude made cheerful by their presence.

One dark shadow, and one only, gloomed amid the brightness of her thoughts: she had forgotten that she was poor, and that her poverty had for a time closed the heart of him to whom she was soon to pay the duty of a child she forgot that this same poverty would compel her to go a portionless bride to the arms of her destined husband; she had ceased to remember all her past struggles, and to weep over her faded beauty; but there was still one painful memory which would not be silenced. She had become an alien from the affection of her nearest relative, the playmate of her childhood, and the friend of her youth. Yes, from the period of his marriage it was evident that he had ceased to interest himself in her fate, perhaps even to recal her existence; and the affectionate heart of Gertrude swelled even amid her new sense of happiness, and the tears of disappointed feeling fell from her eyes, as this intrusive recollection forced itself upon her.

Although all her early dreams of hope had long melted away, like those ice-palaces which are constructed upon the Neva, only to melt beneath the next change of temperature; she yet clung to the son of that more than mother who had watched over her girlish years with a tenderness of which she had never hoped to be again the object; still she thought of him as of a loved and cherished brother; and the heart cannot easily forego so blessed a bond.

Thus there was yet one drop of gall in the overflowing cup of her meek delight, and for a while that drop appeared to taint the whole draught; but gradually she became awakened to the weakness of yielding to such depressing memories, and although the painful impression still remained, she compelled herself to turn to other and brighter thoughts; she finally sank to sleep, to dream of Ernest Armstrong, and to be happy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Sybil and Mortimer were man and wife; and they were travelling over that glorious Italy which they both loved so well, and were so well able to appreciate. More beautiful than ever in the eyes of her enraptured bridegroom, Mrs. Mortimer was radiant with smiles, bright with genius, and affectionate even beyond his hope. Surrounded by all the appliances of luxury, she had scarcely time to form a wish ere it was eagerly fulfilled; her days were all sunshine, and her heart all triumph. Now, indeed, she could defy fate; now, indeed, she was revenged upon that world which had dared to scorn her; and if she did not love her husband as he deserved to be loved, she could at least so thoroughly feign the tenderness for which he sought as to blind him to the fact.

At length they reached Rome; and here they had decided to spend a long and delicious month among the old and glorious memories of the past. No prospect could be more enchanting to Frederic, possessed of his long-coveted bride, and existing in the land of his predilection, he had not a desire unfulfilled; but Sybil soon became less enthusiastic than himself, and there was an evident restlessness in her manner each morning as they set forth to visit the memorable monuments of the Imperial City.

One of her constant cares since leaving England had been to examine the visitors' book of every hotel at which they took up their temporary abode; and although Frederic found an equal amusement in the heterogeneous assemblage of authographs thus placed under his eyes; yet, as he sat with his arm folded about the slight figure of his wife,—his glance following the direction of her finger—and laughed with her at the pompous announcement attached to the plebeian names of Tompkins, Jenkins, Smith, *e tutti quanti*, it was nevertheless evident that Sybil attached a serious interest to the survey, in which he was far from participating. A sigh of relief escaped her as she closed the dingy volume upon each occasion until that upon which we shall rejoin her.

Rome was crowded with foreigners; and it was not without considerable difficulty that Mortimer succeeded in securing for Sybil such accommodation as he considered worthy of her. The streets were loud with those trivial sounds of mere common-place every-day life, which form so paltry and puerile a contrast with the grand and stately relics of buried centuries; bright bonnets and idle laughter desecrated the mysteries of the Coliseum; dingy droschys and dusty berlins crowded the hotel yards; vociferous oaths in English, German, and Italian, were growled, screamed, or muttered on every side; the churches and the coffee-houses were alike full; and everything promised what the degenerate Romans of the present day, in their greed of gain and carelessness of the faded glories of the past, denominate a magnificent season.

The hotel-book was full of names, on which the ink had as yet had scarcely time to dry. Highnesses, duchesses, peers, and chevaliers of every order under the sun, were intermingled in sublime confusion with the city-knights, touring-traders, and chevaliers d'industrie. It was evident that not a hope of even partial seclusion remained for the married lovers. The fingers of Sybil had already indicated her acquaintance with at least a dozen of the new arrivals, while Frederic himself had discovered more than one name that was full of old associations. As yet, however, neither had been sufficiently discouraged to utter more than an impatient "Pshaw!" at each encounter, until the somewhat cramped and hyper-flourished signature of the Prince de Saviatti caused an involuntary start on the part of the lady, which brought a bright flush into her cheek.

"You know *il illustricimo Principe*, Sybil?" said Mortimer, who had observed her emotion.

"Yes," was the somewhat embarrassed reply; "in so far as such an individual really can be known. I met him frequently during a season in town, when, as he expressed it, he was 'doing his England,' and I confess that I am surprised to find him here, when I believed that he was in Egypt, or China, or at the antipodes, *pour pro mener sa paresse;* for he is full of Sicilian prejudices, and always laughed at my enthusiasm for Rome and its treasures."

"He is evidently no favorite of yours," remarked her husband, who had detected an unusual tinge of bitterness in her tone.

Sybil attempted a contemptuous laugh. "I have had few favorites," she said, as she passed her small and jewelled hand through the clustering curls of her companion: a liberty which he resented by drawing her to his bosom, and thus afforded her the opportunity she sought of recovering her self-possession; "and poor Saviatti is sufficiently well satisfied with himself to be able to dispense with all extraneous adoration; but I confess that for a time he amused me. You know, Frederic, that all depends upon the mood of the moment, and that the antics of the monkey sometimes interest as much as the stateliness of the lion; and thus Saviatti, a prince though he be, or at least calls himself, was my monkey during three months, after which I totally lost sight of him."

Mortimer was silent. It was not that one suspicion of Sybil's truth rushed across his mind, but as yet that past, into which he so ardently desired to penetrate, remained a mystery to him. On the eve of her marriage, he had not ventured to hazard a question, lest she might be pained by such an implied want of confidence; and since she had been his wife he had thought of her, only of her, and flung from him every anxiety save that of contributing to her happiness.

Now, however, he for the first time remembered that he had made no progress in her confidence, and that he was indebted to chance for every revelation connected with her early life. Nor had he felt altogether convinced by the explanation which he had extorted; for he could not conceal from himself that it was overstrained, and that its flippancy but ill disguised its hollowness.

It was, therefore, under the influence of a sensation as painful as it was novel to him, that he replied somewhat sarcastically: "In that case the meeting is a fortunate one; for the monkey-prince will afford a diverting relief after our solemn musings among mouldering ruins and crumbling monuments. We shall doubtlessly, soon meet, as we are domesticated under the same roof; and thus an acquaintance so gaily commenced may be as cheerfully continued."

"I care little ever to meet him again," said Sybil, dropping her beautiful head upon the shoulder of her husband, and looking up at him with one of those beaming smiles which always captivated his reason: "Every folly has its day, and becomes stale by repetition. Saviatti is too frivolous to leave one regret behind him."

"Did he visit England alone?" asked Frederic, already half appeased, as he bent down and kissed the fair forehead which was pillowed upon his bosom: "Was the monkey unaccompanied by his attendant bear?"

"Oh no! there was a tall, lean, sour-visaged abbate, who was in his train when he arrived in town; but I believe that the Prince wearied of the *espionage* to which he was condemned by the companionship of this saturnine individual, who had been attached to his person by his father, and so gave him his dismissal; for it is certain that he returned to Palermo only a few weeks after the advent of his principal."

"Saviatti is, then, a Palermitan?"

"So I understand. But you appear singularly

interested about this frivolous foreigner, Frederic!"-

"Do you wonder that it should be so, Sybil? Did he not know you, and apparently know you intimately, long before we had even met?"

Mrs. Mortimer changed her position; her cheek burnt, and she did not care to expose it to the observation of her husband.

"And do you believe that he, and such as he, could *ever* know me?" she asked with a pretty affectation of scorn. "Do both yourself and me better justice, my dear Frederic. Saviatti knows me as he knows Rome; he appreciates me as he appreciates the glories of the Parthenon and the sublimity of St. Peter's. And, apropos of this, what shall we do this evening? Surely we came to the Imperial City for a better purpose than that of 'chronicling small beer!'"

"Shall we visit the Coliseum?"

"*Il Colisco?* Oh no! Have you forgotten that the moon is at its full, and that it will swarm with fools? Let us go there when it can be, if not entirely, at least comparatively our own. I loathe to witness the tricks of the travelled mountebank, upon the very spot where once gushed forth the proud blood from the panting arteries of the stricken gladiator, or the holy life-tide of the Christian captive. Do not even let us attempt the Villa Medici; we shall be elbowed by foreign Excellencies and crimson-stockined Eminences; nor will that, in all probability, be the worst. Remember the list of names over which we have been pondering; and dread the encounter of this flight of northern locusts as you would the malaria of the Campagna."

"Whither *can* we go, then, to avoid them?" asked Frederic, once more appeased by the belief that all society had become importunate to Sybil which deprived her of his own. "Like the ravenous insects to which you have compared them, they will swarm in every direction."

"Have you ever visited the gardens of the Negroni?"

"Never."

"Will you devote your evening to me alone, without regret and without *ennui?*"

"Not my evening only, but my whole existence!" replied Frederic tenderly.

Sybil laughingly placed her hand upon his lips.

"Wait until we are wandering in the delicious solitudes to which I am about to introduce you," she said; "before you forget the husband in the lover. *There*, indeed, you will, or I greatly mistake you, be compelled to yield to the soft influence of the spot; about which we shall, in all probability, be permitted to ramble alone, as it has few attractions for the mere tourist, who seeks to see rather than to feel."

"What a delicious prospect! And when shall we set forth?"

"Now, if you will. The sun is near its decline, and the hour is most propitious."

And as Sybil spoke she passed to an inner apartment, whence she emerged a few moments afterwards, shawled and bonneted; and moreover, for the first time since her marriage, closely veiled. There was little fear that a man of pleasure like Saviatti would be found in the solitary recesses of the Negroni gardens; but even the risk, slight as it was, must be provided against; and congratulating herself upon her expedient for rendering "assurance doubly sure," Mrs. Mortimer, as she hung gracefully upon the arm of her husband, and heard him thank her again and again for so delightful a suggestion, smiled half in triumph and half in scorn. The evening would now pass away without any encounter with the prince; and she must trust to her tact to urge their early departure by every means in her power. She had ere this read her weak but devoted husband even to the heart's core; and she well knew that his vanity was the lever by which she could at all times move him at her will.

Long before they reached the silent and shadowy gardens, and even while she listened, apparently rapt in interested attention, to some old travelling memory with which Mortimer was endeavoring to beguile the way, her whole plan was arranged, and she felt secure of its success.

To her it would be no sacrifice to abandon Rome if she also escaped Saviatti. She had been warned in time of his presence; and she resolved to profit by the knowledge.

"We must leave Rome, and that speedily," she murmured to herself, as, with an exclamation of delight from Mortimer, they plunged into the thickest shades of the perfumed solitude, which to him promised an evening of intense and quiet happiness, and to her a few hours of insipidity and safety!

CHAPTER XXXV.

Fair and gracious reader, have you ever visited the Negroni Gardens at Rome? If not, be careful to bend your steps thitherward when you again find yourself a denizen of the lordly city, if you be one who loves that fantastic blending of the natural and the artistic, the present and the past, which speaks to the heart as well as to the senses; and affords a calm and soothing relief from the perpetual stir and excitement of the busy world by which you are surrounded.

The stamp of centuries was never more visibly impressed upon the mouldering remains of tower or battlement than it is upon the hoary trees and antique monuments of those far-reaching solitudes; above one of whose walls the Baths of Diocletian may be seen, apparently coeval with the long lines of untrimmed cypresses, whose trailing branches scarcely admit the passage of an intruder among their mysterious depths; and the wild patches of bay, scenting the air with their luxurious perfume, as if in emulation of the tangled masses of jasmine, starred with ten thousand blossoms; while, scattered on every side, at times half-buried amid the dense and vagrant vegetation, and at others rising in cold calm majesty upon some partially uninvaded spot, the wanderer encounters frag-

ments of ancient architecture, of which the date, the purpose, and even the name of him who wrought them, are alike unknown; vases of quaint device and graceful chisseling: altars erected to the Manes, in those deep and silent nooks so appropriate to their worship; and sarcophagi, which teach, as we look upon them, the sublime majesty with which past ages invested the idea of man's apotheosis.

It is rare that even the cry of a passing bird disturbs the silence of these dreary retreats; but there is a constant and mysterious voice among the leaves, as they heave or quiver to the passing wind; and a perpetual murmur of falling waters, trickling from the porphry basins which they overflow, and stealing away beneath a network of rank grass and aquatic weeds by which their onward course is totally concealed. When the eye wanders upwards, and penetrates between the sturdy boughs of the ancient wood, it sees, shadowed upon the dense purple sky of evening, the massive domes, and tall singularly shaped tower of Santa Maria Maggiore; the worship of art is without those hoary walls; the worship of nature is within; for how much is there of holiness in such a scene—how much to exalt the soul, and to rebuke the pride!

For a while Sybil and Mortimer walked forward in silence. Both were too full of their own sensations to break the stillness by a word. To Frederic the whole wilderness was one of enchantment; his heart throbbed, and he pressed more closely to his side the hand which rested on his arm, without even remarking that the mute caress was not returned. The spirit of the spot was within him, and about him. Keenly alive to the grand and solemn in nature, he was absorbed by that rare and beautiful feeling of universal love which comes like a holy dream upon the heart only at those infrequent moments when every hope appears to be realized, and when it makes of its happiness one common crucible in which to blend and to purify every thing around it.

It is true that many individuals pass through life without either the opportunity or the necessary faculty for experiencing this enviable, and, alas! too transitory state of feeling. Hume has said that "some people are subject to a certain delicacy of passion;" and Mortimer was precisely such a person. Jealous of the affection of others, he was equally lavish of his own; pure in taste, upright in principle, and tenacious of all which affected his honor, he was, nevertheless, supine in the ordinary interests of life; he had neither ambition, nor a desire of wealth; he lived rather in a self-created world of sensation than in that outward and material circle by which he was environed; and he was, consequently, more readily influenced by purely personal circumstances than one who had diffused his hopes and his anxieties over a broader sphere of impulse and action.

Thus, then, at the moment described, his heart and his aspirations were alike satisfied. He had won the woman whom he loved; and, despite those passing shadows of misgiving which are the ordinary concomitants of strong and exacting passion, he nevertheless, did not entertain a doubt that, on his part, he was equally beloved. Sybil was at his side, they trod together a path of silence and enchantment, and Mortimer was supremely happy.

And where had the thoughts of Sybil wandered? Were they with the husband upon whose arm she leaned? Were they with the mother from whom she was for the first time separated? —or did they linger upon that home of which she was so soon to become the presiding genius, and on those duties which would, hereafter, devolve upon her? In sooth, they were occupied by none of these. As they turned from one avenue into another, a hasty glance first assured her that their solitude still continued uninvaded, and then, her reflections fell back to the point at which they had momentarily paused.

For months, Rome had been the object of all her wishes, as well as those of Mortimer; but from Rome she now felt that it was expedient they should depart at once, and the pretext for this apparent caprice was readily found. Yet, to return to Westrum—to bury herself in an obscure English county, of whose monotony she had already had dreary experience, now that her point was carried, and that the world was once more before her—revolted alike her vanity and her patience. And for whom was she required to do this? For a man whose supineness she despised, whose intellect she scorned, and of whose feelings she was careless. Sybil at once convinced herself that such a sacrifice was impossible. She was not formed for home, either by nature or by education; nor was she responsible for the mistake which her husband had wilfully committed, in supposing that the mere fact of becoming his wife would change alike her principles and her tastes.

That this mistake is of daily occurrence in the world, and perpetrated even by men of shrewd sense and habitual prudence upon other points, is certain; and that it will continue to be so is equally sure, so long as vanity and sensual gratification are suffered to silence the dictates of reason; but so trite a truth could offer no mitigation to the disappointment of a particular individual, and was assuredly not calculated to assuage that of a man of Mortimer's peculiar temperament.

From the very period of her enforced retirement from a world by which she had once been worshipped, Sybil had felt the most invincible desire to return to it, so soon as she should have secured a position which would enable her to revenge what she had never ceased to consider as its injustice. Accustomed to regard herself as one constituted to shine in whatever circle she might embellish by her presence, and caring little for the happiness of domestic life, and still less for the charm of domestic duties, she felt at home only in the midst of a crowd, and as the centre of admiration. The excitement which fatigues and exhausts a less ambitious nature, was to hers the very aliment on which it existed; and she looked forward to the prospect of re-appearing in the world, in the character of a wealthy married woman, with delight, as it would afford the opportunity of a social vengeance, well calculated to soothe her pride and to satisfy her ambition.

It was, consequently, upon speculations such as these that the thoughts of Sybil were engaged, amid the solemn shades threaded by Mortimer with tender veneration; nor was her reverie disturbed by a single word until they reached a spot so striking and picturesque, as to rouse even her companion from his trance of delight. They had traversed one of the cypress avenues from end to end; and then, striking into a lateral walk, fragrant with untended lemon-trees and vagrant honeysuckle, sheltered on its northern side by a thick belt of bay, and rendered fresh and verdant upon its other lip by one of those hidden rivulets of water already described, they suddenly came upon a small open space, in the centre of which stood an altar, moss-grown and hoary, where an eternal requiem was supplied by the overflowing of a capacious basin which was half veiled by the surrounding underwood, and the flexible leaves which trembled, as if in adoration to the touch of the passing breeze.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Frederic, as he suddenly paused, and claimed the attention of his musing bride. "Where can we find a better halting place? Here, Sybil, the world, and the world's follies are, indeed, as nothing; and we may, for a few instants, be all in all to each other. With what exquisite judgment did our forefathers select the spots which they dedicated to the past affections and the past ties by which they had been linked to the loved and lost! How must the Manes, could they be conscious of the present, cherish a scene like this! Let us rest here a while. See how luxurious a couch is spread for you beneath this thicket of bay, overarched by tall and stately cypress-trees!—the mossy turf yields to the foot more softly than the velvet carpets of a palace; the gurgling water and the awakened leaves are redolent of harmony; and we may here indulge in the full consciousness of a happiness which has nothing more to ask of destiny, save its continuance."

"It is, indeed, a lovely retreat," said Sybil, as she suffered herself to be established beside the brimming basin, whence the crystal waters escaped with a low murmur which lent a mystic voice to the solitude; "To be happy here, the spirit need only be at peace."

"Let us, then, be happy," retorted the still enamored husband, as he flung himself beside her, and supporting her slight figure with his encircling arm; "For are we, at least, not at peace? Are we not well able to appreciate all its charm? I love you in the world, Sybil; in the crowd where my protection and my support are necessary to your more delicate nature; but in such a scene as this how doubly dear do you appear to me, where you are all my own, and we are alone with the sublime works of nature!"

"Would that we could ever be thus, my best friend!" replied Sybil, with one of her most radiant smiles; "but, alas! that is impossible. We owe ourselves to the world, which is a stern task-mistress, and will enforce their duties upon all her children. Even now, since we entered these gardens, I feel overwhelmed by a sense of my own individual responsibility; I have become convinced that the path before me must not be perpetually strewn with roses. And when I think of you, Frederic; of you, with all your glorious faculties, and manifold opportunities of good, I become almost sad with anxiety. You know how I love you; for have I not given myself to you, despite the resolution of years, and the dictates which I had so long accustomed myself to regard as those of a calm and matured reason? And yet, I confess that I would also feel myself compelled to regard you with pride as well as affection; I would see you just to yourself; not shunning the world as an object either of scorn or alarm, but boldly taking your place among the foremost of those by whom its destinies are controlled."

"Sybil, you astonish me! What can I need more than I possess?—what can the world of which you speak add to my present happiness? Have I not wealth sufficient to ensure to you—and that alone can now be my consideration—all the luxuries of life? Is not my social station unexceptionable? Are not you my own? What have I now to do with ambition? My race of hope is run."

"Are you then content to die and be forgotten?"

"Not by those who love me. Not by such as you, Sybil; but I care little for the memory of the world. Look around you. We are here almost on holy ground. This silent, and yet most eloquent monument, perpetuates the recollection of some departed one, but it identifies that recollection only for those who reared it. Thus would I have it myself. Rear for me an imperishable altar in your own heart, and I shall ask no worship which would entail a more conspicuous shrine."

"Let us, then, talk of life rather than death," said Sybil, with a sigh for which Mortimer felt grateful to her. "You are still too young to immure yourself in a country house, limiting your duties to receiving rents and entertaining provincial persons. Neither your tastes nor your acquirements fit you for occupations like these, and I confess that I cannot see you reconcile yourself thus to fritter away your years and your faculties, without remorse and regret; remorse that my society may induce you to bear with such a fate, and regret that you should not have chosen a nobler destiny."

"And how can I dispel such bitter feelings?" asked her bridegroom playfully; "Shall I volunteer myself as prime minister, or try my fortune as commander-in-chief? Nevertheless," he added more gravely, "you surprise me greatly, Sybil; for we have so frequently and so fondly talked together of the delights of a tranquil home, and the happiness of making that home the centre of benevolence and love, that I was unprepared for this change of sentiment in one by whom I believed that my thoughtful and somewhat indolent nature was thoroughly understood."

"Nor must you now misconceive me, Frederic," replied Sybil somewhat anxiously; "Before I became your wife I thought only, I dreamed only of securing your affection, of having you constantly beside me, and of engrossing all the faculties of your soul; but now that I know you better and prize your more; now that egotism has become less prominent, and that I live in

you rather than in myself, I have learned to be jealous of your future destiny. I desire that others should understand and appreciate you as I do—that they should be compelled to acknowledge that what you will to do, you can accomplish; in short, that you were never born to live and die a mere country gentleman, vegetating with your crops, and confining alike your ambition and your patriotism to the due payment of your taxes, and an annual speech at the county dinner."

"What a malicious picture, Sybil!"

"Is it not correct in every feature? And, meanwhile, who are you permitting to outstrip you in the race of life? I will not speak of the great master-spirits of the age; let them wear with honor the laurels that they have so nobly won; but look at the herd of mere empty imitators, who make a reputation by the simple mimicry of their great models, as certain blocks of stone owe a voice to the sounds they do but echo; and who, while only the shadows of a substance which they follow, conscious that they have no other means of moral existence, are nevertheless, included in the public eye as part and parcel of the being of the very leaders whom they imitate, even while they are unable to appreciate their powers. Are these, and such as these, crippled alike in means, in station, and in acquirements, to bear away the palm of the world's praise, while you look on supinely? Believe me, Frederic, you are destined to higher fortunes than those bequeathed to you by your ancestors."

"You are an enthusiast, Sybil, and because you love me, you imagine that I am equal to any emergency; but you forget that the very nature of my education has altogether unfitted me for the strife and struggle of the world. Home-usefulness has been the only aim and end of *my* ambition. I have tenantry and dependants to whom I owe all the exertion of which I am capable."

"Say rather, which you are disposed to make," replied his fair wife somewhat impatiently; "But you should rouse yourself, Frederic, from so unseemly a state of moral lethargy. Your local duties are sacred only to a certain point, nor can they entail the necessity of self-sacrifice. You have a handsome property, it is true, but in this respect you only resemble hundreds of others, and consequently that simple fact will afford you none of that personal distinction which is necessary to make a figure in the world. Moreover, you owe your present position to the energy and prudence of your ancestors; the contingency is purely adventitious, and, as yet, you have done nothing for yourself."

"What would you have me to do? My habits are formed; I am no longer young enough to brook control, nor am I so necessitous as to render it endurable."

Sybil laughed. "One would imagine," she did playfully, for by the inflexion of her husband's voice she was at once aware that he was displeased by her pertinacity; "One would really imagine, my dear Frederic, that I proposed to induce you to enter into a merchant's office, or to purchase an ensign's commission. Is there not such a career as diplomacy, for instance, where at once you might avail yourself of your natural talents, and of your knowledge of continental habits and policy?—a career of which, possessed of such advantages as yours, it is impossible to prophecy the termination."

"And our home, Sybil?"

"Our home will be rendered prouder and happier by the distinction of its owner."

"But I have no influence with the Government, even were I to permit myself to indulge in such a vision."

"You have money, and a golden key unlocks every door in our dear treasure-worshipping England."

Frederic sighed as he glanced around him. How little had he anticipated such a discussion in that delicious solitude! For months had he talked with Sybil of the tranquil happiness of that ancestral home which she now so strenuously urged him to abandon. He was well aware that, once involved in public life, he should have little leisure for those calm and heart-satisfying pleasures which are never to be secured elsewhere; and he remembered, almost with a pang, that none of her previous arguments had prepared him for such an effort at self-abnegation. And yet, he was rather pained than angry. If she did indeed wish him to make so vast a sacrifice, was it not her love for him, her pride in him, which led her to forget that she was also, should she succeed in inspiring him with her views, sacrificing herself?

It was consequently with a sad smile that he pursued the subject, by reminding her that such an undertaking was beset with difficulties; that their comfort, their affection, and their peace of mind, would be perilled for an uncertain result, while, even should all end favorably, they could never again be all in all to each other.

Sybil, however, had counter-arguments to advance, which, even if they were not conclusive, were at least flattering and plausible; but still Mortimer hesitated to pledge himself to a line of conduct so repugnant to his tastes.

"Enough of this for to-day, dearest," he said, as he pressed to his lips the small hand which had remained clasped in his own throughout their dialogue; "Let us not further darken the present by anxiety for the future. Are we not in Rome, Sybil? And is it not profanation thus to wander away in thought from the glories by which we are surrounded?"

"You will think me very capricious, my own Frederic," said his wife tenderly, "when I tell you that I already weary to return to England. I know by your start that you are surprised, but you must forgive me when I confess that not even your affection can make me forget a thousand anxieties—my mother, alone for the first time—the unsettled state of my unfortunately involved affairs. Do you know that I absolutely shudder when I reflect upon all the trouble and annoyance which await you on my account, and shall have no real peace until all is arranged?"

"Leave Rome!" exclaimed Frederic, painfully impressed he knew not wherefore, by this sudden whim.

"I knew that you would be astonished, dear love," said Sybil with well-acted humility; 'but

you must recollect, that however you may have exalted me in your own affectionate imagination, I am only a woman, after all; and then, remember that we can return whenever we wish to do so; and that, with a heart at ease, I shall be so much better able to give myself up to all the delights of such a sojourn. In short, you know not, Frederic," she added in a low whisper, as she buried her face upon his shoulder, "how many, and what earnest reasons I have for wishing to return at once to England."

"Is it in order to congratulate me upon my forthcoming embassy?" asked Mortimer, forcing a smile; but before she could reply they were suddenly and unexpectedly interrupted.

"I am sure that I cannot be mistaken," exclaimed a voice which appeared to rise from the ground immediately beside them, as a figure emerged from behind a tangled mass of bay-trees, and advanced rapidly towards the spot where they were seated: "I am quite sure that I see, or that at least I hear Miss Delamere."

The words were English, but the accent in which they were uttered was decidedly foreign, and the change of position necessitated by so abrupt an apparition, enabled Sybil to conceal from her husband the emotion which they had elicited, as, extending her hand, she answered with wonderful self-command, "Your ear has not deceived you, Prince, and we are, indeed, fated to meet again at Rome."

"No matter where," was the reply, as the speaker clasped the offered hand, and then threw himself upon the grass beside her; "No matter where, so that, as you say, we meet again. Are you long from England?"

"About two months: and you?"

"Oh, I? I really scarcely know—I hardly recollect—I remember nothing since we parted; since you—"

"Prince," interposed Mrs. Mortimer hastily: "allow me to present to you—my husband."

"*Corpo di Bacco!*" ejaculated the intruder as if unconsciously; but in the next instant he recovered himself, and with considerable dignity, replied with a low bow; "I am honored. Sir, I congratulate you; I understand all now; and, perhaps I should apologize—but two months—two whole months—that will be my excuse, and you will forgive my indiscretion."

Mortimer bowed in his turn.

"The Prince Saviatti, my dear Frederic, of whom I have spoken to you," said Sybil with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Ha! Madam has spoken of me," pursued the foreigner; "I am, it is impossible to be more, flattered. We are then, old acquaintance. Do you stay long in Rome, Sir?"

"We are as yet undecided," replied the young husband, irritated he knew not wherefore by the cool and self-satisfied manner of the intruder.

"Oh, then, I shall have the honor to decide you," was the rejoinder. "Madame and I are such old and good friends, and we have so much to talk over, and we shall be so glad to come together again in this charming manner. I know this old Rome of ours now, *de bout en blanc*, and I shall have the happiness to be your *cicerone*, and to be always beside you."

Mortimer involuntarily shrank back; the easy hyper-courtesy of his new acquaintance revolted his English reserve.

"We have here many of your old acquaintance, Mademoiselle—*c'est-à-dire*, Madame"—resumed the Prince; "And ha!—it is a sad pity, but you have just come one little day too late to see Trevor. He went yesterday—he would go yesterday; I could not stop him. He is like you; he forgets old times, and he goes home to your foggy England to fetch his wife."

"His wife!"

"Yes, yes, he is determined at last to play the *pastor fido*. Poor Trevor! he makes a grand mistake—don't you see it as I do? But he had so little choice. He was pretty near what you call in London 'cleared out,' couldn't get on, you know, and so—married. Perhaps he was right, and I consoled him with this; 'Bad enough,' I said, 'but better than worse; a rich wife is always better than an empty purse.'"

"Will you never reform?" asked Sybil with affected playfulness.

"I must," was the prompt reply; "since you and Trevor have presented me with so charming an example—so encouraging a model. Perhaps I may even marry a rich wife myself—when there is no other hope left for me."

"You are ungallant, Prince," said Mrs. Mortimer, resolutely concealing her annoyance.

"Not at all; for I cannot hope to find a second Miss Delamere. See now—I find you here alone with Monsieur———" he paused for an instant, but as Sybil did not pronounce the name of her husband, which he had evidentally awaited, he pursued in the same tone; "absolutely alone in this solitude, while other married pairs are congregated in the Coliseo, or the Parthenon, or St. Peter's—Is it not enough to make me despair? I always suspect the couples who are so anxious to *afficher leur bonheur;* while you disarm me by your evident desire to escape the crowd. Monsieur is too happy—Who will not envy him his triumph?"

Mortimer writhed beneath a familiarity which he felt to be almost insolent. It was not thus that he had approached Sybil: that he had won her. He could not brook that she should be subjected to what he considered as an affront to her dignity, and he was about to make some caustic remark, when he was interrupted by the Prince, who, as he reclined upon the ground almost at the feet of his fair friend, languidly striking a costly cane mounted with gems against his polished boot, asked carelessly—

"And how long do you remain in Rome, Madame? I am here for the next three months, and—always with the permission of Monsieur—I shall ask you to do the same. You will be well amused. We shall have plenty to occupy us in the present, and we have so much to talk over, and—who knows?—to remedy in the past."

"We leave the day after to-morrow," said Sybil resolutely.

"Tyrant!" laughed the Prince: "You want to be persuaded—entreated."

"I do not always yield either to persuasion

or entreaty," and the tone of Mrs. Mortimer grew still more cold and repelling.

"True—not always," conceded M. Saviatti with undiminished composure ; "but sometimes —you will not deny that sometimes you are not inexorable. See—I am at your feet—and I pray you to retract your threat."

"Our plans are decided."

"Bah!" ejaculated the Prince sarcastically; "Monsieur, married since two or three months, must be accustomed to see you change your mind. I have not, unhappily, the right to ask that you should once more do so at my request, but the tastes of your sex are so variable that I may at least hope. Why should *you*, Madame," and there was a shade of mockery in his tone as he proceeded; "why should *you* desire to stand alone, and to declare your will immutable? Do you hope that, knowing all your other perfections, any one will consent to believe so enormous a solecism? No, no; when I have the honor to meet you to-morrow, you will say to me frankly: 'Prince, I have repented my idle resolution, and am for three months in Rome.'"

"We shall see."

Mortimer had with difficulty restrained his indignation, but the evident displeasure of Sybil had so far moderated his momentarily-increasing annoyance as to enable him to control his feelings.

The last impertinent rejoinder of Saviatti was, however, more than he could support, and, suddenly springing up, he extended his hand to his wife, as he said with affected calmness,—

"Sybil, the air is becoming damp. I cannot allow you to remain longer exposed to its influence. Prince, I have the honor to wish you a good evening."

"Not at all, Monsieur; not at all," said the pertinacious foreigner; "Madame and I are old friends; I will accompany you"—and, rising in his turn, he prepared to put his purpose into execution.

"You will excuse me," said Mortimer, suddenly stopping short, and forcing his words through his clenched teeth; "I am this lady's husband: for my sake she has been good enough to forget, or at least to resign, all past friendships, and, as you and I are total strangers, you will do me a favor by permitting us to return alone."

"Oh, Monsieur, by all means—by all means in the world," replied the Prince, with an affectation of ceremonious courtesy which became a sarcasm from its excess. "I owe you ten thousand apologies, and I know so well the value of Madame's society, that I am conscious, very conscious of my error. I have the honor to salute you both, and to make you my sincere compliment on your marriage." And so saying, Saviatti raised his hat, bowed profoundly, and moved forward with a brisk step; humming as he went one of the popular airs of the day.

"Sybil," demanded Mortimer sternly, when they were once more alone; "what is the meaning of what has just passed?"

"The meaning," replied his wife with an impatient shrug of the shoulders; "the meaning simply is that you have been 'spirited by a fool; spirited and angered worse,' and, that by your want of self-command, you have made us the proverb of Rome."

"Be it so," said Mortimer; "a few hours will suffice for us to leave the ridicule behind. We will abide by your decision, and return at once to England."

"You are strangely discomposed, Frederic."

"I do not wish to conceal it. Oh, Sybil!" he continued vehemently; "did you know, could you imagine, the proud confidence with which I have always looked upon you—Were you able to estimate the resolute scorn with which I have flung from me every suspicion of that past which you so pertinaciously conceal—the absorbing affection which I have poured out at your feet—you would comprehend what I have suffered during the last hour."

"Am I to understand that you are weak enough to be jealous, Frederic?"

"Perhaps so—but this is not all. I tremble to perceive that my faith in you is shaken; that I am under the influence of some inexplicable misgiving—that, in short, I shall never again feel safe in your affection, until you lay the whole past before me, frankly and confidently."

"Frederic—Mr. Mortimer," exclaimed Sybil indignantly, as she turned her flashing eyes full upon him: "Am I to be made the sacrifice, because an idle babbler sees fit to vent his inanities upon me? Had I not already told you that I knew this man? That he was an empty coxcomb, living only for himself, and making his rank an excuse for his absurdities? Would it have been more delicate, more honorable in me to have betrayed his secret, as you now compel me to do—and to have met your questioning with the reply that he had loved me? Let it suffice that you are now in possession of this mighty secret, and that the rejected suitor will not fail to amuse all Rome before noon to-morrow, at the expense of the jealous husband."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The reader must now follow us to a vast and magnificent apartment, of such extent that the dark walls—whereon a series of ancient family portraits pannelled into the wood-work, and encircled by a faded gold moulding, too much time-worn to reflect the light—were left in the deep shadow; although, in the centre of the marble floor, a somewhat capacious table bore a cluster of wax tapers, which shed their brilliancy over a number of crystal goblets, tall-necked bottles, and a small tray containing dishes of olives, prepared caviare, salted sardines, and other provocatives of thirst. On either side of the table were ranged rows of chairs; against one of which rested a long slender Turkish *chibouque* of jasmin-wood, with a superb mouth-piece of amber, encircled by large turquoise; and the *boudaka*, or bowl of gilded clay, carefully placed in a small round dish of highly-polished brass. Near another stood a magnificent oriental *narghile;* its ample vase of elaborately cut glass already filled with the

scented waters through which the coarser aroma of the Virginian weed was destined to pass before it reached the lips of the smoker; and its long pliable tube of leather, bound with crimson and silver threads, coiled like a glittering snake upon the table above. A couple of boxes of cedar-wood, inscribed with certain letters and figures, which doubtlessly certified as to the genuineness of their contents, were still hermetically closed; but, from their form and fashion, it was easy to discover that they also were filled with tobacco in that more symmetrical and minute shape which has lately obtained so much in European taste; while scattered here and there, among the sparkling wines and goblets of Venice glass, were cards, and dice, and other necessary appliances of the gambler's craft.

In short, all around announced the necessary preparation for one of those midnight orgies in which the idle and the *desœuvre* are accustomed to cheat their *ennui*, to waste their health, and to consume their substance. And it was strange and even sad to glance round that stately room, with its angles gradually disappearing in the darkness, its grim warriors and frowning senators looking down as if in cold and silent scorn from their gloomy eminence, and the huge mirror resting upon the high wide mantel of particolored marble, and dimly reflecting in the distance the deep glow of the clustered lights; and to see it profaned by such occupation. It seemed like a bitter satire silently pronounced by past splendor upon modern folly.

The silence was, however, of short duration; for, as though they had only awaited the completion of these preliminary arrangements, groups of young and fashionably-dressed men ere long began to arrive, until every seat save one was filled; that which was marked by the position of the *narghile;* and servants in rich but varied liveries began to busy themselves in opening the cedar boxes, and pouring out the rich wines, which were dispersed over the table.

Every European nation seemed to have supplied its representative to that nocturnal revel. On one side the deep flashing eyes, and raven hair, and *bistre* complexion of the Spaniard, were contrasted with the pale cheek and sandy locks of the Norwegian; on another, the once fresh, but now somewhat faded complexion and calm hazel eyes of the Englishman, formed a marked and characteristic contrast to the dull skin and restless physiognomy of the Frenchman; the Greek, with his finely-articulated features and mobile expression, was thrown into violent contact with the impassible and moody gravity of the Turk; and the volatile and gesticulating Italian had taken his place beside the polished but wary Russian. It was, in sooth, a gathering together of the nations, thus individually assembled for one common worship—for one simultaneous bowing down before the Baal of dissipation and excess. For a time nothing was heard save the questions and rejoinders necessitated by the nature of the meeting; but ere long, everything being arranged to the satisfaction of the revelers, the domestics gradually withdrew, and the business of the evening commenced.

In one direction a couple of gamesters, too indolent, or too impatient, to trust their fortunes to the slower process of the cards, were hazarding large sums upon a single throw of the dice; in another, a party were collected round a roulette-table, established in an angle of the apartment, which had just been lighted up; at the principal table, sundry of the guests had paired off at *ecarte*, while others stood by, and made heavy bets upon the game. In short, all were occupied save two—one, a splendid-looking man of some four or five and thirty, evidently a native Italian—and the other a youth whose fresh and ruddy complexion, well-opened gray eye, and auburn hair, at once demonstrated his English origin.

"It is strange, however, Duke," said the latter, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar upon the table; "that he should be the only loiterer, when, only a few hours ago, he announced his intention to join us early. Did I not know that he loves the dice-box better than any *dama* in Rome, I should say that the poor prince had met with an adventure."

His companion only shrugged his shoulders, and smoked on in silence.

"And he promised to give me my revenge too," pursued the hopeful youth; "and that cannot be done in half an hour. However, I will-not believe that Saviatti would take advantage of my ill-luck."

"You are censorious, *il mio arco*," said the Duca, as he suffered a huge volume of smoke to escape from his closed lips, and smiled sarcastically: "You take your revenge out of fortune when you should look nearer home. The fact is, that you cannot play."

"Not play *ecarte!*" exclaimed the young man, wounded in his most sensitive point: "A pretty joke, indeed! Why, I have done little else for the last few years."

"Perhaps so," was the unmoved reply.

"Every fool can play *ecarte;*" persisted the stripling, still more incensed by the *sang-froid* of his companion.

"Not *every* fool, Milord," said the Italian: "I will explain to you——"

"I want no explanation," retorted the youth haughtily; "I have played at Baden, Berlin, and Vienna; I know every chance of the game, and I repeat that Saviatti owed all his success to my ill-luck. Did I not win 12,000 francs at Paris in one week?"

"Perhaps so," again repeated the Italian; "and you are very likely to lose the same sum in one night at Rome."

"You are an ill prophet, Duke."

"*Perche?* Because I tell you the truth? Look you, Milord Squanderleigh, I could myself, in a fortnight, send you home to the good Earl, your father, with nothing in your pocket but your genealogy, and your *bonbonniere*——but I am a man of honor, and I have a conscience. I shall not play."

"You fancy that you are more than a match for me?"

"*Devvero.*"

"Let us try."

"No, no; let us smoke. These Havanas are good and cheap."

"Pshaw! Nonsense! You treat me like a child."

The Duke smiled.

"Upon my soul," said the lordling, while a sudden flush crimsoned his handsome countenance, "if you believe that I feel indebted to you for what you are pleased to consider as a proof of your forbearance, you are strangely mistaken; and, therefore, if you do not wish me to look upon what you have said as an affront, let us play."

"*Bene!* since I can retain your valuable friendship upon no other terms, let us play." And, so saying, the Italian calmly swept out of his way the glasses, cigar-tray, and bottle of Cyprus wine which were ranged before him; and, taking up a couple of packs of the cards which were profusely scattered over the table, began to throw aside the low numbers with a languid gesture, as though he depreciated the exertion thus pertinaciously thrust upon him.

While he was thus engaged, three or four of the spectators, who had been overlooking another game, gathered round the two new actors, and "I bet upon *il Signor Duco*," was the simultaneous exclamation.

"We want no bets," said the excited young nobleman; "I hate to play like a puppet, at the bidding of my backer. Duke, we play soberly for a stake—What shall it be?"

"What you please."

"You see, you cannot frighten me, for, if there be anything which I thoroughly understand, it is *écarté*."

"Now, you are endeavoring to alarm me in your turn," said the Italian noble with perfect gravity; "but I also have good nerves. I love your country—'Old England,' as you are proud to call her—so, name your own stakes, but let them be in English money."

"Ten, twenty, thirty guineas the game; take your choice."

"I am a moderate man, *corpo di Bacco!*" said the Duke, as he coolly lighted a fresh cigar; "I will make my choice *au juste milieu:* twenty is enough—quite enough."

"Ha! you begin to wince."

"Not yet, not yet. By-and-by I shall tell you how I feel."

"We have never yet played together."

"Never. I seldom play: now and then, but only to oblige, as I do now."

"I will give you a lesson," laughed the reckless young lordling.

"*Servitore;* I am always happy to learn."

Meanwhile, high play was progressing throughout the apartment, and among the most eager of the gamblers were the Russian prince, the German baron, and the Hungarian count, who had established themselves at the roulette-table. Piles of gold were heaped up and swept away as if by enchantment; and long before day-dawn the German had flung his watch and signet-ring upon the fatal baize, the Russian his diamond star in pledge for a hundred roubles, and the Hungarian the jewelled clasps of his sable-lined pelisse. Less excitable at games of chance than their foreign visitors, the Romans were masters of the field.

And at intervals, even amid the high-born and high-bred assemblage, bitter oaths were vented, and peals of hideous laughter—the laughter of mingled mortification and rage—awakened the dull echoes of the spacious room; deep draughts were drained, and snatches of licentious song added ribaldry to vice.

Yet still the play went on. Why should it pause? When its votaries had exhausted their gold, they had still their honor to trade upon; and so small strips of paper, ready prepared upon a consol of black marble, supported by gilded Cupids linked together by garlands of roses, were passed from hand to hand; and the cards were cut, and the dice were thrown, as eagerly, if not quite as gaily, as when the solid metal had been showered down in streams.

From time to time, the vapor of brandy rose upon the heated atmosphere, and the unsteady hand by which it was poured betrayed the evil fortunes of the reveller, for whom the more generous and less enervating wine had lost its spell, and throughout all this turmoil, all this toil, and all this excitement, the placid duke and the reckless lordling still played on, almost in silence.

Meanwhile, however, Saviatti had arrived: but the engrossing occupation of those around him had only enabled them to greet his entrance by a gesture or a glance; while, apparently satisfied with this somewhat equivocal welcome, the Palermitan quietly took possession of his chair, ignited his *narghilè*, carefully placed a minute and gilded pill of opium upon the surface of the tobacco, and smoked on in silence, absorbed in his own thoughts.

Another hour went by, and a bright streak of light introduced itself between the damask draperies which veiled one of the high casements, announcing that another day had dawned. Symptoms of weariness began to betray themselves in some of the losing gamesters, and gradually a group collected round the principal table, and began to revenge themselves by excess of another description upon the evil freaks of fortune.

"*Testa di Vénus!*" exclaimed a bright-eyed Roman; "*Ecco Saviatti.* Prince, I pledge you in a goblet of Salernian. I did not see you enter. You must have arrived just as—"

"You were about to make your fortune on the red, when the black was turned," said the Palermitan quietly; "you are a perfect victim this year, *amico mio.*"

"At cards, perhaps," was the self-satisfied retort; "in other respects, I have no right to complain."

"No, no; we all know that the fates favor you elsewhere. But how prospers your pursuit of the *Altessa?*"

The Roman smiled conceitedly; swept away his clustering black curls from a forehead which might have become a hero, and threw himself back negligently in his chair.

"Bah, bah! Colonna is affecting discretion," said a French count, who was at his elbow, with a sneer. "Nothing is more *mauvais ton, mon cher;* nothing is more *gentil berger.* Either you have failed—in which case you are right to keep your own secret—or you must travel a year or

two longer, and learn to estimate the reputation of a *femme galante* at its proper price."

"Talking of women," broke in Saviatti with a half yawn, as he withdrew the ivory mouth-piece of his *narghilè* from his lips, and slowly swayed the flexile tube to and fro between his fingers; "women and discretion, be it rightly understood—I had a most amusing encounter this evening, and but for two untoward circumstances, I might have been as happy as Colonna implies to be."

"And what were they?" asked half-a-dozen voices.

"In the first place," said the Palermitan, in the same semi-tragic accent in which he had made his announcement; "in the first place, my dear friends, a jealous husband—"

"*Eh, que disgracia!*"

"In the next, a sudden determination to leave Rome; or rather, to leave me."

"To leave *you!* Impossible!"

"Impossible, perhaps, but nevertheless a fact. And in order to show you that I am too generous to follow a bad example—Colonna, pass me the champaigne—I will drink the lady's health, and tell you her history."

"Brava! brava!" was the general chorus.

Saviatti filled his glass with the sparkling fluid, and drank it off; then, glancing round the table upon his listeners, he said quietly: "You all remember the English Trevor?"

"All, all!"

"Well, then, you are also aware that I first arrived in Rome in Trevor's company; but you are one and all ignorant of the fact that before quitting England, he was an engaged man. The lady was beautiful; is beautiful—your Altessa, *il mio caro* Colonna, is a Swiss beside her; and your Duchessa, *mon cher* De Tremblay, a grisette. Trevor, in the pride of his heart, presented me to his *fiancée*, and I, as I need scarcely tell you, was civil to her for his sake. Never did I see a man of his indolent and languid temperament more inconveniently in love with his future wife.

"After a career of recklessness, the father of *la bella* died insolvent, but that fact did not affect the passion of Trevor: he was really fatiguing in his assiduities, and I almost began to forgive the lady when I imagined that she thought so as well as myself; for I must do her the justice to acknowledge that she occasionally emancipated herself very skilfully from the thrall, and took a liberal revenge by coquetting right and left whenever she could secure a safe opportunity, until, at length, I heard her name bandied rather freely at the clubs, and coupled in no very mysterious manner with those of two or three of Trevor's constant associates.

"As for myself, I knew from the first that she was the betrothed wife of my friend; and, moreover, beautiful as she was, I had seen another whom I thought fairer; consequently, I felt quite at liberty to enact the Damon to my Pythias, and took upon me to hint to *il fanatico per l'amore* that he was duped. Perhaps you fancy that he was grateful to me for this modern act of chivalry? You deceive yourselves. What was the friendship of half-a-dozen Palermitan princes, compared to the love of Sybil? He was furious, *mei amici*, furious. He believed what I told him, as a matter of course, for I had pledged my honor to every statement that I made, but he spurned at the idea that they had any foundation save in the censorious imaginations of those who had propagated the scandal; and so, despite all that I could urge, he still loved on, while these same slanders gained ground, and I could no longer doubt that, by persisting in his suit, he was making his own misery. I felt that something desperate must be done, for his malady was beyond a common cure; and, accordingly—with no slight desire, also, I confess, of preventing a step which would deprive me of a favorite companion—I resolved, despite his indignation, to recur to the forbidden subject, and even to offer him an opportunity of testing the lady's truth in so unequivocal a manner that he should no longer retain a doubt as to his true position.

"After a thousand scruples, he, at length, consented to undergo the ordeal, and as I had more than once suspected that the beautiful Miss Delamere was far from appreciating at its just value the very ceremonious courtesy with which I had studiously treated her, and had ambition enough to feel flattered by the prospect of becoming *la signora principessa*—for you all know the *foible* of ladies of her nation for the *prestige* of a high-sounding name—I resolved to see whether I could not, in my own person, prove to the misguided lover that he was fooled."

"*Bravissimo*, Saviatti!" shouted his now more than half intoxicated listeners.

"I began, then, to pay my court to the flattered beauty assiduously, but cautiously. I became silent and depressed, and she soon discovered that she alone had power to arouse me from my moral lethargy; but she was as wary as myself; nor was it until I had, as if unconsciously, suffered myself to be betrayed into more than one demonstration of an interest more potent than I was authorised to feel for the promised wife of my friend, that she, at length, ventured to inquire into the cause of my evident unhappiness. You may imagine how I replied. How reluctantly, but resolutely, the secret was wrung from me; how I besought her to pardon my temerity; and, gradually, became still less reserved, until I brought her to confess that she had already suspected the truth, and even to admit that she forgave the involuntary error. The remainder of my task was easy, but it required time; nor was she loth to afford it. In vain did Trevor complain of the postponement of their marriage from one period to another; for convinced of the immaculacy of his idol, he never, for an instant, doubted the ultimate failure of my intrigue; she always found some plausible pretext to delay it, and, meanwhile, I had every encouragement to prosecute my suit which I could desire. Still her caution was admirable, and I sincerely believe that, as the mere individual, she greatly preferred my friend; and that, had I been simple Signor Saviatti, the son of a Palermitan banker, or of a Catanian apothecary, she would never have hesitated between us. As it was, however, I held the winning card, and the 'dear prince,' had but to utter one conclusive

word to leave the 'poor baronet' leagues behind in the race. How I ever betrayed her into writing such dangerous truths as this, I cannot even now comprehend; although I have more than once had occasion to remark that there are certain class of women, who, when they once take a pen into their hands, suffer it to run away with their reason.

"Certain it is that it was so in this instance. I wish that Trevor had not, in his rage, burnt, before his faithless mistress, the last letter with which she honored me, and then you would have acknowledged the truth of my late remark. However, suffice it that the letter in question did most effectually open his eyes, and prove to him that his fair *inamorata* was ready to fly with me from an union to which she looked forward with dismay, and to trust to my honor never to give her cause to repent the hazardous step that she had taken.

"So far, so well; but alas! *chi la fatto il male, faccia la penitenza*, says the proverb, and so it was with Trevor. The English laws are frequently both unreasonable and inconvenient. He had formerly promised marriage to Miss Delamere, and he was bound by one of those laws to perform his promise, or to incur the risk, not only of a heavy fine—for that he was too wealthy to care—but also of a public exposure, with which she did not hesitate to threaten him.

"Perhaps you expect, idlers as you are, that I am about to entertain you with the scene which ensued, when the lady discovered that she had been duped in her turn, and that she had lost, by one unlucky throw, both the foreign noble and the English baronet; and, *corpo di Bacco!* it deserves narration, but I have just now neither time nor taste for such a tale, though in truth, her very rage was magnificent, and her indignation as genuine as though she had been no party to this war of wits. Well, to shorten a long story, she retorted every reproach of Trevor, by upbraiding him with his own treachery, and that of his Fidus Achates; and, when he swore that he would leave her for ever, she threatened him with a court of justice, and silenced him, as that threat seldom fails to silence an Englishman.

"What was to be done? Trevor had no nerve for such an exposure. To be exhibited to the world not only as a dupe, but moreover, as the dupe of a woman who had forfeited all claim to consideration from the levity of her own conduct, was more than his pride could brook. He remembered too, that her pecuniary resources must be nearly exhausted, and that the prospect of becoming his wife had induced her to persist in a style of living to which they had long been inadequate; and thus, what from fear from himself on the one hand, and a lingering weakness for the false fair one on the other, they at length came to a compromise. Not, however, that this desirable arrangement was made without considerable difficulty; for the lady, at once baffled and bitter, was exorbitant in her demands, and poor Trevor was obliged, not only to have recourse to the Jews, but also to expatriate himself for a time, in order to satisfy her claim.

"*Ebbene!* The victim accompanied me to Berlin, and *la bella abandonnata* left London, as he supposed, to bury her regrets in the country, and for a time he heard no more of her; while, *per me*, I almost forgot her existence. Judge, therefore, of my amazement this evening, when, in a solitary stroll through the Negroni gardens—a strange caprice you will say, and one for which, in point of fact, I can scarcely account—my ear was suddenly attracted by the inflections of an harmonious and familiar voice. I listened for several instants in order to be satisfied that I did not deceive myself, and then, convinced of the accuracy of my memory, I suddenly turned the angle of the path, and saw before me Miss Delamere in person, negligently reclining upon the grass beside one of the fountains, with her head resting upon the shoulder of a very handsome cavalier, who also held one of her hands clasped in his.

"Nothing daunted, however, by the style of this grouping—for, as you are aware, I felt my strength, and was not altogether sorry to have an opportunity of making my peace, or free from the desire to see it ratified somewhat after the same fashion—I accosted her at once, and that in a tone of old acquaintanceship which forbade any denial on her part; but a change had come over her whole manner. It was neither affectedly cold, nor inferentially resentful; it was more discouraging than either; calm, self-possessed, and—could I have forgotten the past—I should say dignified. The problem, moreover, was soon solved; I began to allude to former times, and I was silenced at once by a presentation to—her husband."

"*Il povero Saviatti!*"

"You mistake, gentlemen, you mistake," pursued the Prince contemptuously; "you should say *il povero marito;* for trust me he will ere long the most deserve your pity, though at present he appears to be 'in love with ruin.' She informed me, and you will be able to estimate the feeling with which she made the communication, that she had been travelling for the last two months in Italy; *ergo*, her bridehood is rapidly waning into commonplace wedded life."

"And who is the sacrifice? Is he one who has been kidnapped from our own set, or a mere matrimonial facility?"

"Therein lies the point of the epigram," said the Palermitan with a light laugh; "I was presented to the hero of the domestic drama, as I have already told you. But how? Why simply thus: 'Prince, allow me to present to you my husband—My dear Frederic, the Prince Saviatti, of whom I have spoken to you;" and thus, you see, although it appeared that the 'great unknown' was enabled at once to identify me as one of his lady's quondam friends, I was left totally in the dark as regarded his own individuality. However certain it is, in whatever spirit I had been made known to him, he had no suspicion of the truth, and I almost began to imagine, from the manner in which he tolerated for a time a series of impertinences on my part, that he was simply what Rowscoffsky has just po-

litely designated as a 'matrimonial facility;' but I was mistaken. He appeared suddenly to perceive that I was transgressing the bounds of even Italian good-breeding, for he started from his seat like a roused lion, and carried off *la donna*, without even permitting me to walk back to the city in her company."

"*C'est impayable!*" shouted the Frenchman; "*ce pauvre Saviatti est déchu.*"

"Then are there two fallen angels in the same drama," replied the Prince quietly; "and I am ready to wager the hundred ducats which I won last evening of Squanderleigh, that the piece is not yet played out."

"Pshaw! you have already had your *congé*."

"Perhaps so; moreover, the happy couple leave Rome to-morrow; another point against me, and nevertheless I am ready to renew my bet, with this reservation, that if I am not myself the hero of the second act, it will be Trevor. Who accepts the challenge?"

"Not I," said Colonna; "I know too well the nature of the sex. The investment is a bad one."

A general laugh followed his remark, but the attention of the party was suddenly called to Lord Squanderleigh, who with a vehement oath hurled his cards across the saloon, and filling a goblet with brandy, drank it off to the confusion of all modest personages, who only played to oblige their friends.

"Milord, you are uneivil," calmly observed his opponent, as he swept into his open palm the pile of bright English gold which he had gradually heaped up, and deposited it in the breast-pocket of his coat. "I appeal to Colonna, to De Tremblay, to Saviatti, if I ever play save when I am urged to it, and cannot decline without discourtesy."

"I care for no such appeals," was the furious retort. "Did not Saviatti only yesterday win my money in all probability in the same way, and on the same principle? And do not both Colonna and De Tremblay hold bills of mine similarly gained? Do you take me for a boy to believe that, knowing my own skill at the game as I do, I should be idiot enough to suppose that I am indebted to ill-luck for my perpetual losses?"

All the group started indignantly to their feet, but a gesture from the Duke silenced them for a moment, as he asked with composure; "And to what then, Milord, am I to understand that you attribute them?"

"To what!" echoed the stripling, as he turned an undismayed look upon the threatening countenances around him. "Have I not spoken sufficiently plain already for you, one and all, to understand that I attribute them to your superior———science!"

"You must answer to me for this," said the Duca, with an unshaken calmness which formed a ghastly contrast with the trembling passion of his adversary.

"And to me," said Colonna.

"And me," followed up Saviatti.

The stripling listened with a bitter and hollow laugh, and simply replying, "I am ready," swallowed another goblet of the liquid fire, turned a fierce gaze of defiance upon his opponents, and strode from the room.

By mid-day on the morrow, all Rome rang with the news that a fatal duel had taken place two hours after dawn, beyond the Porto del Popolo; in which the gallant Lord Squanderleigh, the only son and heir of the Earl of Wastinville, the hope of an ancient house, and the idol of an adoring mother, had fallen mortally wounded beneath the bullet of an unknown adversary. The authorities were all astir; the *sbirri* in commotion, and the whole system of exclusive society shaken for four-and-twenty hours. And then came the relatives from England to claim the corpse, and to convey it to the family-vault, in order that it might repose beside those of its ancestors—and then, Lord Squanderleigh was forgotten.

Such was the circle in which the name of the woman who had become the wife of the proud and sensitive Mortimer was branded with indignity—amid the curses of unsuccessful gamesters, the fumes of wine, and the ribaldries of licentiousness. Such were the revellers, who, not content with branding her with past disgrace and present duplicity, even presaged for her a future still more dishonorable than either. Sybil was indeed fallen!—fallen from the brightness and the purity which compel respect from the dissolute. She had striven and had triumphed. She was the wife of a man of honor; but her very triumph was contaminated by the fact, that he must henceforward be a mark for the world's scorn through her means; and that world not one of upright and soberly judging individuals, who would temper their justice with mercy, and be silent where otherwise they must condemn; but a world of reckless *roués* and bitter satirists, to whom her shame would be matter of loose mirth and ribald speculation; and who would, from their own intimate knowledge of the vices of humanity, be enabled to analyse and to lay bare every working of her heart—her woman-heart,—that pure and holy mystery which, like the statue of Vesta, should ever wear a veil for all save he to whom it is yielded up.

Sybil was indeed fallen!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Meanwhile all was deep and quiet happiness at Bletchley. The ladies of the manor-house had paid their promised visit; the girls had welcomed Gertrude with a warmth of delighted affection which was balm to her meek and gentle heart; and even Mrs. Armstrong, forgetting all the brilliant projects which she had formed for her son, and satisfied that, as her husband no longer withheld his consent to the marriage, it was her duty to think as he did, and perhaps feeling, moreover, that she should in all probability be a person of much more consequence in the eyes of her unportioned daughter-in-law than she could have hoped to be in those of the high born or richly-dowered damsel upon whom she had formerly speculated, was

no less inclined than themselves to believe that Ernest had, after all, been less to blame than she at first supposed; while the worthy old squire, having once determined to withdraw his objections, did so with an open-heartedness and generosity of feeling which removed the last shadow from the spirit of the orphan.

Only a few days elapsed ere Gertrude again found herself an inhabitant of the hall, and once more all the little world of Bletchley was in commotion. It was really too bad and too barefaced, as Miss Bayliss remarked with considerable asperity; too bad on the side of Miss Mortimer, and too barefaced on that of the Armstrongs, that their company had no sooner dispersed than they thought proper to remember their poor neighbor. However, if the girl had no more spirit, it served her right, and she would see what would come of it before long; but it was disgraceful that, because they happened to be the great people of the neighborhood, any one should be mean enough to encourage them in their impertinence; and Miss Mortimer, as Mr. Pilbeam declared, was so blind to the degrading part that she was acting, as actually to be recovering from day to day, even although he had long considered her case to be utterly hopeless: but there she was, as likely to live as his own wife, and as calm and contented as though she had been treated with the greatest respect.

However, she begged that she might not be quoted as having repeated the remarks of Mr. Pilbeam, which he had made to her quite in confidence, as it might injure him in his business; but it really made her blood boil to think that Miss Warrington and her niece had not shown more regard for the respectability of the village. Had she, or her sister, or Mrs. Pilbeam, or even the dissenting minister's widow, ever demeaned themselves in such a way? Not they. As to accepting little presents from the manor-house, there was nothing in that; for if they were sent, they could not decently be refused; but she must say that, for people who pretend to hold their heads higher than their neighbors, the Warringtons were about as mean-spirited a set as she ever heard of.

These murmurs from the village, however, never reached the hall. There all was peace and joy. The happiness of Ernest was complete. To sit beside Gertrude, and to watch from day to day the progress of her convalescence; to see the faint flush again steal to her cheek, and the smile of recovered confidence rest upon her lip, was to him a never-ceasing labor of love. While Somerville and Mary, more gladsome in their joy, were continually on horseback, or engaged in schemes of pleasure, the tranquil delight of Ernest and Gertrude was no less engrossing. To them the whispered confidences, the assured prospects of the future, and the present calm, were full of enjoyment. They had so much to say, so much to ask, so much to hope.

It was during one of these constantly-recurring conversations, when the twilight had stolen upon them almost unheeded, and that the pencil of Gertrude, and the volume from which her lover had been occasionally reading, or rather murmuring, to her a few snatches from Alfieri, had alike been laid aside, that a sudden silence occurred, as eloquent to their feelings as the most profuse and impassioned words. It was at length broken by a sigh from the orphan, which fell painfully upon the ear of Ernest.

"You sigh, dearest," he said anxiously; "and wherefore?"

"Simply," replied Gertrude; "because I have left a duty unperformed for which I am self-rebuked; and that, even now, I have scarcely courage to repair my error."

"Incorrigible culprit!"

"Nay, do not jest, Ernest; for, indeed, my heart is too full for smiles. I feel that I have not acted generously or frankly towards you; and that I am, consequently, unworthy of the unhesitating confidence which you have placed in me. You may remember that, during our memorable interview in the pavilion, you hinted your belief that I was the prey of some secret sorrow; and you were right. That, however, was not a fitting moment for such a revelation as I had to make; and since that day I have suffered my happiness to absorb me so entirely, as to forget that the confession of the past was due to you. It will require an effort on my part to recall that past; but the effort must be made; for I cannot consent to become your wife until you are placed in possession of every circumstance of my early life; and are prepared to assure me that what I have to tell has not lowered me in your esteem."

"Gertrude, why do you torture both yourself and me? I foretell all that you have to say—You have loved another."

"I have, Ernest," was the low, but resolute reply; "and that, too, with all the ardor of a young and trusting heart. Nor was this affection the mere transitory feeling of a few months, but the one great and absorbing sentiment of my life. If I know myself, I am compelled to confess, even to you, that had my love been returned, I believe that neither time nor misfortune would have sufficed to overcome it; but it was not so. I loved where my love was slighted and undervalued; and my whole waste of affection was repaid only by the attachment of a brother. But hear me out before you condemn me. My error was that of inexperience, not of levity. I was misled alike by my own hopes, and by the tenderness of one who was indeed to me more than a mother. And now, Ernest, dear Ernest, will you listen to my story of the past?"

"Say on, Gertrude," answered the young man, who had involuntarily relinquished her hand, and buried his face in his spread palms; "say on—I will endeavor to bear it manfully; but you know not how deeply you have wrung me."

The tears of the orphan fell slow and cold, as she withdrew her eyes from the averted figure of her lover, but she heeded them not. Strong in her conviction of right, she commenced her simple confession.

She told him of the premature death of her mother; of the heart-broken father, who so soon followed her to the grave. She painted to him in rapid, but graphic words, the stately old

house at Westrnm which had been the cradle of her childhood, and the home of her youth; and she dwelt with all the eloquence of deep and strong feeling, upon the virtues of the gentle and high-hearted Mrs. Mortimer.

Nor did her low voice falter when she came to speak of Frederic. There was no suspicious haste, no coquettish reservation, in the manner in which she related all their early and childish affection; she did justice to his amiable qualities, and to the high principle of his nature. She told how, from girlhood up, she had been taught to consider him as her future husband; and how, in order to render herself worthy of his love, she had striven to acquire the habits, feelings, and accomplishments which he approved. And after she had described the long hours of retirement, in which she had listened to all the confident projects of her aunt, while the subject of their discourse was yet absent, she did not even disguise from her agitated listener the eager anxiety with which she had awaited his return; and the bitter disappointment she had experienced on finding that her attachment was not returned, when Frederic, happy and heart-free, ere many months elapsed, bestowed the affection which she had always been taught to consider as her own, upon a stranger.

"And what said your aunt, who had so cruelly misled you?" asked Ernest, suddenly looking up.

"All that the purest and most perfect affection could dictate. She wept over the blight of my visions, and her own hopes; and vowed never to receive another daughter."

"And then Gertrude, all these visions were renewed?"

The orphan smiled a sad smile.

"No, Ernest," she said meekly; "from the hour in which I learned that the heart of Frederic was estranged from me, and that his happiness depended upon another, the path of duty and of self-esteem lay plain before me, and I had only to follow it to the end. Frederic, moreover, was generous enough to trust to me, and to place his cause in my hands; and believe me when I assure you that he had no cold advocate with his mother. I loved him, and to me his happiness was all in all. It sufficed that my affection was not essential to him, for me to understand at once the indelicacy of sustaining what was, at best, only an imaginary claim. My poor aunt died; and with her, as you are aware, the one great tie which bound me to my father's family. In my desolation I sought a home with a distant relative, to whom I was a stranger; Miss Warrington received me, and cheerfully consented to impose another burden upon her already limited resources. I came to Bletchley, unknown, unloved, and hopeless. You know the rest."

There was a momentary silence, and the heart of Gertrude sank within her.

"And your cousin?" asked Armstrong at length, with apparent effort.

"My cousin a few months ago was united to Miss Delamere."

"And you still loved him, Gertrude, when we first met? When I, at once, and unreservedly, made you the arbitress of my future fate; when I placed my whole being in your hands, without a doubt, without a misgiving, you still loved this man?"

"I believed that I did so," was the low and timid reply: "and, in all probability, Ernest, had you not, by your generous affection, taught me the fallacy of my own feelings, I should have sunk into an early grave with that conviction. Remember that my affection for Frederic was one alike of habit and of hope; that I had been taught from my earliest girlhood to look upon him as the partner of my future life; that, although reared in a comfort bordering upon luxury, my seclusion had been almost unbroken; and that, in short, my whole world was comprised within the walls of Westrum House. It is not, however, for me to excuse the past. I have simply obeyed the dictates of my nature, and fulfilled my sense of right, by removing every mystery between us, and by showing myself to you as I am. It is for you to decide if a heart which has hoped and mourned like mine, is worthy of the love that it has won."

"Only answer me one question, Gertrude, and that with the same truthfulness which I have always seen in you. Did you love this man as you love me?" and he again seized her hand.

"I could not. I am now conscious that, in the ignorance of my spirit, I mistook myself. I loved rather the creation of my own fancy, the cherished son of my more than mother, the one fixed idea of my existence. I loved Frederic not only for himself, but because with him I lost all. In short," concluded the poor girl, with a passionate burst of tears, "I despise myself for an illusion which was dissipated from the moment in which I discovered that I had long unconsciously suffered a deeper and a more vital attachment to obliterate the past. And oh! Ernest, were you aware for how long a period your image was in my heart, while I believed that it was absorbed by another, you would understand all that I would say, all that I feel."

"I do! I do! Gertrude, and I thank you," exclaimed her lover with renewed tenderness; "We will never again look back upon the past. What was the love of the girl beside the affection of the woman? I have been irritable and unjust, dearest; when I should rather have been proud of the trust which you reposed in me, and of your faith in my right feeling. You have acted nobly, Gertrude, and once more I thank you. And now, did you not assure me, that no other secret exists between us, and that this tale of girlish romance was the sole mystery of your past life?"

"I did, and truly, Ernest. You have now read my heart, which has not a thought that it would hesitate to confide to you—not a feeling or a hope of which you are not the object."

And still the twilight deepened about them, and the glowing fire-light alone flickered through the silent apartment, and revealed each to the other in that luxurious partial obscurity so dear to those whose thoughts are full of quiet happiness. For a moment the pride of Ernest Armstrong had been wounded. He could not brook that Gertrude, his own Gertrude, the only woman he had ever loved, should have felt for

another what he had felt only for her; but he was too right-minded to persist in so weak an egotism; and he soon forgot his own disappointment in admiration of the delicacy which had taught the timid girl beside him to consider as a crime the reservation of a fact which so nearly concerned his happiness; and to compel herself to an avowal so painful to her feelings, in order to convince him that she was worthy of a love in which she thus ventured to confide.

Henceforward, he could have no misgivings. The past stood revealed before him. The pure and guileless heart had poured forth all its treasures of memory, and was indeed his own. One short half-hour of suffering had secured to him a life of trust and peace; and the more he reflected upon the voluntary and unembarrassed confidence of Gertrude, the more he became conscious of the whole beauty and holiness of a nature which shrank from even the semblance of deceit and dishonor.

And Gertrude, too, was happy, for her sensitive conscience was relieved of a heavy weight. Ernest now knew, and had pardoned all. She might henceforward yield herself up, without one misgiving, to the bliss of loving and being beloved. All the memory of the past appeared to fade into so far a distance, that it rather wore the misty indistinctness of a painful dream, than the sterner features of a reality. All seemed unreal, save the actual present, with its dear delights of peace, and love, and joy. Her very tears were luxury; and the throbbing of her heart made delicious music as she listened to its quick pulsations.

Who has not experienced at such an hour as this? Who has not, at some time, felt the utter inefficiency of words to embody the million sensations which well up, pure and warm, from the overflowing heart, and create an atmosphere of happiness about them? They who have not done this, have been deprived of one of those blessed privileges which leave a holy impress, like the footsteps of angels, upon the spirit, and appear to purify the whole being.

The world may have more tumultuous pleasures to offer, more voluptuous joys to dispense; but the searing-iron of passion and of vice leaves a darker trace behind, and one which no after-tears can obliterate.

Pity, that such moments of peaceful joy are brief; and that, weakened by their own intensity, they are soon compelled to give place to the commoner sensations and associations of every day life. Like a Sabbath of the soul, they do but repose, and cannot replace, the less exalted feelings incident to human existence; and are but too frequently slighted or desecrated, until their purifying influence is negatived and disavowed.

And even Gertrude and Ernest, deeply as they had felt the spell of that quiet joy, awoke after a time to a more intimate consciousness of their actual position; and once more the murmured words of affection, and the lightly-born sigh of happiness, broke upon the stillness of the apartment. Gradually, however, the tones grew less indistinct; and the clear laughter of the lover rang out at intervals, as some joyous vision floated before his excited fancy.

Meanwhile Gertrude affected to be busily engaged in collecting and sorting the wools which were scattered over her tapestry frame, a task rendered almost impossible by the partial darkness; and, as she was thus employed, a small morocco souvenir, clasped with gold, fell from the basket in which she was arranging them, at the feet of her companion; who, hastily lifting it from the floor, laid his finger upon the lock, and was about to open it, when Gertrude eagerly stretched out her hand, exclaiming,—

"No, no; you must not unclasp those tablets, Ernest; indeed you must not!"

"What! another secret, Gertrude?"

There was no reply, as the head of the orphan was averted for an instant; but ere long she repeated beseechingly,—

"If you love me, dear Ernest, do not open them. You will laugh at me, and I cannot endure your ridicule."

"Laugh at you, Gertrude! why, what have you been doing? Inditing a sonnet to the moon, or composing an elegy to a dead robin?"

"Now you are too absurd."

"Justify yourself by authorizing me to open the tablets."

"Be generous, Ernest, and give them up."

"Excuse me—I covet them. You have never yet made me a present. I accept these."

"Well, then, since it must be so," said Gertrude, half laughing and half annoyed; "you may keep them; but only on condition that you do not retain the contents."

"Agreed!" shouted the young man, as he bounded towards the fire-place to examine his prize; "Why, what dry twig is this?" he asked after the silence of a moment, as he drew from between two folds of satin a bunch of withered leaves; "And is this the treasure that I am bound to restore?"

"It is, dear Ernest," whispered the soft low voice of Gertrude, as her small hand was pressed lightly upon his shoulder; "and to me it is indeed a treasure,"

"And what is it, dearest?"

"Another and a happier record of the past,' blushed the orphan, as her lover folded his arm about her waist, and drew her to his heart; "The faded cluster-rose of the garden pavilion."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

The Mortimers were domesticated at Westrum, and Mrs. Delamere established in her favorite arm-chair, as she was wont to be at The Grange; but the old house was soon subjected to a metamorphosis which would have rendered it irrecognisable to its former owners. The first care of Mortimer, on his return to England, had been to desire Sybil to select from among the luxuries in her former home all those which she was desirous to retain; and this done, a public auction desecrated that long exclusive abode. The house itself was placed in the hands of an agent for sale; but, with intuitive delicacy, Frederic so made his arrangements, that not a single suspicion of the insolvency of its late proprie

tors supplied food for the gossipry of the neighborhood.

Nothing could be more natural than that Mr. Mortimer should prefer the ancestorial associations of his own birth-place to the mere splendors of a strange property, unendeared to him by any familiar memories; and consequently no comments were made upon so simple a fact; and while these changes were in progress, little or no alteration was perceptible in the mood or manner of the newly-married man. The quiet unobtrusive gratitude of Mrs. Delamere, who once more saw herself surrounded by her accustomed luxuries, and left to their enjoyment without one misgiving as to their continuance, revealed itself in occasional snatches of deep feeling and earnest affection, and was balm to his wounded spirit; but the excitement consequent upon those domestic arrangements at an end, a gloom gathered upon the brow of Mortimer, which not even the fascinations of his beautiful Sybil had power to banish, even infatuated as he still was by her attractions.

Their homeward journey, commenced under such unpleasant circumstances, had not been productive of enjoyment to either party. A vague, but not the less a painful suspicion, had grown upon Frederic, that the resolute silence of his wife upon the past involved some secret which she was unwilling to confide to him. And if this were indeed the fact, of what nature was the mystery, which, as it now seemed, was to remain for ever untold?

There were moments of bitterness, in which he cursed the sensitiveness of his nature, which had not permitted him to temporize with the impertinence of the Sicilian prince, and to bear anything, everything, until, through his means, he had made himself master of all he had to reveal; for that much of it bore closely upon the former career of Sybil, had been evident from the little which had escaped him during their one brief interview. He might have insisted upon remaining in Rome, and have cultivated an acquaintance with this man; he might —but, in the next instant, as his glance fell upon the graceful woman beside him, he almost hated himself for his treacherous regrets. It appeared impossible that so fair and radiant a creature, whose brow and eyes were full of that proud placidity which bespoke a nature as faultless as her person, could be other than she seemed. Why should he thus torture himself? There might be nothing to learn—nothing beyond those idle follies so common in the world in which she had been reared, as to be almost the general habit of her sex; and her haughty spirit, spurning at his suspicions, might merely be revenging itself by the silence which he deprecated.

And Frederic struggled to believe that it was so; and once more he lavished upon Sybil all the treasures of an affection as deep as it had been reckless; but the illusion would not last—again and again his doubts and his misgivings recurred. The manner of Saviatti had made a deeper impression upon his reason than even the words which he had uttered; and the more he dwelt upon it, the more keenly the reflection wounded his dignity.

That his wife should be thus lightly addressed, thus superciliously approached, stung him to the very soul. He who had always associated the idea of her sex with a respect and deference almost chivalrous, and who had invested Sybil, above all, with the sanctity of his brightest and holiest aspirations, could not brook that not only the woman whom he had worshipped, but even the wife whom he had won, should, without resenting the insult on the instant, have submitted to the degradation of so unseemly a display of sarcastic insolence. And if she had indeed done this—and that it was so he was only too bitterly conscious—could it be that she would visit upon himself a minor injury, and one, too, which grew out of the sensitive jealousy of his affection? Alas! he once more felt that there was no room for doubt; and that harrowing past over which she kept such stringent guard, rose up before him like a spectre of evil, or pressed upon his spirit like an incubus.

Sybil, too, was changed. She no longer returned his affection with the warmth which she had once shown in those moments of returning confidence, in which, for a brief interval, he resolutely silenced his misgivings, and strove to fasten his thoughts upon the present. He felt that she was changed, and that she rather permitted the demonstrations of his tenderness as a natural consequence of their relative position, than welcomed them as its privilege. The most futile objects sufficed to divert her attention from her husband. She was gradually creating a world of interest and sensation about her, from which he was morally excluded. Even the prospect of becoming a mother did not arouse her from the rapidly increasing egotism which betrayed itself in every action of her life. The necessity for exertion had ceased, and her fascinations and acquirements were no longer put forth to win his praise. A gulf had opened between them, and the venerated roof of his ancestors had ceased to be a home to the imbittered and disappointed Mortimer.

It was consequently with less mortification than he would once have felt that, after the residence of only a few short months at Westrum, Frederic heard his once adored Sybil again and again recur to the unpalatable subject of his social insignificance; and reproach him with a supineness which left him unknown and obscure, when, by a slight exertion of energy, he might be battling his way to fortune, and, better still, to the consideration and respect of his fellow men. He had no longer an absorbing passion with which to counteract the dormant spirit of ambition she strove so resolutely to awaken; and he listened until he began to feel that she might be right; and that he had, indeed, hitherto mistaken his own nature when he believed that he was unfitted to wrestle with the world, and to grapple his way to greatness. He did not comprehend that it was the mere yearning of an unsatisfied heart for something to which it might attach itself; for some new and powerful interest by which it might be filled, which so misled his reason; while it is moreover certain that it requires unusual vigor of mind, and decision of character, to enable a man to with-

stand the influence of the woman whom he has once passionately loved, and who has become the partner of his life. Be that influence exerted as it may, either openly and boldly, or quietly and inferentially, its general result is the same. The affection may have become chilled, the trust may have grown weaker, but the moral power remains unshaken, and he instinctively imbibes some portion of her tastes, her habits, and her opinions.

This power, regarded in its responsibility, is at once a proud and a fearful one for women.

Where it is healthily exerted, it may be productive of an immense amount of good; and that it has been so, meekly and becomingly, we have many bright examples. How often has the loving energy of a wife sustained the drooping heart, and reanimated the chilled hopes, which no other voice could call back into being! How many noble actions have owed their existence to the pure and lofty aspirations of a woman's soul?

How many evil hands have been stayed, how many base intentions have been smothered, in complianee with her warning whisper? But where she desecrates this mighty influence, and, forgetting the purity and holiness of her mission, puts forth her strength only for evil, then is her power indeed fearful and her responsibility heavy. Involuntarily Mortimer had become subjected to this common law, and had gradually imbibed the prevailing passion of his wife. He required a great and absorbing interest to replace that which he was only too well aware had already ceased to exist. He felt the necessity of silencing the murmurs of a disappointed heart by the louder and sterner tumult, of worldly struggle.

One violent passion can rarely be conquered save by a second still more vehement; and no sooner did Mortimer find some moments of solitude—and they were many, for already had Sybil, as has been said, surrounded herself by interests, most of which were distinct from his own—than he began to believe that he had hitherto mistaken the path to happiness; that it was mere idle absurdity to seek it under his own roof, and in the society of a woman who refused to repay the fervent and overwhelming affection he had lavished upon her by the confidence to which, as her husband, and the companion of her future life, he was so well entitled; and that the home-happiness, of which he had once so fondly dreamt, was a brilliant fallacy, with which he had been cheated, like many others, and from whose influence it behoved him to liberate himself.

This was precisely the state of feeling to which Sybil had been anxious to lead him; and as she detected the workings of his mind, she redoubled all her efforts to complete the task which she had so skillfully commenced. She gradually became subdued, and almost sad. The air of Westrum, and the monotony of their daily existence, depressed her. She had no faith in the local practitioners; and her situation made her anxious to reside for a time in town, where she could procure competent advice.

Such an argument was, of course, unanswerable, even if Mortimer had felt inclined to oppose her project, but such was far from being the case. Like herself, he had begun to discover that everything was dull and vapid about him, and that, as regarded his estate, his steward was even more efficient than himself; while the prospect of becoming a father held out to him new and delicious hopes, to which he was ready to make far greater sacrifices than a simple change of residenee. It is true that he had hoped to see the inheritor of his fortune born beneath the roof of his forefathers, as he himself had been; but this was a secondary consideration, which could not for a moment be placed in comparison with the safety of the mother, and the preservation of the infant; and Mrs. Mortimer had consequently no sooner expressed her wish to remove to London than immediate preparations were made to gratify her inclinations.

Satisfied by her suceess, Sybil beeame once more almost the Sybil who had beguiled him of his better reason. She spoke of his worldly distinction as certain; flattered his self-esteem by enumerating the many advantages under which he would commence his diplomatic career; and declared herself ready to make any personal sacrifice which might tend to his advancement; and once more Mortimer was beguiled.

Within a fortnight they were established in a first-rate hotel, having left the supine Mrs. Delamere sole mistress at Westrum; and as the London season had not yet commeneed they had ample opportunity to select such a residence as they deemed suitable. Upon this point, however, considerable difficulty was experienced; the views of the husband by no means coineiding with those of the wife. In their house hunt—one of the most disagreeable occupations, *par parenthese*, to which poor human beings can be subjected!—Mortimer steadily bore in mind the amount of his income, while Sybil as resolutely discarded all such considerations.

"Were we about to reside altogether in town," was her constant argument, "or, were we here merely for purposes of pleasure, a very moderate establishment might suffice, provided always that the situation were unexeeptionable; but you must not forget that you have an important purpose in view, and that an ostentatious display of economy will by no means advance your interests. The world worships wealth: there is an oeeult magie in riches which operates even upon the proudest and best principled natures. I never hear a would-be philosopher affect to depreeate the man of money, without feeling a sneer at his want of candor pass over my heart, although I may banish it from my lips. No, no; trust me, Frederic, all such aservation is false and hollow; for do we not, every day of our lives see the affluent courted and flattered, even by those who neither require nor hope to be profited by the wealth they worship? Gold is the religion of the world. There is no shrine so thronged with devotees. In every other creed there are schisms; but Mammon knows no divisions among his votaries. Keep a close hand, and the good qualities which you may possess will be hidden with your wealth; but spread it

abroad before the eyes of the crowd, and they will at once give you credit for every other virtue. When you have accomplished your purpose, you will have time enough to retrench; and, meanwhile, believe me, the more you can persuade others that the very object of your ambition is the mere caprice of a man weary of the total idleness of affluence, the more readily you will find friends to push your fortunes. One mistake at such a moment as this may be fatal to your prospects; and you are about wilfully to commit the most serious error into which you could possibly be betrayed."

What marvel that Mortimer ultimately suffered himself to be subjugated by these specious sophistries?—That an elegant residence was secured in one of the most fashionable squares; that a splendid establishment was formed; and that the equipages, jewels, and opera-box of Mrs. Mortimer, were upon a consistent scale—That the *Morning Post* duly informed its readers of all the movements of the family; that Tattersall rejoiced in the patronage of Mr. Mortimer; and that he was, through the good offices of half-a-dozen of his former friends, who hastened to welcome him to town, in a very short space of time ballotted into two of the leading clubs?

Heart-sick and homeless—for all was glare and representation in the mansion of which he had become the temporary master—Mortimer soon discovered innumerable attractions in the almost bachelor life to which he was thus restored; while Sybil, on her side, saw with gratified vanity and ill-concealed triumph, that she was instantly recognised by half a score of her former acquaintance, who were only too happy to renew what they were pleased to consider as an old friendship, as they caracolled beside her carriage in the ring, or partook of the elegant hospitality of her husband. Thus, for a time, all went smoothly; and as the period drew near at which Mrs. Mortimer anticipated the birth of her child, and that she was comparatively unable to plunge into the vortex of dissipation by which she was surrounded, Mortimer found his expenditure, although serious, yet still defined and regular; and amid the pressure of amusement without, he ere long forgot his anxiety upon the subject.

Not even the habits of dissipation which he was rapidly acquiring sufficed, however, to deaden him to the delight of being a father; and when at length his beautiful Sybil placed in his arms her lovely little girl, he felt all the better feelings of his nature swelling forth again, and made a thousand prudent resolutions for the future. But alas for Frederic! constitutionably unstable, he was now, moreover, under the influence of a firmer spirit than his own, and his wife had formed far different projects. Debarred for a few weeks from those dissipated and exciting pleasures which had been the business of her youth, and had become to her vain and ambitious nature almost a necessity, she had, in her temporary retirement, only grown more than ever anxious to compensate to herself for the time that she had lost; and accordingly she listened with a quiet smile to the sententious orations of her husband; yawned as seldom as possible; and satisfied herself by pursuing her own course as resolutely as though they had never been uttered.

Yet, skilful tactitian as she was, Sybil had nevertheless the mortification to perceive that her train was composed only of such of her former friends as still remained unmarried; and that it was rarely a female guest graced her splendid home. In vain did she hint to the danglers who pressed about her that she should gladly welcome their sisters, their mothers, or their aunts. The answer was always ready. One would immediately have presented Maria, but she moved in a set of her own, and would feel herself perfectly *desorientee* if she were to venture beyond it; another would at once have brought his mother to pay her respects to Mrs. Mortimer, but really Lady Elizabeth was such a "quiz," so prim, so pious, and so straightlaced, that he had not courage to subject her to such an ordeal; for, after all, she *was* his mother, and he did not wish to peril his own popularity with his charming friend by inflicting such a penance upon her—It would be like intruding a gnome into the paradise of a peri—An actual kill-joy, to which he would not be accessory for the world; while a third hinted the coquettish propensities of his widowed aunt, from whom he had certain expectations, and who would never forgive him were he to place her in a position so inimical to her vanity. And thus, each excused himself with the best grace in the world as regarded his female relatives, although all were alike devoted to the charms of their hostess, and the good cheer of their host; whom they amused in his turn by assurances of their best efforts to second his diplomatic views, and professions of intimacy with ministers, secretaries of state, and influential individuals of all parties.

And Frederic, despite his new found happiness and recent resolves, listened and persuaded himself to have faith in all this table-talk, for he had already acquired habits of selfish indulgence which warred against his better principles, and which he was too supine to resist; while, as day after day, and opportunity after opportunity, passed over unimproved, he adopted the idea that the fortunate moment had not yet arrived, but that come it must; and therefore, lapped in luxury, and gradually suffering improvidence to sap the very foundations of that independence which was his birth-right, and upon which he had hitherto prided himself—he waited.

Nor did one reproach, or even one expostulation from Sybil, cause him to pause for an instant in his career of pleasure. She had no sooner innoculated him with a desire of self-aggrandizement than she appeared suddenly to have lost all such ambition in her own person. The measure of her secret aspirations was now full even to overflowing; and she had no longer leisure to speculate upon the probabilities of her husband's destiny; her own was amply fulfilled; and they had ceased to have an interest in common.

Gradually she saw a few of the most fashionable women in town gather about her; women of wealth and rank, who possessed all the advantages of life, save indeed perhaps, an unsul-

lied reputation, and she found it easy, even amid her pride, to discredit the rumors which, from time to time, were intruded upon her on this subject.

"The world was so censorious," she declared with a frown of virtuous indignation; "There was so much party-spirit in English society; so many petty jealousies, and idle slanders, ever ready to destroy the best and the brightest, that she would never believe that Lady Clara Flushing had been divorced from her lord from any cause more grave than an incompatibility of temper, in which he was doubtlessly as much to blame as herself; nor that Mrs. Babington had been forbidden to appear at court for any other reason than that the politics of her husband were unpalatable to the Royalties.

In the case of Mrs. Mortimer it might indeed truly be said, that charity had, in this instance, covered a multitude of sins; but meanwhile, Lady Clara, Mrs. Babington, *e tutti quanti*, were all handsome, highbred and accomplished women who gave a new grace to her drawing-room, and attracted about her all that was most distinguished of the other sex.

Constantly in a crowd, absorbed in perpetual dissipation, and more beautiful than ever, Sybil was as independent of her husband's affection as he was rapidly becoming of her own, and as she always met him with a smile whenever the accidents of a London life threw them together, that she was always well-dressed, did honor to his taste, and sedulously supported his consequence in society, he began to believe that, after all, he had perhaps no right to expect more, and that his former dreams of home-happiness and domestic bliss were a mere idle chimera.

Did he ever remember Gertrude? Who can doubt that, even amid the mad career which he was now pursuing, there were still moments when a terror of *the future* curdled at his heart, and when all would have been dark and murky, had not one faint and far-off memory, like the solitary star which occasionally pierces through the vapor of the blackest night, gleamed upon the horizon of his heart, and rested there? Yes, guilty as he was towards Gertrude—not because he had not loved her, for in that respect, at least, he had been powerless; but by his cold neglect and selfish forgetfulness; by the indolent self-indulgence which had induced him from day to day to defer those gentle courtesies of affection and kindliness which were due alike to her meek attachment and her orphan state, until he had, at length, felt that he no longer possessed a right to recall himself to her remembrance, nor to tender a helping-hand to her necessities—guilty as he felt towards her, still her image never crossed his mind that it did not for a moment appear to purify and chasten his whole nature. And if there were times when, as he contemplated his loveless home and blighted hopes, something like a regret glanced across his perturbed spirit, who shall wonder? But he soon hastened to banish feelings and thoughts like these. His lot was cast—his destiny was accomplished—and it was idle to look back. On—on—his course must now be onward. His whole future, his whole fortune, his whole existence, hinged upon one wild hope. True, it had hitherto eluded him, but Sybil had declared that he need only 'bide his time' to see it realized, and this assurance had been echoed by the boon companions who sat beside his board, and were the partners of his pleasures.

And thus time wore on, until the season drew near its close, and the languor of exhaustion began to replace the mad excitement which had for the last few months characterised the leviathan city. Royalty had withdrawn to the stately towers and terraces of Windsor; the strawberry leaves were transferred from town mansions to lordly halls and hereditary castles; men of fashion forsook their clubs, and women of *ton* ceased their cabals. The seething cauldron of high-life, which had so long bubbled even to the brim, emptied itself to the very dregs, and London was no longer habitable, save for those obscure and unimportant individuals who are compelled by their necessities to remain chained to the wheels of the vast machine, and to labor at its preservation, lest the pulsations of its mighty heart should cease to beat, and thus the pleasures and luxuries of the great should suffer at a future day.

In one word, London was empty. Sullen *employés* compelled by the absence of their principals to mend pens and read the daily journals in dingy offices; men of letters, unable to travel further from the head-quarters of reference and research than to Brixton or Wandsworth; Guards men, sulkily sauntering up St. James's street to the hollow echoes of their own footsteps, and counting the panes of glass in the well-known windows, where in gayer hours they only numbered familiar faces; novelists, closely immured in their modest lodgings, weaving, with wearied brain and aching head, now fictions to amuse the idleness of those who are to pay back gold for health, and strength, and time; the would-be fashionist of slender means and questionable pretensions, who, after aping—as the sign painter apes the artist—for a brief season the follies of the great, closes his doors, not to escape the heat and dust of the summer streets, but to retrench, and to prepare for a fresh season of awkward imitation and uneasy display; the modest household to whom the advent and exodus of the great caravan of idleness are alike unimportant; the careful trader, jealous of every instant which may turn to future profit, and the vigorous artisan, to whom all seasons are alike, so that they bring him daily toil and daily bread;—by such as these alone were now peopled square, and street, and place, in the vast city, which was thus, for a while blotted out from the highly-colored map of the civilized earth.

In short, as we have already said London was empty; and had a second great fire, like that of 1666, supervened, not a single public journal would have found cause to enclose its closely-printed columns with a sable margin; for the disaster would have occurred when there was "nobody in town."

The Mortimers, as a matter of course, followed the example of their associates, and retreated from London to the country; but, unlike most of them, Frederic would not con

sent to increase the revenues of the Post Office by subjecting himself to the importunate "reminders" of a host of creditors, and accordingly satisfied every claim which could be made upon him, before he would consent to return to Westrum. The amount of his responsibilities, as a natural consequence of the life which he had been leading, more than doubled its anticipated extent.

We are so apt to forget the by-gone superfluities which we regarded as necessities when we indulged in them, but which, like the magical blue fishes in Vathek, find a tongue when conjured by the potent wand of the better-memoried creditor, that the very wisest of us are apt to be bewildered at times in our arithmetic; no marvel, therefore, that Mortimer was fearfully startled by his own defective calculation. But he had little time either to regret or to resolve, for although Sybil could no longer remain in London, she had at least arranged to transfer her own immediate fraction of London to the obscure retirement of Westrum, and as the infant and its nurse had been sent forward, as well as half-a-dozen servants, to prepare the house for the reception of the expected guests; and that, moreover, Lady Clara was too timid to travel so far alone, and consequently accompanied her dear friend, Mrs. Mortimer, in her own chariot, while the master of Westrum made his way back to his ancestral home by the mail, attended by his confidential servant; he had neither leisure nor opportunity to impress upon Sybil the vital importance of retrenchment.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Sybil did the honors of her house to perfection, and although such a crowd of fashionables had never since its erection been collected beneath that roof, every one was soon perfectly at home except its master. The summer was brilliant, and the grounds, thanks to the provisions of their mistress, were in full beauty. Not one natural facility had remained unimproved, and as the gardener had been transferred from The Grange, and the less skilful functionary who had grown grey in the family, had been compelled to cede his place to this more scientific florist, marvels had been wrought which astonished, even if they did not altogether gratify her husband.

Nor was the change within the mansion less striking than that without; but although even the beloved library in which Mortimer had been accustomed to spend so great a portion of his time in studious and delightful solitude, was invaded at all hours, he felt the futility of remonstrance, and was compelled to console himself by the reflection that at least its most cherished treasures were suffered to remained undisturbed, and that it was in quest only of the ephemeral productions of the day, that the idlers, who now thronged his saloons, so continually broke in upon him with those vapid demi-apologies, which are rather an impertinence than a courtesy.

And, moreover, one source of happiness was still open to him, in whose pure enjoyment none sought to interfere; and that one was the presence and the affection of his child, who already received him with eager cries of joy and outstretched arms, whenever he approached the remote nursery to which she had been consigned, lest her baby-griefs should occasionally prove too audible for high-bred nerves.

And what a treasure was that infant girl to Mortimer! Her smiles were the Lethe in which he plunged all his bitter memories, and for a while forgot them. As her dimpled arms wound themselves about his neck, and her soft and peachy cheek rested upon his own, he for an instant believed himself to be happy. For hours would he wander about the grounds, with the delighted child and her attendant nurse, watching with anxious joy all those mysterious dawnings of intellect which are perceptible only to the eye of a parent, and endeavoring to strengthen the still unconscious affection which she betrayed towards him.

And he was enabled to do this freely, and almost without comment, for the brilliant circle of his wife were for the most part alike careless and regardless of his movements; while Sybil herself, who was provided with an admirable *souffre-douleur* in the person of her mother, was quite as willing as her guests to dispense with the presence of her husband.

All Westrum was in amazement. The main street of the little town was alive with equipages and horsemen. Provident milliners secured the "last London" fashions from the transient glimpses which they obtained of the fashionable dames as they were whirled along; the breathless post master was no longer the emporium of news and gossip, for the duties of his office occupied every hour of his time; the stalwart carrier, who had long, from prudential motives, remained a bachelor, hastened to claim his promised bride on the strength of his influx of business; and emulous shopkeepers ventured on luxurious innovations hitherto unattempted.

Nor, while such was the sensation produced among the traders, did the gentry of Westrum remain uninterested spectators of the progress of events at the great house. All such as from local position and old custom were privileged to pay their respects there, hastened to enforce that privilege, and even Mortimer himself was satisfied with the courtesy of their reception. The smile of Sybil was as winning, her words as bland, to the prosy rector, and the sententious physician, as to those of her own set. He, in the honesty of his nature, did not understand the necessity, of which his wife was fully conscious, of conciliating all the visitable population of the neighborhood, in order to render them available whenever it might be expedient. He forgot that the court-cards are at times useless without the remainder of the pack, and that it is by shuffling them together that the just value of each is elicited in the great game of life; but the more far-sighted Sybil did not suffer so obvious a fact to escape her.

While Lady Clara could criticize alike the

cap and the courtesy of worthy Mrs. Collins, she could afford to spare her own friends; nor was it less desirable to veil, by a drapery of muslin petticoats, the occasional *tête-à-tête* in which pretty little Mrs. Babington delighted to indulge on a particular settee behind the grand piano.

Let it not be supposed, however, that the honor of visiting at the great house was gratuitously purchased, for such was far from being the case. During the lifetime of its former gentle and unpretending mistress, no moral dais had been raised; no one was compelled to feel that he or she must take their places below the salt; but under the reign of Sybil all was changed. It was doubtlessly pleasant enough for the physician's comely wife, and the rector's good-natured daughters, to comment on the morrow to their admiring and jealous friends upon the courtly society with which they had so lately mingled, but it is, nevertheless, certain that all of them were aware how little they had, in point of fact, formed an integral portion of the brilliant circle to which they had been admitted, and where they had rather been grouped in order to enhance the graces of the principal personages upon the stage, as the *coryphées* of the opera form a living back-ground to the Taglionis and the Ceritos; and to fill up the occasional pauses of weariness which necessarily ensue in all struggles of display, than received upon equal terms. Who could venture a second time to address a peer's daughter, who vouchsafed no reply beyond a look of wonder at the presumption; or to tender any courtesy to a coquette whose soul was in her flounces?

And yet the worthy people bore all this, and returned again and again, and affected not to perceive that they were merely the pawns upon Mrs. Mortimer's chess-board, in order that they might revenge their own mortification upon the dear friends against whom the portal of this earthly paradise was closed.

Those among my readers who have never done the like, can afford to laugh at their infatuation; but some there will be who cannot claim the privilege of mirth upon such a subject, for this species of moral meanness is not confined to Westrum; and which among us does not find some familiar name trembling upon his tongue, which would prove the degrading fact?

Among the guests of Sybil was a certain Mrs. Lamerly, who was, for some unexplained, and it might be inexplicable, reason, more obnoxious to Mortimer than any other of his lady-visitors. Assuredly it was not from wounded vanity that he disliked her; for, if any of the guests occasionally condescended to remember that Westrum House had a master, it was pretty, languishing Mrs. Lamerly, who by some accident had more than once encountered him in his walks, and even caressed his child. Mrs. Lamerly—as she assured him with a sigh, and a down-dropping of the lids which veiled a pair of large and lustrous blue eyes as dark as amethysts—doated upon children, and had it pleased providence to make her a mother, she was afraid that she should have suffered that one affection to absorb her whole existence. What could be so pure, so beautiful, so holy, as the tie which linked a mother to her child? Did not Mr. Mortimer agree with her that all other tenderness was poor and puerile in comparison? Truly did he in his very heart of hearts; although he only smiled vacantly in reply, as he drew his laughing girl closer to his bosom.

Mrs. Lamerly had, indeed, touched the right chord, but she had done it unskilfully, and it only jarred where it should have soothed. Mortimer disliked this woman. She had been one of the early friends of Sybil, and one of the most eager to renew their acquaintance. She had eloped when very young with the dissipated scion of a noble house, whom his friends, weary of perpetually repairing the effects of his improvidence, at length sent into honorable exile as *attaché* at one of the petty German courts, where he was ultimately interred with all honor, leaving his young and pretty widow penniless. He had, indeed, made an appeal to his family in her behalf a short time before his death, but it had been made in vain, none knew wherefore; while it was not the less certain that the lady continued for a couple of years to inhabit the same city, frequent the same court, and maintain the same appearance, by some occult faculty known only to herself.

At length, however, the *maladie du pays* declared itself, and she returned to England followed by the regrets of the Margrave, and the compliments of the whole court circle; as languid and as languishing as ever, with a comfortable although somewhat mysterious income, and a magnificent diamond bracelet.

We have said that Mortimer greatly disliked the diplomatist's widow—Could it be prescience? He never asked himself the question: he only felt that even her blandishments were distasteful to him. And yet Mrs. Lamerly was a general favorite in her set; she simpered out her inanities with such a low sweet drawl; she told such piquant stories of Herr Graff Such an one, and the Grafine So and so, without appearing to be at all aware of the somewhat startling point of her own anecdotes; she sang such deliciously wild and guttural Sclavonic ballads almost with a lisp; she was so original, so odd, and so entertaining, and she had such fine eyes, that it would have been matter of wonder that she still remained Mrs. Lamerly, had she not lingered so long at that petty German court.

But if, even for Sybil, there was still a mystery attached to her friend, it was by no means reciprocal as regarded herself; for the simple, smiling, and apparently unsuspicious little widow was well aware of every incident in the career of her brilliant hostess, and as she looked around her, and contrasted the opulence by which Mrs. Mortimer was surrounded with her own comparatively confined resources, and then, with her usual well-concealed shrewdness, discovered the vaccillation of her husband's character, she began to ask herself how long such a discrepancy need exist, were he to be exposed to fascinations of a different description, and that she were to exert her own peculiar powers of pleasing.

There was something very agreeable to her vanity in such a speculation, and although, in

the first instance, it had been a mere idle fancy, the offspring of indolence and an inordinate love of luxury, the thought recurred again and again, until it piqued her self-esteem into a desire to prove whether, indeed, her foreign graces could not accomplish such a revolution. She had no fear of robbing Mortimer of the heart of Sybil, for she had read that heart to its very core, and she knew the "perilous stuff" of which it was composed; while, as regarded Frederic himself, she had not been a week beneath his roof before she discovered that all his affection was now centered in his child, and that his passion for his wife was rapidly degenerating into the most encouraging indifference.

Mrs. Lamerly was a coquette by nature, and consequently she did not pause to ask herself what might be the actual result of her machinations to either party; neither were her principles of that rigid order which would have taught her to pause upon the threshold of so base a treachery as that which she was thus coolly meditating; she only remembered that she was weary of inaction; that after having for a time seen herself an object of exclusive adoration, she had since degenerated into a mere unit in the great sum total of society. She only remarked that Mortimer was by many degrees the handsomest man in their set, and never doubting that she could also render him the most agreeable, she determined at any rate to try her strength, if it were only *pour passer le temps;* and therefore it was that she contrived to waylay him in his walks, and that she conceived so flattering an affection for his child.

All this is very hideous, but it was nevertheless a natural consequence of the culpable carelessness with which he had suffered his wife to surround herself by associates of equivocal reputation, and to make his home the rendezvous of idle *roués* and fashionable demireps.

Mortimer believed himself to be as susceptible and sensitive as ever to all which touched his honor, but his principles had in reality become unconsciously enervated by constant contact with profligacy and folly, and if he still discouraged the loose jests of the dissolute, and the social vices of the lax, it was rather because they were repugnant to his taste, than that they alarmed his virtue.

Still, Mrs. Lamerly vainly lavished upon him all her fascinations, all her pensive sighs, her languid smiles, her bewitching nonsense. He never bestowed more than a passing glance upon that fairy foot that scarcely seemed to press the velvet cushion by which it was supported; kept his eye riveted upon the daily journal, while her magnificent arm, circled by its brilliant bracelet, rested like a snow-wreath upon the chords of the harp; talked politics with old Sir John Stickfast, the greatest proser in the Lower House, while she was lisping forth some Germanic scandal, and transferred the slippers which she professed to have embroidered expressly for him, to his valet.

Mrs. Lamerly was nevertheless not discouraged. She had yet a great card to play, and although her vanity would have been gratified could she have been indebted for her triumph solely to the spell of her own attractions, still her spirit of emulation was aroused, and she resolved not to be baffled.

There was a strong bond between herself and Sybil. Ostensibly it was that of old affection and happy memories, of renewed friendship and perfect confidence, but in reality it was one of mutual apprehension. Sybil was well aware that many of the secrets of her past life were in the keeping of her former friend, who was as conscious as herself of the necessity of their concealment from her husband; while the widow, on her side, long habituated to all the luxuries of existence, to many of which her present income was inadequate, too well appreciated the advantages to be derived from even a temporary home like that of Mrs. Mortimer to cast them from her lightly.

It was in consequence of this conviction that she still compelled herself to temporize; but although she succeeded in teaching the beautiful infant to elap its little hands and crow at her approach, permitted it to tear her costly veil of Brussels point without betraying the slightest irritation, and even induced it to leave its father's arms to nestle in her own, still that father remained cold, and she was at length driven to confess to herself that her childish graces were expended upon him in vain.

Languid and listless as it pleased her to appear, Mrs. Lamerly possessed strong passions, and a perseveranee in all she undertook to accomplish which amounted to obstinacy. No wonder, then, that mortified vanity in this instance aroused all the darker impulses of her nature. Had he even loved Sybil, she could have understood this resolute indifference on the part of Mortimer, but her self-esteem had not even this poor consolation.

For the first time she felt the impotence of her efforts, and a spirit of revenge took possession of her. It was in vain that Lord James Blenheim and the Honorable Theodore Bruce whispered their honied words in her ear, smoothed the satin cushions of her *fauteuil*, and hung entraneed upon her lisping accents. She smiled upon each in turn, it is true, but she estimated their adoration at its just value. She knew that in a crowded country-house all must find amusement for themselves, and that idleness cared little whence that amusement was derived, whether from a pet monkey or a fantastic beauty; that Lord James was an engaged man, and the Honorable Theodore a ruined gamester. Still, the incense of flattery was essential to her, and so she discouraged neither, although each was but a floating straw upon the current of a stream wherein she had resolved to dive deep for a more coveted treasure.

At length her patience was exhausted, and she resolved to incur any risk rather than fail in her purpose. Like all sentimental women, she indulged in an elaborate correspondence. No letter-bag ever arrived at Westrum which did not contain half-a-dozen closely-written epistles to the address of Mrs. Lamerly; and it was curious to see the indolent and impassive beauty seated at her desk, in her turn rapidly covering sheet after sheet of delicately tinted vellum—for the odious and vulgar fashion of colored paper, mystic devices, and emblematic wafers,

was at that period just beginning to obtain in England—with the most minute characters, and to watch the facility with which the crow-quill poured forth its stream of soundless words.

Mrs. Lamerly protested that she hated writing, and perhaps she did, but there was sound diplomacy in her perseverance. Her position was uncertain and insecure; she could not afford to lose a friend, and it was, moreover, necessary that she should be constantly informed of the movements of those who might, directly or indirectly, exercise an influence over her fortunes. Thus no occurrence took place in her set, and it was an extensive one, of which she was not immediately made cognisant; and this fact not only enabled her to enhance her popularity by a constant supply of that light and often malicious gossipry so welcome at all times to the idle and frivolous, but also to facilitate such plans as she occasionally found it convenient to devise.

It is wonderful how often a placid and simple exterior deceives the crowd. The old and trite proverb, that "still water runs deep," is full of sound philosophy. Those laughing, rattling, reckless persons, who utter without reflection all that rises to their lips, may work mischief alike for themselves and for others, but the wound is at least laid open, and there is no hidden canker to apprehend; while the blow which bruises rather than breaks, lingers longer in the flesh, and at times corrodes even to the bone, poisoning the stream of life, and inducing the fatal gangrene which can never be eradicated.

Mrs. Lamerly, even while lisping out her German ballads, discussing the merits of a morning cap; reading half-a-dozen pages of a French novel; flirting with Lord James and the Honorable Theodore, quizzing Sir John Stickfast with a pretty smile which almost turned the brain of the bachelor politician, old as he was; waylaying Mortimer in his walks, and dressing a doll for the baby, had mentally completed her project; and it was worthy of her. In one way or the other, as she triumphantly reflected, it *must* tell, and who could say but it might succeed in both?

Mortimer was too proud to place himself in competition with the foplings by whom his wife was surrounded, and thus he left them a free field in which to display their arts of fascination; but would he do so were he pitted against a more formidable opponent? Would he not awaken to a full sense of his danger if he once saw her the object of adoration to a man with whom he could only doubtingly compare himself? And, in this case, would he not need a friend, a counsellor? A slight and gratulatory flush rose to her cheek as she glanced around her. Where could he so fitly seek that friend as in herself? Had she not already knit between them the bond of his child's affection, which, appear to disregard it as he might, she felt well assured must nevertheless have, in some degree, produced its effect.

It was clear that he despised Lady Clara, and that he barely tolerated Mrs. Babington; and she was well aware that let proud man commune as he may with his own sex in his hours of pleasure, it is the sympathy of woman that he turns to in his season of doubt and trial.

What fervent passions have sprung from a far weaker cause! The haughty spirit, once humbled to seek for help and consolation in the eyes and on the lips of a pretty and designing woman, seldom recovers heart-whole from the moral prostration. Like the silly lamb, he leaves some portion of the fleece upon the brambles; and it was upon this contingency that Mrs. Lamerly cleverly calculated. And meanwhile, what might be the effect of her design on Sybil? A curve of scorn rose to her lip, and trembled there for an instant. Let Sybil look to herself; her honor was in her own keeping. Her honor! How subtle are the distinctions made by the world on the subject of female honor.

The widow laughed in her sleeve; bitterly perhaps, but still she laughed. Mrs. Mortimer was *blansée*, it is true; had been the jest of half London for a season; had jilted the man to whom she was affianced; had volunteered elopement with another under very precarious circumstances; and had finally enriched herself with the spoils of her first dupe; but still she was an honorable woman, married to an honorable man, who would consider it incumbent upon him to send a bullet through the heart of any one bold enough to assail her reputation; while she herself—there needed no demon-whisper in her ear to urge her on, but it came; close, mocking, and baneful as the blast of the simoom, and the little heart which a career of vice and folly had spared to her, parched and withered beneath the scorching breath of jealousy and mortification.

CHAPTER XL.

"Sybil," said Mrs. Lamerly, in her most insinuating tone, as they stood together arranging some exotic plants in a *jardinière*, as female taste only can arrange them; "I have *such* a favor to ask of you."

"What is it?" demanded her companion in reply, moving a few paces backward as she spoke, in order to ascertain the effect of her last grouping; "I trust not to sanction your sending for your blue macaw; you know that my mother's nerves cannot sustain its screams; so, do, pray, be rational, and not urge it again."

"I was not even thinking of Jacko, poor dear," pouted the simple beauty, "though you know how I miss him; but tell me if I did ask you to admit another pet, who never screams, and who could not disturb Mrs. Delamere, or anybody else, would you refuse?"

"That depends entirely upon the nature of your plaything."

The little widow indulged in a peal of rich and ringing laughter, which sounded like the very echo of a joyous heart, as, smoothing her glossy ringlets before a mirror, and drawing closer the *cordillière* of her pink satin *douillette*, she said, with an arch look: "You must, in such an establishment as yours, still have one bachelor's room available."

"And if so, Amabel?"

"Why, then, I would ask you to allow me to supply it with an occupant."

"I must, first, know whom you would introduce."

"No one to whom you, at least, will object, *Madame la Chatelaine*," said the widow with a peculiar expression; "unless, indeed, like many of our monopolizing sex, you will neither take nor give."

"Speak plainly, Amabel, if you would be answered."

"I will speak plainly," said Mrs. Lamerly with a sudden change of voice and manner: "Trevor is just returned to England. All Mortimer as you are, you cannot have forgotten Trevor, Sybil? We met abroad; and time, as you are aware, works wonders. You were married; and, in short," lisped out the lady, bashfully inclining her head towards her left shoulder, until her long light curls rested upon the glowing satin, "I have reason to suppose that I almost succeeded in consoling him."

"You!" involuntarily exclaimed her listener, as, with burning cheek and flashing eyes, she glanced towards the little doll-like figure beside her. "You succeeded in consoling him! Am I to understand that he loves you?"

"You are to draw your own conclusions when we meet," tranquilly replied the widow, as she re-arranged a cape-jessamine. "Thus much, however, I will tell you, that I was the depository of his regrets and his despair—that I it was who played the Desdemona to your jealous Othello; and that while I was very near loving him

'For the (gauntlet) he had run,'

I have sufficient grounds for believing that

'He did love me, that I did pity him.'

"Am I to understand, Amabel," asked Mrs. Mortimer, suddenly becoming pale as the blossom of the arum near which she stood, "that Sir Horace Trevor made you his confidante?"

"That is a searching question, Sybil," was the smiling retort; "but I will be frank, and answer at once 'yes' and 'no.' To tell you the truth, I heard as little as I could; for I hate men to entertain me by talking of other women when they should be thinking only of myself. You loved him, he said; or, at least, he loved you, and you were to be married, and all that sort of thing; not as I was to poor Augustus, but surrounded by all the properties—parsons, and proctors, and postilions in scarlet jackets—when suddenly you jilted him. Yes, I am afraid, Sybil, that, in order to be quite fair and open with you, I must confess that he said you—had—jilted him. Naughty girl! who could not be satisfied with any thing short of a prince; and silly woman! who, having made up her mind to catch her bird, was not careful to lime the twig thickly enough."

"And was this all he told you?" again asked Sybil, with difficulty controlling her emotion, whose very excess enabled her to despise the taunt of her companion. "Did he tell you no more than this?"

"It may be that he did," said the widow, listlessly throwing herself upon a sofa; "but you know of old, Sybil, that I am a bad listener; and my memory has become so defective since I lost poor dear Augustus, that I really remember very little that has happened to me since."

"Listen to me, nevertheless, Amabel," said her companion with compressed and bloodless lips. "You may succeed in deceiving others, but *I know you*. We were girls together, and your baby caprices cannot beguile me. What is your intention, what your view, in bringing Trevor here? Do not lose sight of the fact that I may have less interest than yourself in forgetting the past."

"I have already told you," was the sullen reply: "I believe that Trevor admires me—and—I am poor."

"I understand," said Mrs. Mortimer, with a contempt which she did not even seek to conceal; "but I doubt that my husband will consent to receive such a guest. Even before our marriage, Trevor was distasteful to him."

"Perhaps so," was the careless reply: "he feared a rival, but of course that danger is now past; and if you represent the matter to him in its true light, I cannot see what valid objection he could raise."

"And yet you have been a wife, Amabel."

"I have; and, therefore, I have not now to learn that these things are easily arranged. Besides, Sybil, Mortimer can only rejoice in the opportunity of displaying his triumph to your discarded lover."

The words were common-place enough, but there was something in the tone in which they were uttered which jarred alike upon the pride and upon the fears of Mrs. Mortimer. The war of wits was equal; and there needed no magician to prove to Sybil that her dear friend held her in the toils. It cost her much to temporize, and gladly would she have spurned her as she sat, but she dared not; and, accordingly, she forced a smile, and throwing herself down beside her, said, in a tone which she struggled to render playful—

"Come, now, Amabel, be true for once, and tell me if you, indeed, anticipate that you shall, one day, be Lady Trevor."

"If Horace can really forget you, I am sure I shall."

"Then are you not throwing away your best chance by asking him here—*here*, where we shall be brought into close and constant contact? Mark me, Amabel, I do not believe for an instant that you have any thing to fear from my influence, but you know that men are wayward, and surely it would be more judicious—"

"To give him time to forget me altogether. Is that what you would say, Sybil? I give you all due credit for your humility; and I will so far put faith in it as to tell you that I feel quite satisfied you will not exert your influence to my detriment; while, as a natural consequence, Trevor will henceforward consider you only as the wife of his friend, and therefore beyond his reach. Thus, you see that I have nothing to apprehend."

"Amabel, would you only be honest and straightforward for five minutes—"

Mrs. Lamerly laughed; not scornfully or sa-

tirically, but as though she really thought the dialogue in which she was engaged very amusing.

"Will you at least hear me?"

"Of course. Do you not perceive that I am listening with all my ears, and that I am vastly entertained to discover that Sybil married has as great a confidence in the effect of her charms as she had in her first girlhood? Why, my dear, my vanity has aged tenfold more than your own; and it is as much as I dared venture to expose my *preux chevalire* to the captivations of so accomplished a coquette, even now, when she is hedged round with the proprieties of married life. But, Sybil," she added with affected solemnity, as she shook her head, while her chesnut tresses shimmered in the sunlight; "I know all the onerous obligations of matrimony, and all the rigid duties which it involves. You may believe me; for although I was barely seventeen when I married Augustus, I discovered a gray hair above my right temple before I had been a wife more than a week, and almost suspected a wrinkle one short month afterwards. Judge, therefore, if I can enter into your feelings."

"I have done," said Sybil indignantly; "and although I cannot be discourteous enough to weary of an invited guest, I must decline receiving one who is forced upon me." And she rose from the sofa.

"As you please," retorted her companion. "I am then at liberty to tell Trevor that you do not feel authorized to run the risk of seeing him here?"

"Amabel," said Sybil, as she paused before her; "I do not understand you. I can incur no risk from contact with your lover."

"Then why are you so unaccommodating?"

"I have already told you that he is distasteful to Frederic."

"Why, so are fifty other things. He hates Lady Clara, and snubs Lord John; and yet here they are. He detests a home full of flirts and fools, and you will admit that if you are good-natured enough to make room for Trevor, he will be the most rational man, and I the most rational woman, under your roof. You may as well concede that *il caro marito* has very little to do with the matter."

"If I were only convinced that Sir Horace really intended to make you his wife," said Sybil doubtingly, "all my objections would at once be overcome, but, Amabel, Trevor is a man of the world, and he knew you abroad."

"He did so," replied Mrs. Lamerly, with the most provoking *à plomb;* "and in like manner Mr. Mortimer is a man of fortune and family, and yet, Sybil, he is your husband. Do not let us taunt each other, love. There are some ugly proverbs which might be brought to bear upon us both. In one word, will you receive Trevor *as my friend,* or not?"

Mrs. Mortimer stood for a moment irresolute; all her habitual self-possession had forsaken her, and it was in an ill-assured voice that she at length said: "You are ungenerous, Amabel; but I can deny you nothing. Only, if I consent to admit Trevor here, you must promise to keep a secret for me; a poor and puerile one, it is true, but still it must be kept."

"And you will confide it to me?" exclaimed Mrs. Lamerly with a genuine joy, which she strove to conceal under an affectation of childish eagerness.

"I have no alternative, or perhaps I should hesitate to do so," replied Sybil with haughty bitterness; "but this it is: before my marriage with Mr. Mortimer, Sir Horace visited The Grange in order to—to renew his suit——"

A low and almost inaudible laugh broke from the parted lips of her listener; but she was too much excited to remark it.

"Conscious of the jealous temperament of Frederic," pursued Sybil; "and aware that our previous engagement had authorized, in Trevor's eyes at least, a familiarity of manner which my captious suitor would never tolerate, and in fact, driven to some such expedient by the circumstance of his having come upon us when Horace had raised my hand to his lips——"

"Fie, naughty Horace!" broke in the exulting widow, affecting to hide her eyes in her jewelled hands: "But was that all?"

"All, Mrs. Lamerly!" said Sybil sternly; "and that *all,* simple as it was, would have sufficed to estrange from me forever the hand, if not the heart, of Mr. Mortimer, had I not, upon the impulse of the moment, presented the stranger to him as my cousin."

"Enviable presence of mind!" said the widow, with a smile which partook rather of contempt than admiration. "How the dear old Margrave would have enjoyed such a *tour de force!* Really, my dear Sybil, you are inimitable! And what said your simple Corydon of his new connexion?"

"He bore with him for my sake; and that is all that I can expect, should he again be compelled to receive him as a guest."

"Poor Horace! However, I will endeavor to compensate to him for the slights of the happy mortal who won you from him. And so I may tell him to come—may I not? And you will welcome him for my sake, for he is at present quite *désorienté;* only a week from Italy, where he saw your old friend Saviatti, who told him that he had seen you, and all about poor Signor Mortimer being as jealous as an ogre; and that wretched little Lord Squanderleigh being shot in a duel by that dear handsome Florentine Duca, who was kicked out of a *saloon* in Paris for cheating at *ecarte;* and a host of other things that you would be delighted to hear. And I will promise to be generous, and to lend him to you until he has emptied his budget: after which *gare de loup,* for I am a little demon when I am thwarted in what the French prettily call 'affairs of the heart.'"

And so the two friends parted.

CHAPTER XLI.

"False pride, my pretty Gertrude, nothing but false pride," said Mr. Armstrong gaily, as the orphan stood, steeped in blushes, and with large tears swelling in her eyes, in the deep bay of a library window, where she looked in the midst of the heavy dark frame-work of carved oak

like one of Guido's angels; "surely when I give you my son, I may also be allowed to offer you a few flounces and farbelows!"

"But, indeed, my dear sir—"

"But, indeed, my dear young lady, I must have my way! Mary has set her heart upon it; and I will not consent that there shall be the difference of a knot of ribbon between you. Do you not hear her every now and then whispering, 'Papa, I should like so and so?' or 'Papa, I *must* have such a thing?'—And are you not both my daughters?—I can have no more folly of this kind, Gertrude. Had you been wealthy, I must, I know, have allowed you to be as headstrong as the rest of your sex; but as it is, I will not hear another word."

"And yet, for that very reason, dear Mr. Armstrong, I must entreat of you to let me speak. Do you know that even now—now, at this very instant—when you are not only endeavoring to hasten my marriage with your son—I, a poor, penniless orphan, who can only repay your generosity by the gratitude of a true heart, and the tribute of a sincere affection—but are even urging me to share the luxury which, although they may be the birthright of Mary, are all too costly for a portionless bride like myself—do you know, that even now—" and, as she continued speaking, she had gradually approached the old gentleman, until at last she was leaning over his high-backed chair, her arm upon his shoulder, and her golden hair mingling with the grey and glistening locks which clustered over his benevolent-looking head; "even now, I feel as though all this happiness must be a dream; and I start at every sudden noise least I should awake only to find myself once more alone and unloved."

"Silly child!" said the old man, in a voice that trembled somewhat more than usual, as he drew her towards him, and pressed his lips to her glowing cheek.

"Suffer me, therefore, I implore you, to return to my humble home until the period of—of this double marriage. I have already, in my selfish happiness, too much neglected the benevolent relative to whom I am indebted for all that I possess, and all that I am taught to hope. Let me for three short weeks endeavor to prove that the joy of my heart does not extinguish its affection."

"What you ask is only fair, Gertrude, if you really wish it," said Mr. Armstrong reluctantly; "but I very much doubt if either Ernest or his mother will consent to such a sacrifice. As for me, I confess that, between man and man, (if I may use such an expression where an old woman is concerned,) I think you are right."

"I know you would, sir, for you are always alike just and generous; and therefore I may now calculate upon your support upon this point, for which I am really anxious. But I have not yet done; and even in spite of your own disclaimers I do not, I will not despair, that you will still make another and a greater concession, when I entreat it almost upon my knees. Oh, bear with me for an instant! And indeed, indeed, you will admit that I only ask what is reasonable and consistent! Reflect for a moment! Your daughter is about to marry a man of large fortune, and carries with her to the altar a dowry worthy of him, while I——"

"Gertrude, again I say that this is a false pride; and, moreover, surely something is due alike to Ernest and to his family?"

"Much—very much. Nevertheless, I fearlessly persist in my petition—leave me free until I am indeed *his* wife and *your* daughter. Do not compel me to feel utterly powerless."

"Poor Mary! Why will you persist in thwarting her?"

"Mary will hear reason, I know she will, and I shall be so much happier. Moreover, my dear sir, poor as I am, I still possess resources which I can explain to dear Mrs. Armstrong and the girls, although I should shrink from detailing them to one of your lordly sex."

"Well, well, I have not the heart to contradict you any longer," said the squire, "so, if you can convince the women, I will not interfere further in the matter; but I warn you that they are likely to prove less ductile in your hands than I have done."

Enchanted by her success, Gertrude warmly thanked the affectionate old man, and hastened to the breakfast-room, where the ladies of the family were busily discussing the merits of Lyons satins, Lisle laces, and orange-blossoms. A general exclamation greeted her entrance. Mary's taste was at issue with that of the London dressmaker, to whom Mrs. Armstrong bowed with implicit confidence, and it has just been decided that the question should be referred to Miss Mortimer.

"Now, am I not right, dear Gertrude?" eagerly asked the other bride-elect; "will not our dresses be infinitely more graceful if entirely composed of lace, than if we merely trim them, and leave the glossy glarish satin unsubdued? And shall you not prefer a long veil of this delicious point to an odious bonnet?"

"The lace robe and the veil by all means, love," replied Gertrude, with a quiet smile; "like you, I shrink from the glare of satin by sun-light; but, unlike you, I shall neither venture upon the one nor the other."

"What can you mean?" exclaimed both sisters with surprise; "Has it not been already arranged that the two dresses are to be precisely similar?"

"It *was* so arranged, I know," said Gertrude, as she raised the hand of Mrs. Armstrong to her lips, "and grateful, very grateful do I feel for the affection which could prompt such a proposal, but, within the last half-hour, I have induced Mr. Armstrong to rescind his resolution."

"How very unkind of papa," said Mary, with a pretty pout. "Our party will not look half so picturesque, and that is not the worst of it, for I know you so well, Gertrude, that I am quite sure of your motives for this silly whim. But, mark me, I will not stand at the altar with you if you are dressed one whit worse than myself."

The orphan laughed as she silenced the threat with a sisterly kiss. "Do not fear, dear girl," she said quietly: "You have as yet no idea of my heaped-up riches, and moreover I warn you that I shall pride myself more upon my dress that day, than were it composed of lace like cobwebs, or thrice-piled velvet."

"What is it then, Gertrude!" inquired Mrs. Armstrong, anxiously.

"It is the work of my own hands, my dear madam. Simple, very simple in its materials, but rendered somewhat costly by the labor which has been bestowed upon it. Let us, however, rather talk of dear Mary's toilette."

"Ernest will be bitterly disappointed when he finds that you have overthrown our plans, Gertrude," said Eleanor reproachfully.

"And so am I," observed the old lady, as she raised her eyes for a moment from one of those atrocities which, in the shape of illustrations to Magazines of Fashion, Belle Assemblées, and productions of that class, libel at once the good taste of Englishwomen, and the fair proportions of nature. "Only look here, Gertrude, at this sweet costume! I had made up my mind to persuade you both to fix upon this; and now, you see, you have upset everything."

"I am afraid that you will, indeed, be inclined to think so, my dear madam," replied the orphan, after glancing for a moment at the great human hour-glass, overwhelmed with conflicting finery, which Mrs. Armstrong submitted to her inspection, "when I tell you that this is not the only concession that I have induced your kind husband to make. A certain feeling of remorse has reminded me that I owe a debt of gratitude and courtesy to my aunt, and that I cannot better pay it than by devoting to her comfort and amusement the three brief weeks which still remain before——"

"Oh! no! no! Gertrude. Impossible!" was the general exclamation. "Ernest will never consent, and, moreover, only consider that, should you persist, there is an end at once to all our consultations, all our plans. Miss Warrington cannot want you, and will only be annoyed by the perpetual intrusion to which such an arrangement would subject her. No! no! We will yield the first point, if you will give up the second."

"Indeed, I cannot," said the orphan, smiling through her tears; "I cannot, because I feel that I am doing right, and you will see that I shall soon induce Ernest to think as I do. Remember, also, how soon we shall have a right to be constantly together, without sacrificing any sense of duty; and let us not wilfully rush upon so needless a source of regret."

"As Mr. Armstrong has consented," said the old lady, laying down the beflounced beauty which had so long been her study; "as your father has consented to this arrangement, my dears, I think that Gertrude is quite right: for, after all, her poor old aunt must miss her even more than we do; and so, if she can persuade Ernest to allow it, I must desire that you will not say another word upon the subject."

And Gertrude did succeed, although with considerable difficulty, in convincing her lover after having been compelled to hear him utter certain comments upon old women which were anything but complimentary; and their last evening at the Manor House was considerably saddened by the consciousness that they should not, for some time to come, again enjoy that solitary communion in which they had latterly indulged.

"Nevertheless, rebel as your are," said Ernest with a smile, "I will indulge you with one more evening saunter through the grounds: so, throw on your bonnet and shawl, and we will stroll until the dews force us in again."

And then it was, as they wandered through the rich shrubberies, and seated themselves for a time in the pavilion so dear to both, that the orphan, for the last time, poured forth all the feelings of her pure heart to the man who was so soon to become her husband, and listened, with a happy smile, to the rebuke with which he met her earnestly expressed regrets that she should bring him no better dowry than her love.

"I ask, I care for nothing more, Gertrude," he replied, in an accent which carried conviction to her mind. "In possessing you, I shall possess all that I have ever coveted on earth; but when once you are mine, I shall become more ambitious for your sake. Nor do I doubt that by exerting proper means, I shall succeed in leaving you no such cause of regret. I have already a project, and had you been less unselfish than you are, or could I have made up my mind as demurely as you have done, to a temporary separation, I might already have taken some steps towards its accomplishment. However, as you have decided upon returning home where I shall have no chance of seeing you except in the presence of your female jailer—confound all old maiden aunts—I am half-inclined to start for town in a day or two. You can write to me by every post, and I will endeavor to satisfy myself in that way until I ascertain what may be my chance of success. But after all, Gertrude, this new caprice of yours is too bad. Look at Mary, she has never tried Somerville as you are trying me, and I warn you, lady mine, that this is the last occasion, the very last, in which I shall submit to your odious despotism."

Gertrude answered by an affectionate smile.

"How you women love to tyranuize," pursued Ernest. "Meek and mild as you seem, you are all alike."

"Except Mary," laughed his listener.

"Not even excepting Mary," retorted her lover. "She is only deferring her impertinence till she can cover it by the dignified authority of a wife, but you have not had the grace to do this."

"And your project, dear Ernest?"

"Is a secret, fair lady, at present, but I will nevertheless be generous enough to confide to you one of its earliest results, should it prove successful. You remember that lovely little retreat which we drove past a few days ago, Gertrude, half cottage and half villa, with its dainty pleasure-grounds and miniature lake? I covet that smiling abode as our home. But I have said nothing on the subject to my father,—who would, as I well know, strain every nerve to gratify me while it remains in the market,—for Mary's portion must be paid, and I am aware, that he could not, without inconvenience, meet so large a demand upon his means at this particular moment, so that all I can do is to trust that it will not find a purchaser until I am prepared to make it mine."

"And had I not been penniless you might at once have accomplished your wish," said Gertrude sadly.

"Now, fie upon you!" exclaimed Ernest, "thus to steal my secret from me, and then to repay me by outraging the delicacy of my affection. One more such regret, Gertrude, and I shall begin to fear that you have not a proper confidence in my love."

"Rather, then, will I be grateful for the poverty which has left you without one doubt," replied the happy girl, as she wiped away the tears which had started to her eyes; "and henceforward I will speak and act as though I were a rich heiress, and privileged to indulge in every species of extravagance. Will that promise satisfy your exacting nature?"

But often, very often, when she found herself once more domesticated beneath the narrow roof of her aunt, did the conversation of that evening recur to her, and never without a pang. Of Ernest's affection she was assured, nor did she fear that even poverty could weaken it, but still she wept over the sacrifices to which he had compelled himself for her sake, and bitterly felt her utter helplessness to lessen them. She was indeed about to give herself to him, a portionless bride, for even the bequest of her aunt she no longer felt to be her own, and it had already been arranged by Ernest that it should be transferred to Miss Warrington, as a tribute of gratitude for the kindness which she had shown the orphan in her hour of need.

Thus, however cheerfully Gertrude might seem to bear the humiliating fact of her poverty, still it revolted her delicacy, and pained her heart. She could not quite forget the resolute refusal with which Mr. Armstrong had in the first instance met the entreaties of his son; and although he had subsequently treated her with paternal kindness, still the mortification of that refusal had left its sting. It was in vain she repeated to herself that all this waste of feeling, situated as she then was, had become worse than idle; still a thousand memories rose up before her, each coupled with its own regret. She was, indeed, an outcast. Even her cousin, the companion of her childhood, had forsaken her—and she was about to enter the home of Mr. Armstrong, as a wife which his generous son had rescued from the cold, wide ocean of the world; without a home, without a friend, and almost without a name.

It was fortunate for Gertrude, that the daily letters of her happy and sanguine lover, overflowing as they were with affection and gladness, and the occupation with which they necessarily provided her, tended to rouse her mind from the morbid state into which it might otherwise have fallen, while the half-playful and half-serious reproaches of his sisters, who found it difficult to forgive her desertion at such a moment, assisted in no slight degree to reconcile her to herself. They declared that everything had gone wrong since she left the Manor-house; that they could come to no decision upon any point without her assistance; and they even endeavored to enlist Miss Warrington in their cause. The rigid old lady, however, proved impracticable, and laid so much stress upon the propriety of her niece remaining under her roof until the very eve of her marriage, that they rather lost ground than gained it, and were compelled once more to submit.

Thus a week passed by, during which Miss Warrington was more erect and sententious than ever. Not a rumor had transpired in the neighborhood, of the great event which was about to occur. Not even the grey-haired curate had a suspicion of the double wedding; although he had already been apprised that his church was to be honored by the presence of the Archdeacon, who being an intimate friend of the Squire, had been invited to perform the ceremony for his daughter; and thus, although the gossips were busy chronicling every movement between the Great House and the humble abode of Miss Warrington, and found ample food for their conjectures, not only in the perpetual transits of the ladies themselves, but even the comings and goings of grooms and waiting-maids, they naturally attributed all this delightful commotion to the approaching marriage of Miss Armstrong; and marvelled that as the proud niece of their neighbor appeared so essential to the "Squire's people," she should have chosen such a moment to return home.

On the tenth morning after her return to Bletchley, two letters instead of one were, to the surprise of Gertrude, put into her hand. For a moment, her heart beat quickly—It must be from Frederic, and after all, she was not quite forgotten. But no, a single glance sufficed; the writing was not his, and the mysterious missive bore the London post-mark. She had a faint idea that she recognized the somewhat quaint and crabbed characters of the superscription, but she could not identify them; and in another instant she laid the letter down, merely marvelling who could have written to her, and soon altogether forgetting the circumstance as she greedily devoured the contents of Ernest's far more interesting epistle.

Even the letter of a lover, however, comes to an end at last, and Gertrude had no sooner for the second time arrived at the conclusion of the three closely-written pages which composed that of Ernest, than she once more remembered the still unopened packet upon the table.

These were its contents.

"Dear Niece,—"My physician informed me yesterday that I am dying, and I felt so perfectly satisfied that he was right that I at once dismissed him, as it is useless to throw money away which is certain to be lost, both principal and interest. I am aware that the fact of an old man's death can be of little consequence to you, and therefore it is only as the brother of your mother that I now write to tell you, that after having lived for so many years alone, I am weak enough to desire not to die alone. I have no relation upon earth but you, or I would not have troubled you upon such an occasion. I enclose a *5l.* note. If you consent to come to me, it will pay the expenses of your journey, and if you do not, you may keep it to buy a black gown, if you think proper to wear one when I am gone, out of respect to your mother's memory. If you *do* come, you must come at once, or you may be too late. I give you the address of my late

office. When you reach town, drive there, and they will send a clerk with you to my house, as you might not be able to find it.

"Your uncle and well-wisher,

"WILLIAM SPENCER."

The agitation of Gertrude was excessive, as she rapidly perused the letter of her obdurate relative; but not for a single instant did she hesitate as to the line of conduct she should pursue. She had not, moreover, a moment to lose; the coach by which she had formerly reached Bletchley only made its London-ward journey twice within the week, and was to leave that very day at noon. Hurriedly, therefore, she detailed to Miss Warrington the emergency in which she found herself, and after writing a brief note of regret and explanation to the ladies of the Manor-house, hastily threw together a few indispensable articles of apparel, and aided by the energy of Hannah, found herself at eleven o'clock traversing the well-known meadows, accompanied by a stout lad bearing her portmanteau and carpet-bag, precisely as she had done on the previous occasion.

Yes; thus alone and unattended, save by a fustian-clad village boy, did the future mistress of the Manor-house set forth upon her second melancholy journey, leaving behind her smiling lips and loving hearts, to encounter at best a very uncertain welcome, and to assist once more at the melancholy spectacle of a death-bed. She reached the road-side inn, paid the modest fee of her impromptu page, and then in a large, bleak, chilly room, whose sanded floor, rude chairs, empty grate, and beer-stained table, combined to form the very acme of discomfort, sat down to await the departure of the coach, and for the first time to reflect.

Her thoughts naturally turned on the probable displeasure of Ernest, when he should learn not only the fact, but also the manner of her departure; she felt that his pride would be wounded, and his fears excited by her solitary pilgrimage, but still she did not repent the step which she had taken. The brother of her mother, however harshly he might have acted towards her, had a claim upon her respect and obedience, which she dared not neglect; and even amid her terror of the present, and her dread of the future, she experienced something akin to joy as she remembered that she had still one relative to whom she was not utterly cast off, and to whom she might even yet prove a source of consolation and comfort.

At length, after much preparatory bustle, the dragging of trunks and packages along the stone passages, the loud laughter and louder oaths of a score of idlers and hangers-on, and the shrill voices of women calling to each other, as it appeared to the trembling Gertrude, from every quarter of the building, the horses were at length put to, and to her great delight she found herself, on entering the coach, in the presence of a single fellow traveller, a comely woman of sixty, who, after having uttered a courteous and respectful "good-day" to her new companion, attempted no further conversation, and thus once more left the anxious girl to her own thoughts.

CHAPTER XLII.

NEVERTHELESS the journey was a dreary one, and well calculated to oppress the already saddened heart of Gertrude. Nothing could be more dispiriting than the constant intrusion of strangers, who, after a coarse stare, and a surly greeting, were anxious only for their own accommodation, and careless of the discomfort of those with whom they were brought into temporary contact; the sudden stoppages, accompanied by hurried departures, and the discordant rumbling of heavy trunks overhead, or the still more annoying searches for small parcels, mislaid in some of the numerous pockets dispersed in the interior of the vehicle; the succession of repugnant fumes of food and strong potations, rendered still more inodorous by the closeness of the carriage, and the selfishness of its occupants, who, having fortified themselves against the external air, saw fit, moreover, to insist upon its entire exclusion; the dreary waiting at the doors of road-side houses, where the other passengers descended to make their hurried repasts, for the sole purpose, as it appeared, of subsequently grumbling over their inferiority; and, ultimately, the arrival in town, and in the heart of the city, in the midst of a twilight deepened by fog, and rendered still more terrifying to a novice like Gertrude by the noise of many voices and the tread of many feet.

A hackney-coach was, however, soon procured, and ere long the orphan, with her slender luggage, was on her way to the office to which she had been directed by the letter of her uncle. Hitherto she had borne up bravely, but this last slow and melancholy, and to her mysterious progress, through narrow streets, where the dim lamps failed to throw more than a sickly beam upon the dirt-obscured, and often iron-barred windows of the lofty and frowning houses, totally exhausted her courage; a thousand fantastic doubts and terrors took possession of her; she was utterly alone, in the power of a stranger, of whose probity she had necessarily no assurance, and as she looked eagerly from the window of the foul and rumbling machine in which she was borne along, she could not obtain the most remote idea of the streets she traversed; all were alike, long and dingy, and dark, without one distinguishing feature which could be discerned through the thick and uncertain gloom.

Nor was her situation apparently much improved when, at length, the cumbersome coach drew up beside the narrow pavement of what appeared to be a squalid lane, and the immense mass of capes and handkerchiefs which enveloped the driver appeared beside her, and his hoarse voice inquired if that were the right house. Gertrude trembled in every limb as she declared her utter ignorance upon the subject, and requested that he would inquire of the inmates. The man turned away with a surly and inaudible rejoinder, but he nevertheless obeyed, and, at his summons, the door was opened by a slip-shod woman, whose uncombed hair fell in revolting confusion about her face and who held in her hand an unsnuffed candle

which flared and guttered under the action of the chill wind.

The heart of the orphan sank within her as she felt convinced that this could not be the haven she had sought, and for an instant, she felt crushed by the conviction of her forlorn and helpless situation, thus utterly alone in the streets of a great city, amid damp and darkness; but she was soon relieved from this new terror by the approach of the slatternly portress, who, advancing to the side of the carriage, dropped a curtesy, and inquired if Miss would be pleased to alight, adding, that she had just come in time, as Mr. Jackson had already locked all up, and was preparing to go home.

"No, no, I thank you," was the quick rejoinder of Gertrude; "I have not a moment to lose. If it be, as I suppose, Mr. Jackson who is to be good enough to accompany me to my uncle's, have the kindness to tell him that I am ready to proceed at once."

The woman withdrew into the house, and at the termination of a few minutes she reappeared accompanied by a diminutive man of careworn and haggard countenance, who, as he emerged from the dingy passage, was hastily buttoning a shabby and insufficient great coat over a huge bunch of keys. By the light of the flaring candle he accosted Gertrude with a courtesy which was almost obsequious; and, on her reiterating her wish to avoid all further delay, made a quiet bow, and mounted the box beside the coachman.

The poor girl was entirely ignorant whither she was now proceeding, and she had ample opportunity to reflect upon the discomforts of her position ere they arrived in a narrow street at Walworth, which was their place of destination. Here they once more stopped, and the active clerk having hastily descended from his unenviable eminence, and cautiously knocked at the door, announced to Gertrude that she had now reached her uncle's house.

It had by this time become so dark, that, owing to the absence of street lamps, which, as it appeared, were a luxury entirely dispensed with in that immediate neighborhood, the excited and wearied traveller could form no judgment as to the description of residence selected by her uncle; but she did not long remain in doubt; for once more a door was opened to her, and again a female stood upon the threshold, candle in hand, to inquire her business. To this question Mr. Jackson immediately replied in a low, and somewhat deferential tone, after which, he himself opened the coach-door, took possession of the portmanteau and carpet-bag, which he was compelled to deposit in the front room, in order that the young lady might be enabled to pass into the house, and then, while the neat and matronly person who had given them entrance was respectfully ushering her into the same apartment, he advanced, hat in hand, to inquire if he should discharge the coach. Totally unaccustomed to all such arrangements, Gertrude eagerly and thankfully put her purse into his hand, and, while she was making hurried and whispered inquiries as to the state of her uncle, she was once more startled by the sound of a fierce contention without.

"Don't be alarmed, Ma'am," said the good woman with a smile, as, even by the faint light which she carried she saw the cheek of the orphan turn pale; "It is only Mr. Jackson settling with the Jarvey. They are such rogues, that he has been trying to cheat you, as a matter of course, but for once he has met with his match; he must look sharper than ever he did in his life before, if he imposes on Mr. Jackson."

"Oh, I entreat you, give him anything—all that he asks. That outcry will disturb Mr. Spencer."

"Oh, no, Ma'am," was the quiet rejoinder; "I don't think my master will hear it; but if he does, it will do him good. He will be so glad to know that you have not thrown away your money."

The heart of the orphan sank within her; she knew not how to reply to such an assurance, and involuntarily she glanced round the squalid room in which she stood, as if to read in its arrangements some token of its owner's habits. The survey was soon completed. Fire there was none, and the discolored shavings which filled the grate afforded ready evidence that they had long remained undisturbed; a small and well-worn carpet partially covered the floor, and half-a-dozen rush-seated chairs assisted in concealing the remaining portion of the boards; a small round table, furnished with an office inkstand, a few pens, and a torn blotting-book, stood in the centre; and the walls boasted, for all ornament, a folio sheet-almanac fastened to the faded paper by four pins, immediately above the chimney-piece.

Gertrude had already been initiated into the discomforts of genteel penury; but on her arrival at Bletchley she had believed that the home of Miss Warrington was an extreme example of its class, while now she had only to look round her to be convinced, that even by her last change of residence, she had left, not merely positive comfort, but almost luxury behind her.

In an instant the conviction flashed upon her mind, that the helpless old man who had so unexpectedly summoned her to his bed of death had been ruined by one of those hazardous speculations in which he had formerly amassed considerable wealth; and the question trembled upon her tongue, when it was arrested by the re-entrance of Mr. Jackson, upon whose hollow cheek the excitement of his late contention had almost brought a flush, and who smiled a smile of genuine complaceney as he restored the purse of Miss Mortimer, assuring her that he had succeeded so thoroughly, that the rascally coachman had not carried off a farthing more than his fare. It was evident, by his crest-fallen look, as Gertrude answered only by a silent bend of the head, that he had anticipated both thanks and congratulations upon his victory; but he once more became radiant as she placed the last remaining guinea of Mr. Spencer's gift in his hand, and assured him, in her gentlest accents, that she would not fail to

inform her uncle how greatly she was indebted to his care.

How difficult it is for those who have once enjoyed affluence, even though it may have been succeeded by comparative penury, and those gnawing doubts and apprehensions which occasionally accompany the disbursement of a crown-piece, to forget their early habits, where they feel they have incurred obligation! and thus it was as Miss Mortimer of Westrum House, rather than as the niece of Miss Warrington, that Gertrude recompensed the services of the astonished old man, who had been her guide through the mysterious wilderness of London. Never, however, was largesse better bestowed; and could the gentle girl have guessed with what a feeling of astonished happiness that poor office drudge trudged homeward to his obscure lodging, to gladden the eyes of his sickly wife and ill-clad children by the sight of that golden coin, she would have shed tears of delight. When he took his leave, the female attendant, after apologizing to her new inmate for leaving her in the dark for a few instants, as she had no other candle, bolted and barred the door of the house as carefully as though it had closed over the entrance of the jewel-cave of Aladdin, and then, hastily returning, deposited the light upon the table, and, at the request of Gertrude, went to inform the sick man of her arrival.

Again the orphan looked around her in utter sadness. It must be as she had guessed, and the rich relative who had abandoned his family because he could not endure to share his wealth with them, had lived to see it melt away into absolute penury, and perhaps to die amid privation and regret. And then another thought flashed upon her. Miss Warrington as yet knew nothing of the generous intentions of Ernest in her behalf, and, consequently, she should commit no injustice if she proposed to him to divide Mrs. Mortimer's bequest between her aunt and the equally needy brother of her mother. It was little, as she sorrowfully felt, to offer to either, and thus divided, became even less worthy of their acceptance; but it was her all, and it would suffice to convince them that she was not selfishly indifferent to their welfare.

Feeling more happy than she had done since she left Bletchley, Gertrude rose from her seat, and was disencumbering herself of her heavy travelling cloak, when the servant reappeared, and offered to conduct her to the chamber of her unele, who was prepared to see her.

Overcome by fatigue and anxiety, the orphan felt her knees tremble as she preceded the woman up a narrow and unearpeted flight of stairs, and then paused beside a door which stood partially open.

"Walk in, Ma'am, if you please," was whispered in her ear; "that's master's room."

And Gertrude obeyed.

The same solitary candle by which she had been received on her arrival still lent its friendly light, which, faint though it was, enabled her to discover every detail of the closet-like apartment of the dying man. One of those odious inventions called fire-baskets stood in the grate, where a feeble flame was flickering beneath a suffocating clump of coke; a table of unpainted deal was drawn near the hearth with a chair beside it, and upon it stood a spoutless jug and a glass tumbler. A large hair trunk, which had evidently long afforded a banquet to the moths, supplied the place of drawers, and a comfortless tent-bedstead, with curtains so scanty that they refused to meet on either side, occupied the upper end of the room, and partially obscured the window.

Upon this squalid bed lay the worshipper of Mammon, beneath a thin and sullied coverlet; one hand under his head, which was only protected from the chill night air by a profusion of snow-white hair which fell over the pillow, and the other resting upon a walking-cane, that had evidently been left purposely within his reach.

"So you are come, are you?" growled a voice which would have been harsh had not weakness rendered it feeble, as Gertrude moved noiselessly across the floor: "Thank you for that at least." And the bony fingers quitted for an instant the head of the cane, and were extended to her as she reached the bed-side: "Come to see me die—not in a palace—not in a palace, as perhaps you expected, but like an honest man, under a quiet roof, never disturbed by debts or duns."

"Do not despair, sir," said Gertrude softly, "you require care, and I am very grateful to you for having given me the opportunity of becoming your nurse. Young as I am, I am no stranger to a sick room."

"All the better—all the better," was the ungracious rejoinder; "no woman has a right to be so. But sit down, sit down; why do you stand!"

Gertrude possessed herself of the solitary chair, and placed it near the sick man's pillow.

"And you, Mrs. Sharp," continued the invalid in the same low growl, "go and arrange Miss Mortimer's room. Have you borrowed a bolster as I told you?"

"Yes, sir," replied the woman with a slight blush.

"Very well, go then; take the candle with you. We can talk as well in the dark."

Mrs. Sharp curtseyed in silence, took up the brass candlestick, and disappeared. Gertrude remained in darkness with her scarce seen, and dreaded relative.

"And now tell me—tell me," whispered the sick man, when they were thus alone together, "tell me, niece, what has your journey cost you."

"Your generosity, sir, more than supplied my wants."

"Yes, yes; you could not spend five pounds in coming here, unless you sowed silver by the road-side, that it might bring forth gold. London was the trial, child; London, I know it. I have lived in London, boy and man, for sixty years, and now and then they have tried to cheat me. *Tried*—do you mark me—tried, but never succeeded!" And through the darkness sounded a low chuckle, as the sick man turned abruptly upon the pillow. "I protected you against the tricks of London, when I put you

under the care of Jackson—Jackson is as keen as a file, but has never had wit enough to make his fortune. He was too weak to grapple with the world, and to hold what he had clutched. It requires wit—ay, and wisdom too—when a man has once become rich to enable him to remain so, and not suffer his honest gains to escape him;" and full of the image which he had conjured up, the wretched mammon-lover raised his bony arm in the air, and unclosing his clenched hand, spread wide his attenuated fingers, as though a shower of gold-dust were evaporating from between them.

The poor girl shrank before this sudden burst of factitious energy, although its most hideous feature was spared to her by the obscurity around them, and anxious to evade all reply to such an observation, she said timidly,—

"You were speaking of Mr. Jackson, sir."

"True," was the prompt reply, as her uncle once more relapsed into sudden calm: "It is idle to talk to you of what you cannot understand. I was talking of Jackson, telling you that he had been a fool, who never knew how to avail himself of his natural capabilities. But, by the bye—what's your name, child? I have forgotten."

"Gertrude, sir," said the poor girl almost choked by her tears.

"Ah, yes, Gertrude, I remember now; your mother was fond of novel reading, and found the name there, no doubt; but no matter. I say, Gertrude, you did not give Jackson anything, I hope? He's in constant employment; sixty pounds a-year, and only four children. With proper management, sixty pounds a-year will go a great way, and where there are no appearances to keep up—and what appearances can be expected from the junior clerk of a mercantile house?—it is a very comfortable income."

Gertrude made no reply.

"And so Mrs. Mortimer left you 2,000*l.*, child?" pursued the sinking gold-worshipper; "2,000*l.*!! Do you know that millions have been made out of the fiftieth part of 2,000*l.* And what have you done with such a sum of money?"

"Will you forgive me, my dear sir, if I venture to tell you what I should rejoice in doing with a part of it?"

"Oh, then, it is not all gone!" said the eager voice, as the bony fingers again expanded themselves, and sought in darkness for the hand of Gertrude, which they clasped in their skeleton pressure; "Then it is not all gone! And I may live long enough to get you good interest for it; unquestionable security; you may trust me. But be saving, Gertrude, be saving. 'Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves,' as Poor Richard says. But what do you want to do with a part of it, child? What can you know about money-matters? What nonsense have you got into your silly woman's head?"

"I scarcely know how to tell you, sir, but I had better confess that when I received your letter I believed you to be living in affluence, if not in splendor."

"I dare be sworn you did!" growled out the harsh voice, and the clasp of the withered hand was suddenly withdrawn.

"That idea alone," pursued the orphan undismayed by the effect of her frank confession, "made me hesitate for a moment in obeying your summons; for I felt that where you could command every comfort and every care, my presence would avail but little; while there were circumstances which rendered me anxious not to abandon my home at this particular crisis. Now, however, I am indeed grateful that I stifled the voice of my selfishness, for since I entered your house, I feel that I may not be utterly useless; that I may be enabled to act towards you the part of a child, and that, with your permission, I may in a slight, although unfortunately a very slight degree, repair the injustice of that fortune which I am painfully aware has deserted you, at the very moment when its favors were the most needed."

"And what can you give me, should I live?" murmured the dying man, even more huskily than he had yet spoken.

"Little, too little, I fear to secure to you all the comforts of existence," replied Gertrude sadly, "but still enough to protect you from want."

"And what do you propose to live upon yourself?"

The orphan blushed, although all was dark about her. "I should, perhaps, already have explained to you, my dear sir," she almost whispered, "that I am about to become a wife."

"The wife of whom, Gertrude Mortimer?" loudly demanded the sick man, aroused into violent although transitory energy: "Beware how you suffer yourself to forget, that although an almost penniless orphan, you are the daughter of my sister."

"I do not shrink before the warning," was the proud reply: "I am betrothed to the only son of Mr. Armstrong of Bletchley House."

Although Gertrude could not see the action, she could hear the dry and fevered palms of the invalid clasp together, and something like a laugh mingle with the hard and laboring cough which ploughed his chest.

"And so," he said at length, "You can help me to live? and I have toiled for years only to be indebted at last to a puny and love-sick girl, who is ignorant of the value of what she gives up so readily! But I am glad that you are to marry an Armstrong, child, very glad. I know their history—part of it is written in bonds and post-obits,—but better days are coming for the Armstrongs, better days; and again I say that I am glad of it. Gold is like the loadstone, girl; only it acts and reacts upon itself. Did you ever see a jewelled dowager seat herself at a card table, that all the gold did not fly to her ringed fingers, from those of the poor and proud adversary who had dared to breast her in the cunning strife? Did you ever see the great speculator pitted against the trembling novice in some fourth-rate venture, that the Leviathan did not swallow the gudgeon? No, no; gold loves gold, child. The sight of it is pleasant; the ring of it is sonorous; the weight of it is satisfactory: the man who has once pos-

essed gold, good, sterling gold, knows its real value, and cannot be cheated by a counterfeit. To him it is food and fuel, home and wife, and children, costly raiment, and proud station. If you could raise again the walls and palaces of Tyre and Sidon, and Carthage and Palmyra, do you know what all their stones would cry aloud in honor of their resurrection? Nothing but gold." And the dying man sank back, panting and exhausted upon his pillow.

Gertrude felt very wretched. Here lay beside her a worshipper of Mammon, evidently excluded from the sordid temple of his cherished deity at the eleventh hour, and yet so fearfully imbued with the one and only idolatry of a long life, that he could not divest himself of his old, and now worse than idle associations.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"And now tell me, child," muttered the wretched man after a pause, "have you brought money enough with you to take you home after all is over here? You had better go back at once when I am gone, for London is a sad place, a very sad place, fit only for those who do not know the value of what they squander. Are you provided with money to take you back?"

"I am, sir," said Gertrude, more and more saddened by the conviction that her uncle could converse upon no other than his one darling theme: "and indeed I blush to have already intruded so greatly upon your generosity."

"That is right," replied the gold-worshipper, evidently much relieved by the assurance; "And now, while we are alone, let me tell you at once that here, in a pocket-book under my pillow, you will find a 20*l.* note. That is to bury me, child. A sad waste of money, when, after all, we need only a few planks nailed together, and a deep hole dug to hide us away in; but we all have our weaknesses, and I wish to be put into the ground like a gentleman. So it must *all* be spent; do you hear me, Gertrude? All—that I may have the satisfaction of knowing that the thing was done handsomely. Jackson will follow me, and it will be a fine day's work for him; the scarf, and hatband, and gloves, will be a little fortune, for I know well from experience, that they can be turned to good account. He will have earned them, however, for I have given directions that he shall come here and arrange everything. I cannot depend on you; they would rob and cheat you on all hands; while Jackson knows the world, and trusts it as little as I do. Nevertheless, make him show you the account. Twenty pounds is a large sum to expend at once, and a great deal ought to be done with it."

"I will endeavor to follow all your directions, Sir; but would it not also be prudent to make some arrangements in contemplation of a happier result to your illness than you appear to anticipate? These gloomy forebodings can only tend to aggravate your sufferings."

"Gloomy forebodings!" echoed the old man in a tone of sarcastic indignation, "Who has told you that I have any gloomy forebodings? Do you suppose that I am afraid to die?"

"I sincerely trust not, Sir."

"Well, then, you may be at ease upon that point. Afraid to die! Pshaw! the very idea is sickening. What have I left to live for? Are you not aware that I have been compelled to give up business; and that I am indebted, even for the services of Jackson, to the courtesy of my successor?"

"I had indeed suspected, on my arrival here, that such was probably the case."

"You are a shrewd observer it seems, girl; and yet you fancy that I am afraid to die. What is the world to me now, when I have nothing left to do in it? However, if I should live, it appears that you have provided for my wants," and again the exulting chuckle was faintly audible; "but never fear, never fear, all is nearly over with me, and I shall not burden you long."

"You do me injustice, Sir, if you suppose——"

"I suppose nothing, child; I am a man of facts—honest, straightforward, plain facts. My whole life has been one fact—one dry, hard fact—one palpable and tangible principle."

"I was only about to assure you, Sir——"

"You had already done better, girl, you had offered me money, which will go farther than all the assurances in the world; and I hate sentiment."

Fortunately for Gertrude the staid attendant of her uncle entered as he ceased speaking, and thus obviated the necessity of any reply. After having carefully deposited her candle upon the table, she knelt down, and with a piece of stout iron-wire attempted to stir into something like a blaze the dull and cheerless handful of fuel in the wretched fireplace; but, even cautious as she was, the noise grated upon the ear of the sick man, who, drawing aside the miserable apology for a curtain which veiled the head of his bed, exclaimed eagerly,—

"Gently, Mrs. Sharp, gently. How often have I told you that coals are the precious jewels of the people? It is by no means cold, by no means cold," he repeated, as he withdrew his arm under the scanty coverlid when the chill air of the little chamber fell upon it; "and coals are dear, very dear, this winter."

"It is the nasty coke, Sir, that will not catch," said the housekeeper in a tone of respectful remonstrance.

"All the better, Mrs. Sharp, all the better," was the tart rejoinder. "Half the fires that take place in London are occasioned by that injudicious use of the poker which appears to be an epidemic with your sex. Let the coke alone, it crackles and burns away gently, and nothing more is necessary. And now, what have you got to give Miss Mortimer? She may, perhaps, be hungry after her journey."

"We have a cold mutton-chop in the house, Sir."

"Good, good, nothing is so wholesome as mutton; and cold meat after fatigue is always preferable to hot. Go and sup, child, and then let me see you again."

"I thank you, my dear Sir," said the unhappy Gertrude; "but I have no appetite."

"All the better," said the sick man with a smile; "all the better. Meat is heavy at night, and might spoil your rest. Do as you please, my dear, do as you please. Mrs. Sharp will obey your orders. And now give me some water, Mrs. Sharp, I am thirsty."

"Water, Sir!" exclaimed Gertrude earnestly; "Surely you will not run the risk of drinking water in your present weak state!"

The miserable invalid made no reply until the quiet matron had poured a glass of water from the dilapidated jug, and placed it in his hand, then, after having swallowed a portion of its contents, he said ironically; "And why should I not drink water? Is it not the natural beverage bestowed upon us by nature? Beer is privileged poison; tea is costly, and I have a pump in my yard, child, for which I have already paid a tax. Why should I not drink water?"

"I would entreat for myself, however, a cup of tea," said Gertrude, who could no longer repress her tears; "for I begin to feel that I am utterly exhausted."

"Do you hear, Mrs. Sharp?" asked the sick man peevishly. "Miss Mortimer wishes for tea; and, as that is the ease, you may bring me some also; but coffee is cheaper, coffee is cheaper."

"Coffee will be equally acceptable to me, my dear Sir," gasped Gertrude.

"Mrs. Sharp! Mrs. Sharp!" almost screamed the wretched sufferer from his squalid bed; for the delighted attendant had hurried from the room, carrying off with her once more the solitary candle, and had already reached the head of the stairs; "Miss Mortimer will take coffee. Measure it carefully, for should I get well again (and there is no knowing what may occur), I shall not overlook any waste. Miss Mortimer will take coffee, and, perhaps, some bread and butter."

The female functionary replied by the conventional "Very well, Sir," and rapidly descended the stairs; while the orphan, once more alone in the darkness with her unhappy relative, instead of pursuing the conversation, sat and retraced in her mind's eye every feature of the sharp thin face which lay upon the pillow beside her.

One glance had sufficed to show that, in his youth, Mr. Spencer must have been strikingly handsome. The outline of his features was regular and fine, although now pinched and meagre from disease, and she was almost tempted to add—from famine. A hectic circle burnt and glowed upon his cheek; but his forehead was as white as marble, his eyes encircled by a dark ring, and his narrow lips parched and livid. The expression of his eyes was half cunning and half suspicious, and betrayed a nature which his silence might otherwise have concealed; while the continued clutching of his fingers, fastening as it seemed upon some visionary treasure, and the continued restlessness visible in his whole person, told that the spirit within was ill at ease.

Not a vestige of that beautiful placidity and inward peace which make age so venerable and so attracting, drew the heart of the spectator to Mr. Spencer, even in his suffering. The sympathy which he had recklessly cast from him during the course of a long life could not be awakened by the still stern and eager selfishness predominant in every word and look; and even while Gertrude anxiously endeavored to cheat herself into the belief that she should, in time, feel for him the affection due to so near a relative, she was, nevertheless, conscious of a sentiment of repulsion which she could not overcome.

The silence was soon broken by the sick man, to whom a moment's quiet appeared burdensome; but it was evident that he was greatly weakened by the exertion of the past hour.

"You will soon have some amusement, child," he said, as he turned his head heavily towards her: "The paper will be here in a short time. I cannot live without a paper, and I get it cheap from a neighbor by waiting till the evening. All I shall ask you to read to me is the city article, I care nothing about polities, or Old Bailey reports. The money market is the only market worth watching, and when you have read that, you can follow your own fancy as to the rest. But you must be quick, for they call for it again in half-an-hour. I made that arrangement with them," he added, dropping his voice still lower, until it sunk into a confidential whisper, "to prevent Mrs. Sharp from sitting up to read, and burning the candle to waste, for Mrs. Sharp has had an education, and used to bring books and read while she sat by my bedside. Books, indeed! when she might have been repairing my linen, or washing my clothes. I soon sent the books out of the house," and the wretched man laughed once more his low, bitter, and heartless laugh.

The coffee was soon afterwards announced, and at the bidding of her uncle, Gertrude rose and followed the servant down stairs, once more leaving him in the darkness, and alone. She was miserable, but she feared to betray all the bitterness of her feelings before a stranger and a menial, and, consequently, she repressed her tears, and seated herself at the tea-table with one of those forced smiles which are infinitely more painful to witness than any burst of grief.

Comfortless, indeed, was the meal prepared for the wearied and exhausted girl, but she eagerly accepted the steaming coffee which was offered to her, and even endeavored to compel herself to partake of the uninviting bread which was its accompaniment. This last effort proved, however, beyond her strength, and a thick sob arrested the unpalatable morsel ere she could swallow it.

"Let it come, Ma'am, let it come," said the sympathising woman who stood beside her, "it will do you good to cry, and well you may, poor lady. Do not try to stop your tears, you will be better able to bear up afterwards, and I shall be no restraint upon you, for I am going to take my master his cup of coffee. I must water it a little first, however," continued the worthy Mrs. Sharp, as if speaking to herself, "or the poor gentleman will fancy that he is going to the workhouse." And, taking the kettle from the hob on which she had placed it, although there was no fire in the grate, she half filled it with water, and, then, adding the coffee, disappeared

steadily in the darkness, as if long habit had rendered her independent of such a consideration.

And when she was once more alone, Gertrude wept, indeed. For a time, the smiling future which was beckoning her on, was utterly forgotten, and she lived only in the cheerless present. She cared not for the poverty of her uncle, she would not have shrunk from any privations, but his narrow and sordid spirit crushed her to the very earth. Not a vestige of that becoming pride and moral independence which would so well have graced his adversity, and recalled the habits and feeling of former days, appeared to have survived his pecuniary ruin; he had evidently sunk with his fortunes, and still clung with a childish pertinacity, to the wealth that he had lost.

The orphan felt her fearful responsibility, she felt how much and solemnly it behoved her to awaken him to a better and a more befitting state of mind; but she could not conceal from herself all the difficulty of her task. How was she to enforce the necessity of a higher and a holier worship—the worship of humility, and self-abnegation—upon one who, like the epileptic maniac, saw everything tinged with the yellow hue of gold? And yet the effort must be made. She must not suffer him, because he had lost his all in this world, blindly to put from him the promises of the world to come; and therefore humbly, and with a deep sense of her own incapacity, she resolved to make an attempt to inspire him with higher and holier hopes.

Poor Gertrude! She had yet to learn that avarice is in itself a religion, and that when once it has fixed its fiery clutch upon the human heart, that heart is evermore preyed upon by the one demon-flame, and the fearful tragedy of the fabled Hall of Eblis is perpetually enacted upon earth. The idol may indeed be consumed upon its shrine, but the infatuated worshipper will still kneel before the empty altar, and pour out his orisons to the memory of the vanished deity.

It was not long ere the attendant returned, and the orphan having wiped away her tears, felt the presence of a fellow-being almost a relief. She, moreover, had some misgivings as to the remaining pecuniary resources of her uncle, which it was expedient either to confirm or to remove, in order that she might know how to act, and accordingly, she determined to question the staid-looking woman who so quietly and resignedly served him, and thus to ascertain, if possible, the exact position of his affairs.

Having once arrived at this determination, she desired Mrs. Sharp, on her re-appearance, to reply frankly to her inquiries; a request with which the matron readily and respectfully complied.

"I believe my master to be a ruined man, Ma'am," she said, "although not actually destitute. I am the widow of one of his late clerks, and to me he has always been just, even if not generous, but he is less so to himself, and it has been with the greatest difficulty that I have induced him to take sufficient sustenance to preserve life. He cannot last long, and yet you see the wretchedness in which he is content to pass the last few weeks of his existence. Before he thought of inviting you here, Ma'am, I ventured once or twice to propose to him that I should engage some young girl at low wages, to do the drudgery of the house, in order that I might devote my time exclusively to him, but he resolutely refused, and I have been compelled in consequence to leave him hour after hour alone on his sick bed. I should not have cared so much for this, could he have rung me up when he required my services, but we have not a bell in the place, and although I substituted the cane which you must have seen near him, it has frequently happened that he has knocked upon the floor for several minutes before I heard him, and I have found him faint and exhausted from the exertion, and almost believed him for a moment to be dying."

"But tell me, Mrs. Sharp, tell me honestly," urged the unhappy Gertrude, "this state of almost starvation in which I find you, can it indeed be necessary?"

"I really cannot say, Ma'am, but I'm afraid so. As regards myself, Mr. Spencer has always paid my salary with the greatest punctuality, but I will not conceal from you, that a portion of it has almost always been spent in purchasing trifles for his comfort which I have been obliged to tell him were presents from my friends, or I do believe that he would have died long ago of actual starvation."

The tears of Gertrude flowed afresh. "My poor uncle!" she sobbed out, "and yet he was once wealthy."

"Yes, Ma'am, and I have been even told, very rich, although he never lived like a rich man, but after the death of my husband, I saw little of him for some time, until he proposed to me that I should become his housekeeper, an offer, which, as I was totally dependant on my friends, I readily accepted."

"I thank you, Mrs. Sharp, for your candor," said the orphan, "and now, we must act in concert and endeavor to render his remnant of life more tolerable. My own resources are scanty, it is true, but they are sufficient for the purpose. Moreover, under the circumstances, I feel it a duty to expend upon his comfort the sum which he forwarded for my journey, and which must have made a cruel inroad upon his scanty means."

"I fear it did, Ma'am, for the forwarding of that money delayed his letter for several days. He even shed tears as he folded it, declaring that should he die before your arrival, he should have ended his life by an act of folly. But now you are come, Ma'am, all will be right, and he already seems more happy in his mind."

Thus instructed, Gertrude hastened to make sundry petty but well-judged arrangements, all tending to the comfort of the sick man, which the housekeeper gladly undertook to realise, and she was still involved in such considerations when a knock at the door summoned Mrs. Sharp to receive the paper, for which, as she remarked, her master must have long been anxiously looking out, from its unusual delay. Nor was she wrong in her conjecture, for she had scarcely returned to the parlor, when the

sound of the cane upon the uncarpeted floor of Mr. Spencer's room, announced that he was aware of its arrival, and impatient for his daily luxury.

Gertrude accordingly took possession of the unsavory journal, which, reeking with the smell of tobacco, and fouled by the touch of unwashed fingers, betrayed its tavern origin, and followed by the housekeeper with the ubiquitous candle, hastened to the sick room.

"Good girl, good girl," said the invalid eagerly, "now come close to me, and read very slowly, slowly, that I may be able to understand you."

Gertrude was already repaid for her alacrity. The deal table was drawn nearer to the bed, and the candle placed upon it. The dying man raised himself upon the pillow, an eager expression lighted his dim eyes for an instant. The hand which clutched the pocket-book still remained buried beneath his head, but the other, relaxing its hold upon the cane, wandered over the bed-clothes, and the fingers occasionally traced with wonderful rapidity the figures announced by Gertrude as she read.

"Foreign securities commanded no great attention to-day," she commenced, carefully accenting every syllable.

"Just as it should be," growled the listener, "look at home, is the wisest motto."

"Consols began at 99, and left off at 101 3-8.

"What's that?—What's that?" asked her uncle with a sudden enery.

Gertrude repeated the quotation.

"Good, good," he murmured almost inarticulately, "things are mending. I wish I had 100,000*l.* to sell out."

Despite this species of running commentary, however, the orphan at length reached the termination of her dreary task; and declining the proposal of her host that she should continue the perusal of the inodious sheet for her own private gratification, she ventured to urge her state of fatigue, and to request permission to retire to rest.

Nothing could be more consonant with the wishes of her uncle. Gertrude once withdrawn, Mrs. Sharp might also immediately follow, and the candle be extinguished. It was therefore with something like warmth that he bade her good night, and saw her retreat to the wretched and pillowless bed, upon which she no sooner threw herself, than, exhausted both in mind and body, she had her head upon the *borrowed bolster*, and sank into a deep, and happily, a dreamless sleep, with the breath of prayer upon her lips.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Nothing could exceed the annoyance of Mortimer, when as he was one morning crossing the lawn, gun in hand, preparatory to a day's shooting, he was passed by a travelling chaise and four, in which he recognised Sir Horace Trevor. Already dissatisfied with the circle which had assembled at his house, and wearied by the coquetry and frivolity of which he was a perpetual witness, he fairly lost his temper, and felt half inclined to warn the intruder from his premises. A moment's reflection sufficed, however, to show him his folly. Had he not already, by his supineness, authorized the presence of several individuals almost equally obnoxious to him? And how could he consequently decline to receive his wife's relation? Nevertheless he was irritated and annoyed, he had always hated this man, and here he was once more bearding him under his own roof. Full of angry and impatient emotions, he forgot for a moment the errand upon which he had set forth, and plunged into the shrubbery, as if to shut out at once all sight of a home which had latterly become odious to him.

Suddenly the happy laughter of his child, fell upon his ear, and, like the harp of David before Saul, it sufficed to restore him to composure. It was therefore almost with a smile that he hurried on, in order to embrace his darling, and still the loud and ringing sound of her artless mirth came buoyantly upon the breeze. It was yet early, and he assuredly was ill-prepared to encounter any one save the infant and its nurse, when at an abrupt turn in the path, he saw before him Mrs. Lamerly, seated upon the grass under a sycamore, with her rich chestnut hair falling in showers about her, and his little girl busy in tangling the gleaming tresses with her fairy fingers.

Mortimer would have retreated, but the child had already heard his step, and, pausing for a moment in her sport, recognised him with a scream of delight. There was consequently no means of avoiding the encounter, and after the utterance of a brief greeting, and the expression of his surprise at finding his fair guest so early risen, he rested his gun against a tree at a little distance from the group, and threw himself down upon the turf beside them.

Despite his dislike of the coquetish widow, Mortimer could not remain altogether insensible to the kindness which she lavished upon his heart's idol, and on the present occasion she looked so extremely pretty amid the disorder produced by her indulgence to the child; the golden waves of her hair glimmered so brightly in the sunshine; her wrapping-gown of white muslin, designed so modestly, and yet so perfectly, the outline of her small but faultless figure; the little foot which, outstretched a few inches beyond the border of her dress, lay imbedded in a rich frame-work of mossy turf, was so exquisitely minute and well-proportioned; her fair cheek was so softly flushed by her exertions, and her large eyes were so "darkly, deeply, beautifully blue," as she looked up at him, half in confusion, and half in merriment, that he began to marvel how he could so long have remained insensible to her attractions.

"But where is Harris?" he asked as the child, after having received and returned his caress, once more extended its little arms to its playfellow, and pursued its former amusement.

"Oh, we dispense with Mrs. Harris's attendance when we are bent upon a frolic, do we not, Eva?" lisped the ingenuous beauty, as she clasped the little girl to her breast, so suddenly as to cover the face of Mortimer for an instant with

lr long and perfumed tresses; "and we are it bound to tolerate the intrusion of papa. We al an hour in the morning before mamma her friends have left their dressing-rooms, order to be entirely alone, and it is too bad at our solitude should be invaded by gentlen in leather gaiters and velveteen jacket. e must select another play-ground, my pretty ra."

"You are quite right Mrs. Lamerly," said ortimer, apologetically; "mine is certainly no tire in which to present myself before one of y wife's guests, but you will at once find my cuse in the fact that I could not possibly antipate this meeting."

"Oh, you are quite forgiven," laughed the dy as she affected to be anxious to gather gether her scattered tresses; an attempt hich was, however, frustrated by an impaent cry from the child, "for it must be conssed that I am somewhat in the same preeament, and not altogether in a presentable stume. We must therefore sign a mutual uce, and promise to behave more prettily in ublic."

"One of us, at least, will not succeed in *looking* more prettily," replied Mortimer, scarcely onscious of what he said, but inadvertently ttering his conviction at the moment; "and hen I consider from how kind, how very kind motive you have suffered yourself thus to be urprised in your present picturesque state of isarray, I should be ungrateful indeed were I ot to appreciate all its attractions."

"Now, fie upon you for a flatterer, Mr. Mortimer," was the retort of the fair widow; "I hall really tell Sybil!"

"Tell Sybil!" repeated Frederic between his enched teeth, and a sarcastic smile hovered for n instant about his mouth, which, transient as t was, did not, nevertheless, escape the quick ye of his companion, "you were one of Syil's earliest friends, and must be quite aware hat I shall be easily forgiven."

"I can scarcely agree with you," said, or rather murmured Mrs. Lamerly, as she bent down and pressed her lips to the rosy cheek of the child, which, wearied at length with its sport, was falling asleep upon her encircling arm; "Even knowing what I know, I cannot believe it."

"And what *do* you know?" asked Frederic abruptly.

"Oh, nothing, nothing, at least, which should bring such a scowl upon your brow. Sybil, as an unmarried woman, may have been fickle, capricious, perhaps even what the naughty, ill-natured world calls a coquette, but now, of course, all that is over. The feelings of a wife are so different. Compelled to act so as to place her above all reproach, she is naturally jealous of her prerogatives."

"You are an able advocate for the unsullied purity of wives," said Frederic, with a sarcasm which even at that moment he could not control.

"Certainly I am," replied the lady, wholly unmoved by the tone in which the observation had been uttered; "my good friend the Margrave often used to tell poor Augustus that he could not be too grateful to me for all the care I took of his interests, and the sacrifices which I was always ready to make for his benefit, and although this praise was perhaps a little partial and exaggerated, still it gives me some right to suppose that I am not altogether ignorant on such a subject."

"And so my fair Sybil was somewhat of a coquette in her youth, eh, Mrs. Lamerly? To be candid with you, I had already suspected as much. A handsome woman, you know, has so many temptations to a little levity."

"To be sure she has," readily conceded the intimate friend of the married beauty; "and then Sybil was so *very* handsome, and so much admired, that it is not to be wondered at if she *did* get herself a little talked of. For my part, I believe it is impossible for any one who is even commonly attractive to escape."

"No doubt of it," replied Mortimer with a saturnine smile; "pretty women are the natural prey of malevolence and slander. There are degrees, however, even of scandal, and so long as nothing can be adduced against them beyond a little harmless coquetry, why, there is not much mischief done."

"True," replied his companion, as if lost for a moment in her own reflections; "but the line to be drawn between coquetry and—and—impropriety, is so extremely fine—such a mere hair's breadth—that, like the bridge of El Sirat, by which the Mahommedans are to pass into heaven, it is somewhat difficult to avoid treading over on one side or the other."

"Aptly illustrated!" said Mortimer, as he swept back one of the long golden tresses of the lady, in order to possess himself of the chubby little hand of the sleeping child, a movement which brought him still closer to the side of the apparently unconscious widow. "Very ably illustrated! We should indeed be merciful to those who lose their footing, even if we cannot save them. But to return to Sybil. You have known her many years?"

"We were girls together."

"And you are acquainted with her cousin, Sir Horace Trevor, perhaps?"

"Oh yes;" and Mrs. Lamerly laughed an equivocal laugh which rang even to the depths of Mortimer's spirits.

"He loved her, I believe?"

"To be sure he did, or he would not have sought to marry her."

"I almost wonder that so handsome and fashionable a man should not have prevailed."

"For shame, Mr. Mortimer," said the widow with a pretty display of childish indignation, as she struck his hand lightly with her slight and ungloved fingers: "For shame; you are trying to make me tell tales out of school."

"Why should I?" asked Frederic, looking into her face with one of those smiles by which men generally retort the condescending familiarities of the other sex; "I have the whole romance by heart. Fierce love on the part of the gentleman; negative encouragement on that of the lady; a proposal on one hand, and a refusal on the other. You see I have nothing to learn."

"Indeed!" was the ambiguous rejoinder;

"and so you consider that to be a romance worthy of an acknowledged beauty? Why, my dear sir, I could weave a better for the gawky daughter of a village curate."

"Never mind the curate's daughter, but indulge me with one according to your own view of things. Something pretty, piquant, and peculiar. I adore love-stories."

It was a strange, almost a frightful look, which Mrs. Lamerly turned upon her companion. There was a mocking triumph in her eye, which darkened its pupil until it became almost purple, and an expression of eagerness in the dilated nostril and quivering lip that added to its fierceness, but it passed away as rapidly as it had risen, and, bending over the child, she said simply,—

"I have no imagination."

"I do not ask you to imagine anything; you know the world so well, and must have such a store of memories."

"Do you suspect that I could be guilty of treachery?"

"I suspect nothing, but, as my meeting with you this morning has marred my sport for the day, I feel that you owe me some compensation."

"You seem to forget that you have given me great cause to complain of you."

"I?"

"Yes, undoubtedly. As Sybil's most familiar friend, I had a right to expect at your hands far greater courtesy than you have shown me."

"My dear Mrs. Lamerly," said Frederic, as he took her hand and retained it, despite a slight, a very slight struggle for its release; "I am not a fashionable man, and always approach my wife's friends with caution."

"How incorrigible you are!" was the smiling reply; "You always will misunderstand everything. To hear you, any one would really imagine that I wanted you to make love to me."

"That would be very easy, and very pleasant," remarked Mortimer.

"Upon my word you are too bad, and I will not allow it," said the widow, releasing her hand from that of her companion; "so in order to punish you, I shall leave you to yourself," and, gently placing the little girl upon her lap, she began to collect her scattered hair, as if to enable her to put her threat into execution.

"Be careful, Mrs. Lamerly," exclaimed Mortimer, springing from the ground; "You will awaken Eva. Allow me to act as your *soubrette*. I have a strong arm and a light hand; you shall see how well I can acquit myself."

"How very incorrect, Mr. Mortimer!"

"What can you mean? Can anything be more simple? Does not the child prevent you from rendering yourself this service? and is not that child mine? What glorious hair!" he continued, as he gathered it up, and endeavored to bind it round her small and well shaped head; "It is really the shower of Danae realised."

"What nonsense!" pouted the widow.

"It is a sin to torture it in such a way," pursued Frederic; "Were you my wife, I should compel you to defy conventionalities, and to wear it *a la Magdelaine*."

A slight suffusion rose to the brow of the lady.

"There, that will do, Mr. Mortimer," she said peevishly; "now give me my bonnet, and let me return to the house."

"There is the bonnet," replied Frederic, once more throwing himself down beside her; "but I cannot suffer you to leave me without the promised love-tale."

"I made no promise," said the lady, still only half appeased.

"Be generous, then, and act as though you had done so. Look round; can any spot be more appropriate for such a purpose? Come now, I will prompt you—'Once upon a time'"—

"Be it so," murmured Mrs. Lamerly, as a transient shadow passed across her brow, "'Once upon a time,' then—since that is the fashion in which I am to commence—when I was quite a girl—But no, I am in no mood for story-telling this morning, and moreover, what do you wish to know?"

"All that you will confide to me."

"You deserve nothing at my hands."

"I will hereafter endeavor to do so."

"Well, then, I will be equally generous. Trust not Sybil too far—"

"Ha!—"

"You are, however, perfectly safe at present. She despises the fops and *roués* by whom she is now surrounded."

"And if her cousin were to arrive?"

"What cousin?"

"Trevor."

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten that Trevor was her cousin," said the simple beauty, playing with a tuft of wild anemones which grew beside her; "I have such a bad memory. Why, if Sir Horace were indeed to pay you a visit—There would be nothing surprising, you know, in such an arrangement between relations—it might be as well to remember that the iron which has already been ignited heats the most easily. But no, no, he will not come here. And besides, even if he should, why should he come only to renew his attachment to Sybil? Lady Clara knows him, though, to be sure, he detests her—*that*, I will do him the justice to say, and I know him—just as I know Lord John, and a score of other men about town—but I have not the vanity to believe that I can be attractive enough to tear him from the dear delights of gayer scenes."

"But, should he come, you advise me to be cautious. You consequently think that, despite his rejection, Sybil loved him?"

"No doubt she did, or things could not have gone so far. And, perhaps if that odious Palermitan Prince had not come in the way, she would have married him when once they were engaged, but she was ambitious, and the title dazzled her vanity."

"You allude to Prince Saviatti?"

"Of course I do, and after he bowed himself off, it was natural enough that Trevor——But upon my word, we are talking scandal!"

"As you say, it was natural enough, that Trevor, after having 'loved,' should 'ride away' in his turn," said Mortimer with the apparent calm of concentrated feeling, affecting

it to have remarked the tardy caution of her
lt exclamation; "these are every-day events,
rd your romance is no more interesting than
r own."

"Ah! but——However, I will say no more
lon the subject," remarked the lady, affecting
t check herself; "It is, I think, impossible that
revor will intrude under your roof, and conse-
cently the past is of little importance."

"Trevor is here," said Mortimer in a hoarse
isper.

"Here! Oh no, he knows better."

"I tell you he is here, I saw his carriage ap-
oaching as I left the house."

"Your eyes deceived you. It is impossible."

"Nevertheless he is here."

"But upon what pretext can he have come?
pend upon it, you are wrong."

"And if not?"

"If not—why then—Oh, I see it all now,"
d the beauty with a forced laugh; "his visit
ll be attributed to me, for we saw a great
al of each other abroad. And perhaps," she
ded fixing her large eyes steadily upon her
tener; "perhaps I have been too modest, and
may be so, in which case Sybil has indeed
own her friendship."

"She should be grateful to you for such an
mission. And do you also love this man?"

"Really, Mr. Mortimer—"

"We are speaking confidentially, you know,
d we may answer such a question without re-
gnance, particularly when I assure you that,
ould it be otherwise, he shall not remain four
d twenty hours in my house."

"Why, you are a perfect tyrant!"

"That is no reply, and I must have one."

"Surely I am not bound to betray myself?"

"Under the present circumstances I think dif-
rently. You have now told me either too little
too much, for me not to desire a perfect un-
erstanding upon the subject. Should you
deed be the object of Sir Horace Trevor's pur-
it, are you prepared to receive him as a
itor?"

"Upon my honor, Mr. Mortimer, I do not
mprehend your right to ask me such a ques-
on."

"Perhaps not, and yet it must be answered."

"Well then, it is possible that I might be in-
uced to listen to him."

"So be it," said Mortimer, rising; "as your
cknowledged suitor alone can he remain an
mate of Westrum. The romance shall at
ast never reach its climax."

"Your readiness to dispose of me is, at any
ate, not very flattering," pouted the unsophis-
icated beauty.

"My dear Mrs. Lamerly, I owe you so much
ratitude for your kindness to my little Eva,
hat I am unfeignedly interested in furthering
our happiness."

"But suppose I do not love this man?"

"You will be fortunate. It is those who mar-
y where they love only to find their affections
ast back upon them, who run the risk of being
nade miserable."

"Naughty man! What would Sybil say to
uch a speech from you?"

"If she could make up her mind to be sin-
cere upon the subject, she would tell you that I am quite right. Believe me, Mrs. Lamerly, it is always safer to marry where you are loved, than where you love. The one is an illusion, and the other a reality."

"What *triste* philosophy!"

"I am no philosopher. I advance only a plain fact."

"I am sure that my poor Augustus loved me dearly."

"And can you honestly quote that circumstance as a proof against my argument?"

"Of course I can."

"I am glad, very glad to hear it."

"I cannot think why you should doubt any thing so simple. Of course I never could forget that he ran away with me in defiance of all his disagreeable relations. Every woman is proud of such a proof of her power."

"No doubt of it, but gratified vanity is not affection."

"I detest such subtle reasoning."

"Because it is unanswerable; is it not so? However, to oblige you, I am willing to concede that yourself and Mr. Lamerly were examples, despite your love-match, of a contrary result, but you know that exceptions only prove the rule."

"I do believe that you are laughing at me."

"I dare not. You are too handsome."

"Upon my word, Mr Mortimer—"

"And upon my word, Mrs. Lamerly, I am perfectly serious. Again, I repeat that you are too handsome to be trifled with without risk. Suppose now, for instance, that Sybil should surprise us at this present moment——"

"I care not though she should."

"Yet she might think, and perhaps say—"

"She *dare* not!" exclaimed the usually supine widow, with flashing eyes; "she dare not!"

"Am I to understand that she would dread a retort?"

"Perhaps so."

"Mrs. Lamerly, I beseech of you to tell me seriously—"

"No, I will not say another word. And now, since you have taken fright, leave me, and, if you will do me the favor, be good enough to desire Mrs. Harris to come and take charge of Eva, for I doubt whether I have strength to carry her all the way to the house."

Mortimer paused for a moment, and glanced down upon the beautiful young creature before him, upon whose brow a shade of offended dignity was discernible. Half fascinated, and half terrified by the strange mixture of coquettish simplicity and undaunted worldliness which was betrayed in her every word and action, he could not, at that instant, forbear assimilating her to the glittering, but envenomed serpent, which, while it enthrals the eye, poisons the life-blood. Nevertheless, he could not altogether liberate himself from the spell. It was the first time that he had looked upon her without positive dislike, and yet, instead of resenting a coldness which would have irritated many women less attractive, she had scarcely disguised a far more flattering feeling towards himself.

And at what a moment had she done so! When, dreading he knew not what, conscious of

his wife's utter and selfish indifference, and suspicious of every one by whom she was approached, his mortified vanity and disappointed affection alike led him to resent so false and comfortless a position.

He could not doubt that Trevor had triumphed over the heart of Sybil long before he had believed it to be his own—and should he suffer him to enjoy a second triumph over that of the fair creature before him? True, Trevor could make her his wife, but *would* he do so? Did she even anticipate such a result? Mortimer scarcely believed that she did, nor had he sufficient confidence in her principles to imagine that she would long be swayed by such a consideration. He could not conceal from himself that he despised and almost feared her, but he was becoming reckless, and—he was human.

The result of his momentary silence was a proposal himself to take charge of the sleeping child, and to accompany Mrs. Lamerly to the house.

"But suppose Sybil should see you," said the widow, with an arch and mocking laugh.

"In my turn, I reply that I care not."

"Well, then, suppose that Trevor should see *me?*"

"You can alone decide if that circumstance is likely to affect you," retorted Mortimer, with offended vanity.

"Such a family group!" again smiled the lady.

"I wish it were!" retorted the gentleman, and in another moment Eva reposed quietly upon the arm which he extended to receive her, and the bright-eyed widow hung confidingly upon the other.

"And now, will you promise not to be jealous of Trevor?" she asked in a low whisper, as she approached her coral lips to his ear.

"We shall see," replied her companion, in the same subdued tone, pressing the little hand which rested against his side still more closely.

"And not to suspect Sybil?"

Mortimer laughed, but it was not the buoyant laughter of earlier days, and of earlier hopes.

CHAPTER XLV.

Nothing could exceed the excitement produced by the arrival of Sir Horace Trevor upon the circle assembled at Westrum. To most of the party he was unknown, save by report, but that report had sufficed to ensure his welcome; for he was precisely one of those individuals whom the women are ambitious to see in their train, and the men to quote as an acquaintance. Self-centred, worldly, and satirical, he possessed every quality calculated to shine in society, and as the said society cares only to be dazzled, tinsel passes current as readily as sterling ore.

Trevor had few vices, and it is probable that, had he been educated in a different school, he would have adopted some more worthy ambition than that of merely figuring as "a man about town," but the evil, which in his case owed its origin to his pecuniary independence, and consequent freedom from the enforced thraldom of professional study, was gradually increased by his own experience of men and manners—aye, and of women too, for even that fact must be admitted in his justification.

Once, as we have seen, he had loved earnestly and well, and moreover, with a perfection of moral courage which had enabled him to disregard the gibes of his more dissolute associates and to look forward without shame to the time when he should have degenerated into a common-place married man, but even here his honesty of purpose met with no answering truth; he became the prey of a coquette, and was made the sacrifice of a heartless cupidity and from that hour Trevor vowed an eternal enmity to marriage. A mere votary of pleasure the whim of the moment was the sole rule of his life, the most minute care of his person his only serious occupation, and as a natural consequence, he became the model of a certain set and was dressed at and aped accordingly.

Capricious as a spoiled beauty, he was one hour the assiduous cavalier of some fair and fashionable trifler, and the next a bitter satirist upon the whole sex. Disappointed in his earliest aspirations, and blighted in his holiest affections he affected to disbelieve in the existence of any pure and disinterested attachment whatever maintaining that human nature, and more particularly female human nature, was incapable of profound feeling of any kind, and could only skim along the surface of sentiment and sensation, as the dragon-fly ruffles the wavelets of the meadow brook upon whose current it is to weak to settle.

As he had begun life by investing everything about him with a fictitious brightness which would not bear the test of trial, so he revenged himself upon his own delusion in after-years, by deepening and darkening every shadow that fell across his path. Systematically skeptical he doubted even where his reason should have been convinced. A Sybarite on principle, he was irritable under everything which interfered with his individual gratification, and when he occasionally encountered persons of more liberal ideas, he either sneered at them as dupes, or denounced them as hypocrites.

But again we repeat that Trevor was only such as the world had made him; that world of fashion, frivolity, and falsehood, which was his peculiar atmosphere. He was a moral wreck which nevertheless retained some portion of its original brightness.

Strictly honorable, according to the conventional acceptation of the word, recklessly generous, and imperturably good-tempered, the bitterness which occasionally passed his lips never penetrated to his heart; he was weak, but not wicked. When he gamed, it was merely to divert his idleness; he cared little for the result and consequently never lost his courtesy with his money. When he betrayed the woman who confided in him, he did so with a perfect conviction that he had simply distanced her in the race of deceit, and when he sacrificed the interests of a friend to his own, he felt no compunction, convinced that the said friend would have

done precisely the same, had he possessed a similar opportunity.

Such was the man whose advent beneath the roof of Mortimer occasioned such universal gratulation. He had, as we have seen, arrived early in the day, and Sybil learned, with a sensation of relief, that he had taken possession of his apartment before her other guests were assembled at the breakfast-table. Confident as she felt in her power over her husband, she was for the first time conscious of an anxiety which she had never hitherto experienced. She was quite aware that Mortimer both despised and disliked the circle which she had already drawn about her, and she knew full well that Trevor would be even less acceptable to him. It might be also that a vague presentiment of danger warned her of the probable consequences of her weak compliance with the suggestion of her *soi-disant* friend Mrs. Lamerly, and that something like a doubt crossed her mind as to the perfect good faith in which it had been made. Her woman vanity whispered that, having once loved *her*, it was impossible Trevor could be thralled by the baby-graces of the fantastic little Amabel, and if it were not so, why, after the insult which he had offered to her at The Grange, should he be once more forced into her path? Gladly would she have forgotten his existence, for his name it was which was inscribed in the darkest page of her life's volume, but she felt, whatever might have been the evasion of the crafty widow, that she was in possession of the fatal secret which she was anxious to conceal from Mortimer, and that she was consequently so thoroughly in her power that she could not protect herself from the impending evil.

Sybil was, however, no weak and trembling woman to be scared by shadows; and thus driven to rely upon her own strength, instead of yielding to impotent alarm, she endeavored to fortify herself by arguments tending to reassure her mind. Trevor had already tested the power of her former affection by endeavoring to renew it, and he must be convinced of the futility of further pursuit. He had, moreover, offered to her an insult which he must be well aware that no woman of pride or principle could ever pardon. But at this phase of her reasoning Sybil paused, and although no one was near to detect her unbidden emotion, she covered her face with her spread hands, to conceal the crimson blush which mounted to her brow. Alas! what faith could Trevor place in either her pride or her principle? Had she not deceived him cruelly? And was it not from his weakness that she had wrung the resources which had enabled her to make a second dupe?

This reflection, for a time, prostrated her courage, but happily she had been prepared for the struggle which awaited her, and during the time that had elapsed between the departure of Mrs. Lamerly's invitation, and the arrival of its object, she had possessed ample time to decide her measures. She must not receive him coldly, as such a want of courtesy to a bidden guest could not but excite the suspicion of those about her, while it might, moreover, tend to impress Sir Horace himself with the idea that she feared him. Neither must she permit him to resume the easy and familiar tone, which would almost warrant the trial of a second impertinence, from which her dignity as the wife of Mortimer might be insufficient to secure her. No, she must meet him with a smile and an extended hand, it is true, but the smile must be cold, and the hand passive. She must regard him only as the presumed suitor of an early friend, and leave Mrs. Lamerly to do the honors of Westrum to her own visitor.

How she regretted that they still had a mutual secret, and that she could not, without compromising herself in the eyes of her husband, at once, and definitely, divest him of the privileges of their presumed relationship! but this, she was painfully aware, was now impossible. How she loathed the folly which had induced her to avoid confiding in the mad passion of Mortimer before their marriage, when a few tears and smiles would have induced him to overlook even the presumption of an admitted rival, and which had thus bound her hand and foot before the altar of deceit and falsehood.

It was, however, vain to deprecate the past. Were she to confess to Frederic that she had betrayed his confidence in her truth in this one instance, what might he not suspect? And his suspicions once aroused, where would they end? She dared not risk such an attempt. The reverberation of the past storm was beginning to make itself heard, and, for the first time, Sybil felt herself powerless to avoid its contact.

How she lingered at her dressing-table, as if delay could profit her in such an emergency, but at length the last string was tied, and the last frill adjusted. Her maid, astonished, and at length irritated by her unusual tardiness, had begun to busy herself in repairing the disarray of the chamber; the warning bell had rung, and she felt the necessity of controlling her emotion. Not even then, however, could she compel herself to proceed at once to the breakfast-room, but snatching up her gloves and handkerchief by a sudden impulse, she left the chamber, and proceeded hastily to the nursery.

There she found only Mrs. Harris and her assistant, by whom she was informed that Miss Eva had been for the last two hours in the grounds, under the guardianship of Mrs. Lamerly.

"And who authorised you to trust your young lady out of your sight for such a length of time?" inquired her mistress, angrily: the circumstance affording a safe escape-valve for the hitherto hidden bitterness of her feelings.

"Indeed, ma'am," hastened to reply the astonished nurse, "I thought you must have known that the kind good natured lady takes Miss Eva out every morning when the weather is fine enough for her. If I had thought that you would object——"

"Of course I object," retorted Sybil imperiously; "I will permit no interference of the sort. You should immediately have acquainted me with this caprice of Mrs. Lamerly's."

"As my master was aware of it, ma'am, I supposed——" commenced the female functionary, anxious to justify herself.

"Oh, indeed, your master was aware of this

arrangement, was he?" interposed Mrs. Mortimer sarcastically, "and does he also undertake to amuse Miss Eva during her daily absence of two hours?"

"I am sure, ma'am, I cannot say," answered the nurse, becoming more and more alarmed at this exhibition of displeasure, succeeding as it did to so habitual an indifference to the movements of her charge.

"You appear to be strangely ignorant of your duties, Mrs. Harris," said Sybil sternly, "and I must request that in future no one may be suffered to interfere with the arrangements which I see fit to make for my own child."

"You may depend upon it, ma'am."

"I do," replied Mrs. Mortimer. "And now go at once in search of the little girl, and bring her here. I will await your return."

At this moment a clear ringing laugh became audible, and footsteps were heard ascending the side stairs which led to the nursery, while in the next instant the lisping voice of Mrs. Lamerly exclaimed in accents of childish amusement—

"Ah! you may open your large grey eyes, Eva, and stare about you with astonishment! Yes, you fell asleep under a tall sycamore, and here you are, you can't tell how, at home again, and on the very confines of your own domain! Oh, fairy, you have guessed all about it now! And have you no kiss for papa, who made so pretty a cradle for you?"

The words had scarcely escaped her lips when the speaker crossed the threshold of the apartment, followed closely by Mortimer, about whose neck the child had clasped its little arms. Instantly, as if by a species of instinctive fascination, the eyes of the two friends were riveted upon each other, but ere long those of Mrs. Lamerly fell before the fixed and almost contemptuous gaze of Sybil, who, after a momentary silence, broke into a forced and bitter laugh, as she said sarcastically—

"Truly, Amabel, you are becoming matutinal? Harris informs me that you have elected yourself head-nurse to Eva, and that you are abroad with her for hours before I have finished my morning sleep. You are really too good. But I fear that to-day, at least, you have been the victim of your own kindness, for I perceive, what I had not before remarked, that the wind must be very high, as it appears to have inconvenienced you during your walk, and a portion of your hair is streaming from under your bonnet."

"That is very probable," replied Mrs. Lamerly with imperturbable composure, "for Eva has been amusing herself by inventing for me a *coiffure a la sauvage*. I am sorry that you do not admire the effect."

"She had seized an unfortunate opportunity for the exhibition of her talent," resumed Mrs. Mortimer in the same biting accent, "but perhaps you have been too pleasantly engaged to be aware that not only has the second breakfast-bell rung, but also that your friend has arrived."

"*My* friend? What friend?" inquired the widow, with a pretty assumption of innocence.

"Sir Horace Trevor."

Mrs. Lamerly shot one quick glance towards Mortimer, who had during this short dialogue been endeavoring to induce the child to leave his arms for those of the anxious Mrs. Harris, an attempt in which he had only just succeeded, and as he turned he met the meaning eyes that sought his own.

"Oh! *your* cousin!" exclaimed the lady with affected joyousness. "How very nice! He will initiate us, in his own dear satirical way, into the latest scandal of half the European capitals, and tell us all about Lady Clara's old flame, General O'Keefe, and Mrs. Babington's French marquis, and poor Saviatti, and half a million of our old friends."

"And is that all you expect from his visit?" asked Sybil, more and more provoked by the perfect *nonchalance* of her friend.

"Oh! no, believe me, by no means," replied the widow, with marked emphasis; "but you do not say a word, Mr. Mortimer," she continued addressing Frederic, who had remained silently and steadfastly scrutinizing the words and manner of his wife; "are you not charmed to hear that our party has received such a delightful addition?"

"Sybil's relatives must always be welcome under my roof," was the somewhat cold reply; "although I confess, that on the present occasion I am somewhat perplexed to imagine what can have procured for us the honor of a gentleman's society, who, on the last occasion of his presence at Westrum, declared it to be the *ultima thule*, and regarded its inhabitants as only one degree removed from Hottentots."

"Oh! that is so like Trevor!" said the widow, clapping her little hands, in order to silence the rejoinder which already quivered upon the lips of Sybil. "Did you ever hear him praise anything? He is such a spoilt child. Do you know he is a perfect skeptic, does not believe in the love, nor indeed, I am afraid I may add, in the virtue of our sex. Is it not shameful? When everybody knows that women——"

"Pray, Amabel, do not inflict upon us what everybody knows," said Sybil with affected impatience, "but ring for your maid to dress your hair, or you will not be fit to present yourself at the breakfast-table."

Mortimer was not, however, to be so deceived. He understood the expression of Sybil's speaking features, and he saw at once that no mere dread of Mrs. Lamerly's disregard for appearances could so thoroughly have ruffled her. He was conscious that although the two persons before him had ventured upon a war of wit, which they were unable to control, there was a mystery in the advent of Trevor which neither was anxious to reveal in his presence. Resolved, therefore, to terminate the scene at once, he pointed with a smile to the door, exclaiming—

"You are dismissed, you see, Mrs. Lamerly, and in obedience to your liege lady, have only to withdraw, although, fortunately for all who know and admire you, to reappear ere long with increased attractions."

"So be it," was the laughing rejoinder; "good bye, Eva," and she tenderly embraced the little girl, who was now contentedly playing upon the lap of her nurse; "your frolics have entailed a terrible lecture upon me, but I forgive you"—and playfully kissing her fingers to the child, she bounded from the room.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Sir Horace Trevor did not make his appearance until the morning meal was nearly at an end, and he had no reason to repent the arrangement, for the party had just arrived at that satisfied and complacent point when all which follows is rather matter of idleness than appetite, and each member composing it is not only willing, but eager to repay, by the most assiduous attentions, the ample return of news and gossip.

Fortunately, their first meeting was one of less embarrassment than Sybil had anticipated, for here was such a general greeting on his entrance that no one, save her husband, remarked the slight flush which rose to her cheek, and the almost imperceptible quivering of the lip with which she received him as he made his way towards her, or the constrained "You are welcome, Sir Horace," which was her brief response to his eager address. This partial display of emotion was nevertheless by no means calculated to alarm him, for it was no more than every delicately-minded woman might be disposed to feel upon meeting, after an absence, the man who had once offered her his hand, while in the manner of Trevor himself he could detect nothing more objectionable, as it gave him the impression of a graceful piece of acting, rather than the impulse of deep or excited feeling.

Not one of the guests, however, came to the relief of her hostess so effectually as Mrs. Lamerly, who, with one of her childish exclamations of delight, extended her jewelled hand, and said, half-laughing and half-pouting, "So you have remembered your old friends at last, my dear Trevor, and only just in time, I can assure you, for both Sybil and I had made up our minds to give you up if you did not repent your ingratitude. However, you need not look up so dismayed, we will forgive you, but in return you must tell us everything about everybody everywhere, and make yourself as agreeable as you can. And now, when you have done shaking hands with Lady Clara, come here, and I will make room for you between me and Lord John." And with pretty imperiousness she motioned to the mortified lordling to advance higher up the table, while she removed her own seat sufficiently to enable the new comer to occupy the place assigned to him.

She was not however, so exclusively occupied with Trevor as to overlook the probable anxiety of her host, and more than once she raised her heavy eyelids, and turned upon him one of those rapid glances of inquiry, which betray so little and imply so much. She wished him to understand that she was endeavoring to screen her friend from his suspicions, and sacrificing herself for his peace of mind.

Nothing could be more amiable! And it was beautiful to witness the perfect good-will with which the generous and artless Mrs. Lamerly executed her self-appointed task. Scarcely would she permit Trevor to address his hostess, whose tardy answer was in almost every instance anticipated by that of her friend, and then she had so many questions to ask, and so many half-whispered communications to make, that Trevor found ample employment between his *pâté de Perigord*, and her unceasing demands upon his attention.

"After all," observed Lady Clara, with one of the dull stares of her lack-lustre blue eyes for which she was peculiar. "After all, what?" the reader may be inclined to ask, nor can we satisfactorily reply; suffice it that this mode of expression—this *lucus a non lucendo*—was a favorite with the lady. "After all, Sir Horace, I can scarcely imagine how you could make up your mind to leave Italy, where all is so nice, and so easy going, and so pleasant, for this nasty, dull, foggy, catch-cold country."

"Fie upon you, Lady Clara!" exclaimed Mrs. Lamerly. "Do you suppose that our dear Trevor has no natural affections, and that even one glimpse of his cousin will not repay him for the sacrifice?"

"His cousin!" said Lady Clara, doubtfully, "why, I never knew that you were his cousin!"

"Nor am I. I allude to Mrs. Mortimer."

"Dear me!" ejaculated the peer's daughter, more and more mystified; "I cannot understand it. Let me see. Old Sir Reginald, his grandfather had three sons, one was killed in the Body Guards before he was twenty, another married Lady Barbara Dobson, the Nabob's widow, and having no family, left all her fortune to *his* father. And you, Sir Horace, are an only son."

"You are quite correct, *amica bella*," replied Trevor, biting his lips to suppress a laugh, while his ally, Mrs. Lamerly, was exhausting all her ingenuity in endeavoring to balance a tea-spoon upon the edge of her chocolate-cup, "right as a clerk in the herald's college—only—you have forgotten my aunts."

"I never before heard that you had any."

"*Comment!*" cried Trevor in affected astonishment; "Did you never hear the unfortunate history of the beautiful Mrs. Hildebrand, who eloped with her coachman?"

"La! how very horrid!" shuddered Mrs. Babington, settling a curl. "So low!" she whispered to the Honorable Theodore, who lounged beside her.

"And was this sporting lady the ancestress of our fair Sybil?" lisped out the widow innocently.

"Now, all the fates forfend!" said Sir Horace. "No, no, I had another aunt, and were Mrs. Delamere in the room she could answer all your questions, but it is fortunate, as we have fallen upon this topic, that she is not present, for since Honoria's lapse she is always extremely distressed by any illusion to the past."

Mortimer started. Here then was, at last, one tangle of the ravelled skein drawn out, and once more Sybil stood acquitted. A smile, which was almost one of relief and gratitude, flitted across his lip, but meanwhile the sensations of Sybil herself were infinitely less satisfactory. The audacious and unblushing effrontery with which Trevor had thus invented for himself a supposed family connection which had never in reality existed; the easy complacency with which he had calumniated the character of her sex in order to make his tale run more glibly, and the self-satisfied look with which he turned towards her at its completion, in order, as it seemed, to claim her gratitude for his exploit, rendered her more and more conscious of

the depth of the abyss into which she had been plunged into by her own levity.

Who can calculate upon the bearing and result of a first deviation from the high and holy principle of truth? To extricate herself from a momentary difficulty, Mrs. Mortimer had volunteered what she believed to be a mere inconsequent falsehood, and she now felt that, at the instant of its utterance, she had herself attached to the sword of Damocles the one frail hair by which it was hereafter to be forever suspended over her head. Henceforward it was indeed vain to hope that the lie could ever be retracted, and she must abide its consequences, be they what they might, while, as if to augment her mental torture, Lady Clara continued to pour forth her surprise in the "Dear me!" and "Well, I never!" of mindless astonishment.

"You must tell us all about your Aunt Hildebrand," interposed Mrs. Lamerly, during a momentary pause. "It must be such a funny affair! I can understand a woman falling in love with a prince, or a——"

"Or a margrave," whispered Trevor in her ear.

"For shame! you are really unbearable," pouted the lady, "but do tell us the story. Or, perhaps," she continued, interrupting herself abruptly, "now that we know all about it, Sybil will give us the details."

"You are too obliging, Mrs. Lamerly," was the indignant response of her hostess, "and, moreover, I pledge you my honor that I am as ignorant of them as you are."

"I am convinced of it," said Sir Horace, with well assumed gravity. "From whom were you likely to hear such a relation? Certainly, not from your mother."

"How very improper Mrs. Lamerly is at times," remarked Mrs. Babington, *sotto voce*, to her neighbor.

"What! because Sybil's aunt ran away with her coachman?" exclaimed the widow, who had detected the incautious whisper. "Why, what on earth had I to do with it?"

The pretty inanity of this lisped expostulation elicited a general laugh, and to the great relief of both Mrs. Mortimer and her husband, the subject was abandoned.

No man could be more what the French expressly call *facile à vivre*, than Sir Horace Trevor, and despite all his resolutions to the contrary, Mortimer soon found himself with him on terms of intimacy, which, previous to his arrival, he would have declared impossible. Trevor was in fact, in a few days, emphatically and actually at home at Westrum. An hour had sufficed to render perfectly evident to him the tolerating indifference of Sybil towards her husband, whom he had long learned to despise for the weakness which had betrayed him into the power of a woman without principle or honor, while, had he needed an interpreter, his sworn friend Mrs. Lamerly was ever at hand to render every look and word intelligible.

Between the Baronet and the widow there existed no secrets. He was aware of the whole of her past career; had worshipped at her unrighteous shrine when she swayed the fortunes of the pigmy court of ——; had been indebted to her for a host of those trifling services so invaluable to the travelling Sybarite, and had, in return, vowed to her one of those everlasting friendships which are so convenient to the worldly and unscrupulous, and wherein the give-and-take system forms so efficient a bond of union.

It has already been explained that Mortimer had remorselessly wounded the vanity of Mrs. Lamerly, and embittered her feelings, and that what at first had originated in mere levity and idleness, had become in her eyes an imperative duty to herself, and as she mentally argued, a just and consistent vengeance upon the insolent security of Sybil. How dare Sybil affect at times to question, and almost to sneer, wherever she alluded to the period of her widowhood? Was Sybil then, so faultless, that her past life had woven a circle of light around her which was impassible?

As she asked herself the question, the thought of Trevor recurred to her—but Trevor was at Venice. What then? Could she not summon him to her side? And she did so, we have seen with what result.

"Do you know that you are a species of miniature divinity?" said Sir Horace to his fair and frail ally about a week after his arrival at Westrum, as he found himself alone with her in the morning-room. She was busily engaged in knitting a silk purse, or some other of those useless follies by which the idle and opulent so seriously injure the efforts of the poor and the ingenious; while he, seated on a low stool at her feet, was amusing himself by tuning and untuning her guitar. "You are, indeed! But come now, be frank and honest. You do not expect me to believe that you had no ulterior view in thus bringing me into contact with my improvised cousin, and that it was solely and entirely *pour l'amour de mes beaux yeux* that you called me from Venice?"

"What other motive could I have?"

"Nay! that is precisely what I seek to learn. That you have one is beyond a doubt, and that it is personal, is equally certain to one who knows you so well as I do. Surely, *cara*, you do not love this Mortimer? Why, child, you had better bestow your affections upon a willow-bough; satisfied while the wind blows it hither and thither, that it must return to its natural position when the breeze falls, than upon such a human *girouette* as Sybil's husband."

"What an absurd idea!"

"What is it, then? For that I am no desired, or even desirable guest, to either the lady or the gentleman is perceptible enough, and therefore you had some reason for urging my presence, and that reason I must know, or I bid adieu forthwith to this cave of Trophonious, with its two solitary gleams of sunshine. I love to commence, as Horace—wasn't it Horace?—says, *ab ovo*, therefore, I must be initiated into all the mystery of the springs before I consent to set the machinery in motion."

"Why will you not be guided by me?"

"Because I do not love to walk through the world with a bandage before my eyes, and, moreover, because I want to comprehend the

probable extent of the obligation which you will owe me."

"Well then, I am displeased with Sybil, *et pour cause*."

"Ha! I begin to understand. You have something to revenge?"

"A great deal."

"But when you have so much in your own power, why should you have resource to my assistance? Make the man love you, and you will have ample means of vengeance."

"And what would that avail me?" asked the lady with some asperity, "save to afford her a new triumph over what she is pleased to consider as my levity? No, no, I will adopt no such imperfect policy. So long as she continues under his roof, and is recognised as his wife, the contest is unequal."

Trevor smiled and struck a few discordant chords on the instrument which he was torturing.

"Now, pray do not make that horrid noise," said Mrs. Lamerly, "but tell me at once if you no longer care for Sybil."

"No longer care for her!" echoed Sir Horace with sudden animation; "Impossible! Why she is handsomer than ever."

"And sick to death of her humdrum husband, and her old-fashioned country-house," pursued the lady in the same tone. "And you a spark of spirit, you would need no prompting from me."

A second, and more intelligible smile gleamed over the features of the Baronet.

"I see it all now," he said with a light laugh, "Sybil once gone—And you really think such a thing *might* occur?"—He was answered by a significant gesture; "The willow wand would require a prop, and who could he so pleasantly lean upon on as the sympathising friend who would be upon the spot, and who is so well calculated to act as a second mother to his child?"

"And suppose it were so?"

"Oh, I have not a word to say against it. Nothing could be better imagined, and, as a matter of course, it would be an immense relief to my conscience. But—but—I must venture one more question," and Trevor really looked embarrassed for a moment; "As I should be deeply grieved to compromise your pretty self, without some prospect of fulfilling your projects, I tell you frankly that I believe you have little chance of becoming the *wife* of this worthy squire."

"And why not?" asked the lady indignantly, "Did he not marry Sybil?"

"He did, and it is precisely for that reason that I conjecture he will just have wit enough to be very cautious how he commits himself a second time. Now, don't look so defyingly. You know all that I mean, and you are quite aware how high an opinion I have of your abilities, as well as how sincerely I admire your person, but nevertheless, ———"

"Do you mean to insult me?"

"Not a whit, but if we are to be honest confederates, we must thoroughly understand each other. I thought you had more strength of mind."

"Pray leave me to conduct my own affairs," said the widow sullenly; "I flatter myself that I am quite competent to such a task."

"I never doubted it for an instant, but still I felt it my duty to warn you."

"Wait till I am in danger."

"With all my heart. It is understood, then, that we are to be faithful allies?"

"Have we not a common interest?"

"True. My question was an idle one, and I deserve the rebuke. Our mutual undertaking is, however, by no means easy. Sybil evidently shuns me."

"She fears herself more than you."

"That, at least, is encouraging, and I will trust to your penetration; *car vous avez passé parla*. Now do not be angry again, frowns never become you, and you know, by experience, that they are wasted upon me. But tell me, for whom are you laboring so diligently?"

"For Sybil," said Mrs. Lamerly, with a sneer.

"What a graceful attention!"

"Is it not? Let it serve you as an example."

And then, having accomplished this mutual understanding, they talked of other matters perfectly irrelevant to the subject which still, however, remained uppermost in their thoughts, and worthy colleagues in evil, did so with smiling brows and friendly tones, undisturbed even by the intrusion of Mrs. Babington and her honorable hanger-on, despite the curious and somewhat supercilious looks which were occasionally riveted upon them. They had so much to ask and to tell, so many dear friends to be canvassed and condemned, and so many schemes of pleasure to arrange, that they both continued apparently unconscious of the *espionage* to which they were thus unceremoniously subjected.

CHAPTER XLVII.

When Gertrude awoke on the following morning, she was several minutes before she could collect her thoughts, and, as she cast her eyes round the desolate apartment which had been allotted to her, her first impulse was to close them again, in order to shut out all surrounding objects, but, in the next instant, she felt the utter folly and weakness of thus shrinking back upon the very threshold of her task, and springing lightly from her comfortless bed, she hastened to dress herself, and to be prepared for the first summons she might receive.

The dark and soot-laden fog still hung heavily over the street, clung to the dingy windowpanes, and made its way through the ill-fitted frames even into the chamber. No one requires to be told all the wretchedness of such a waking, while to Gertrude, totally unaccustomed as she was to a London atmosphere in any season, it seemed as though her very breathing were impeded. Steadily, however, she persevered in her purpose, and at length, closely folded in a thick shawl, but still trembling with cold, she made her way down stairs, with her writing-desk in her hand, to the little parlor in which she had first been received. The shutters had been thrown back, and as no prepara-

tions had yet been made for the morning meal, she found herself at liberty to sit down at once, and commence the somewhat difficult task of explaining to Ernest her sudden evasion from Bletchley.

Until the very moment in which she prepared to do this, she had never become thoroughly conscious of the delicacy of the undertaking, for one look round the squalid apartment in which she was seated, sufficed to convince her that she must still conceal from him the exact nature and situation of her temporary home. Undoubtedly some human feeling of hurt pride and wounded personal dignity mingled with other and less selfish convictions, but it is nevertheless certain that the guiding-spring of her conduct was a consciousness that she had no right to intrude a stranger beneath the roof of a ruined relative, of whom she had already seen enough to be well aware that he valued, at even more than their just price, the privileges of which poverty had denuded him, and would consequently ill brook that an indifferent, and perchance, scrutinizing eye, should be permitted to rest upon the nakedness of the land.

Such a position was very irksome to Gertrude, whose nature was truthfulness itself, but she was compelled to admit that in this case the withholding of the whole truth was part of the painful duty which she had imposed upon herself when she obeyed the summons of her dying uncle, and with a sigh such as she had never thought to heave on sitting down to address Ernest, she commenced her task.

She told him of the hasty and imperative call which had been made upon both her duty and her affection for her mother's memory; of the state in which she had found her unfortunate relative; nor did she shrink from avowing that he had sunk from affluence to poverty. And then she besought him to bear with her if she entreated that he would not attempt to see her until her return to Bletchley, and not only forgive such a request in his own person, but even justify her in the eyes of his family should they appear to resent the step that she had taken.

"He was my mother's only brother," she continued; "a stern and prosperous man, who was regardless alike of family ties and family affections during the greater portion of his life. He existed, consequently, unloving and unloved; absorbed in large financial speculations, and engrossed by gold. Think, Ernest, what must now be the bitterness of his regret, and the desolateness of his position. His hard-earned gains have melted away within his grasp; the penury at which he used to scoff is abiding under his own roof, and he has found no other source of comfort than a desire to possess for the (I fear) very brief remains of a wasted life, the society of his hitherto unknown niece. Can you not, therefore, easily pardon both him and myself? And will you not readily do so? We have so many long years of happiness before us, while *his* days are already numbered, his hopes annihilated, and his gray hairs bowed down by misery, both actual and mental. I do not fear your reply to such an appeal, for I know your heart, and I have confidence in your consistency. Do not, however, believe, that in requiring you not to seek me out—you, who are in my thoughts at every moment, and perhaps even (for I know little of the great wilderness of which I am now an inhabitant,) within a few streets of the very house of which I have become an inmate—that I do so without an immense personal sacrifice. You will at once feel this to be impossible. Never had I greater need of sympathy, but I cannot on that account add another pang to those by which the wounded spirit of my dying uncle is evidently crushed to the very earth. Bear with me, then, as I would cheerfully bear with yourself in such an extremity. It is already much that I may be with you in thought, and that I am enabled to shelter myself from the present in the future."

Her letter to Miss Warrington was more easily written. To her she had only to announce her safe arrival under Mr. Spencer's roof, and to express her wish that none of the family at the Manor-house should be made acquainted with her place of residence.

"He may linger," she added, "and should such be the case, I feel convinced that Mr. Armstrong would not permit me to remain in his house; a thousand kind, but needless apprehensions on my account, might induce him to prevent the accomplishment of a duty which I consider most sacred, and of which I should lament the omission throughout all my life. I leave my fate, therefore, in your hands, and I am assured that you will not betray me."

Her task was scarcely accomplished ere Gertrude heard a stealthy step approaching the apartment, and saw the staid attendant of her uncle enter laden with the meager preparations for breakfast. The astonishment of the worthy woman was extreme, on perceiving that the young lady whom she had been fearful of awakening after her fatigue, was already up and occupied, and she busied herself with quiet alacrity in rendering her as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

Nothing could, however, remove the aspect of cheerlessness by which the orphan was surrounded; the clinging fog looming heavily and lividly through the window and obscuring every object without, the dusty grate, the curtainless cornice, the time-stained walls within, all conspired to depress her, and it was almost with a sense of relief that she heard the dull sound of her uncle's cane upon his uncarpeted floor, as he knocked to announce that he required the presence of his house-keeper.

Mrs. Sharp hastily poured out a cup of coffee, diluted it as she had done on the previous evening, and then placing a small slice of thin dry toast in the saucer, hurriedly obeyed the summons; nor did she return till the frugal meal of Gertrude was accomplished, when she announced that her master would see Miss Mortimer in a few minutes.

"He is much changed since last night, Ma'am," added the woman, "and although he never alluded to it, I could see that he was very anxious from the time he wrote to you, lest you should refuse to come to him; for I more than once heard him mutter to himself: 'If she does

not, there is time yet! There is time yet!' And then he laughed. You have heard him laugh. As for me, I would much rather hear him cry at any time than laugh that frightful laugh—it always chills my blood. But I am wrong to talk of this to you, Ma'am, I was only going to say, that I think when he saw you at last he felt a great deal, though he was too proud to let you see it, and the agitation has been too much for him. He had some trouble to swallow his coffee, and the bread he could not touch. Poor gentleman! I believe that his troubles are nearly over."

"Then for pity's sake," exclaimed Gertrude, clasping her hands entreatingly, "send at once for his physician. Surely you can procure a messenger somewhere in the neighborhood, and I will pay him whatever he requires, provided he lose no time. See to this at once, Mrs. Sharp, and I will attend to my poor uncle during your absence."

The housekeeper shook her head.

"I dare not, Ma'am," she said timidly, "you do not know my master, but if you authorize me to venture upon it, I will send a boy for Mr. Jackson, who can come as if by accident on his way somewhere else, and then he can advise you as to what is best to be done."

"By all means," said Gertrude eagerly, "by all means—now—this instant. I could not incur so terrible a responsibility alone."

Mrs. Sharp curtsied and left the room, and when the orphan heard her open the house-door, and close it gently behind her, it was with a feeling of terror which she could not overcome, that she remembered she was alone with the dying man. Dead, she would perhaps have feared him less, for there is a mystery and a holiness in death which rebuke the weaknesses of the living; but dying, and dying *thus*—without a thought or a care for the Great Beyond, towards which he was hastening,—without an anxiety on the subject of that life which must endure forever, and wholly occupied by the cares and futilities of that which was so rapidly to close upon him!—It was very frightful, and the poor girl bent down her head, and buried her face in her hands, as she listened breathlessly for the return of her messenger.

It was not, however, the welcome footstep of the zealous housekeeper which fell upon her ear as she sat there in her terror, but the renewed pounding of the heavy cane upon the boards in the room above, and starting from her chair, she swept back the long curls from her forehead, and hastened to obey the summons.

Even prepared as she was to see a change in the countenance of the unhappy invalid, she, nevertheless, started with surprise and fear as her eye first fell upon him. The hectic spot upon his cheek had deepened into purple, his lips were livid, and his brow bloodless, while it was evident, by the rapid convulsions which passed over his features, and the wild fierce light which glistened in his eyes, that nature was making a last and powerful effort, which would in all probability utterly exhaust his slight remains of strength.

"Ah! come—come," he said almost in a whisper, as with faltering steps, which she in vain endeavored to render steady, she approached to his bed-side; "Come—for I can set your mind at ease. I shall not need your annuity, child; what remains in the house will now last my time. Sit down, sit down, and let us talk."

"Shall I not rather read to you, Sir?"

"How can you?" he asked peevishly; "I have already told you that the paper never comes until the evening."

"But in your present state," again asked the orphan timidly; "could I not find something more appropriate, more comforting, than the mere news of the day?"

"Ah! I understand," said the sick man, as a sardonic smile quivered for an instant over his faded lips; "You care nothing about the money-market—You do not condescend to addle your brains with the dull concern of consols, and foreign securities, and all the great interests of a commercial country. I am sorry for it, child, I am sorry for it, for such indifference to the most important considerations of a rational and enlightened kingdom will bring bitter repentance in time. No, no, I want no reading. I want to think, and to speak, and I have little enough time left for either. No fear of being taken at your word, child, the annuity is safe enough!" And that strange, unnatural laughter, deprecated even by the accustomed Mrs. Sharp, again burst from the parched throat of the fevered invalid, but on this occasion, not with impunity, for in the very paroxysm of this forced and bitter mirth, a gush of blood followed the sound, and streamed down over the sheet which covered the breast of the sufferer.

Gertrude uttered a faint shriek, as she flung her arm about his neck, and raised his head from the pillow. It was a fearful moment for the solitary and inexperienced girl, but the sick man soon partially rallied.

"Thank you, thank you," he murmured huskily; "and now give me a drop of water."

Gertrude laid him down softly, and held a tumbler to his lips.

"Began at 99," he whispered with closed eyes, after the silence of a moment; "and closed at 101 3-8. Better times are coming better times. I must keep my eyes about me Gertrude, where are you?"

"I am here, Sir."

"That was a great rise, Gertrude. A great deal may be made by such a rise as that. I used to be very fortunate—very, at least folks said so, though I never believed that luck had much to do with it. Gertrude, if you should ever be rich—you know you will have the annuity which you offered me to begin upon, and many there are in the world who have reared a goodly brood without such a nest-egg—if you should ever be rich, watch the funds, child—watch the funds, and remember your poor uncle."

"Pray, do not excite yourself, Sir," said the anxious girl. "You are, just now, quite unequal to such an exertion. You need rest."

"I shall have enough and to spare before many suns set," was the reply of the faint and

exhausted voice. "Leave me in peace, now. And Gertrude—"

"I listen, Sir."

"Gertrude, I say, do not forget the pocket-book, and if Jackson should ask for it when he comes—for he must come after I am gone, you know—don't give it to him, but make him show you his accounts. It is a large sum—a very large sum for a poor man to handle, and—and I want to be quite sure that it will be well laid out."

"You shall be obeyed, Sir."

"Good girl! Good girl! Worth a score of your mother. *She* married for love, poor fool, and then wanted me to pay the debts of her spendthrift husband. *You* have been wiser. An Armstrong will do, child, an Armstrong will do. You must be prudent and saving for a few years, and things will come round. Take care of your gold, and—your—gold—will—take—care—of—you. I—"

There was a long pause, for the sick man was utterly exhausted, and Gertrude, drowned in tears of mingled fear and horror, could not even attempt a reply, when, suddenly rallying once more, the invalid panted, rather that uttered: "Why do you close the shutters? Nothing can be done in the darkness. Give me light. I must have light—broad, unblinking sunlight. I shall be robbed in this foul darkness. Robbed? Who shall dare?" and he clenched his dry and withered hand, and attempted to extend it in menace, but he strove in vain; his muscular power was spent, and the shrunken arm fell powerless at his side.

What wild and conflicting, and bewildered visions must have passed over the brain of the dying man during the hour which succeeded, for truly, throughout one long, and, as she believed, interminable hour, did the miserable girl watch beside that unholy death-bed, unsupported, alone, and quivering with anxiety for the return of her messenger, who, meanwhile, having duly fulfilled her mission, had not ventured to enter the sick-chamber unbidden, and was, in her turn, awaiting, in her cheerless solitude, the advent of the poor humble clerk, who was to be their sole support and comforter throughout the coming trial.

Strange unconnected snatches of thought were incoherently revealed by the sick man in disjoined and faintly articulated sentences. Now it was a fresh and far-off glance at his green and joyous boyhood, and a wild smile played about his lip, and the vision of some pilfered orchard passed before him, and while the congenial scene occupied his mental vision, he clutched the bed-clothes with a convulsive grasp, as if fearful of being cheated of the spoil that he had won. But this comparatively tranquil waking-dream soon vanished, and the toil and turmoil of more manly struggles were enacted over again. Like one who saw before him the open pages of a ledger, he calculated immense sums with an accuracy which filled his terrified listener with silent astonishment, pausing at intervals, to utter stern denials, as it seemed, to some importunate petitioner, or to chuckle over some successful venture, and throughout all this fearful time, whatever might be the broad outline of the mental picture conjured up by memory, the same dark shadow hovered over it; the greed of gain hung darkly about; the pencil of avarice polluted all its features. He was the breathing embodiment of a solitary idea. No reminiscence of affection, no soothing consciousness of one generous deed done, and registered for hereafter, flitted like a good angel, through the memories of the past. His horizon was without light, the lurid gleam of gold was the only ray which had power to penetrate the gloom.

Gertrude thought of the placid and prayerful death-bed of the protectress of her youth, and averted her look from the rapidly-working features, and endeavored to close her eyes against the mammon-worshipping words of the dying man who lay before her. Her heart sickened as the conviction forced itself upon her reason, that beyond fulfilling the mere trifling and unimportant duties required by the sinking body, her care could here be of no avail, for the voices of the soul had become clogged by the base yellow fluid to which it had been abandoned, and it no longer found utterance for higher or nobler aspirations.

Suddenly, the hoarse murmur ceased, and then came one of those deep and awful periods of utter stillness so solemn in a death-room. All was silent and chill, and the wordless prayer which was poured out by the stricken spirit of the watcher, arose pure and untinged with one taint of earth; an offering for him who cared not to supplicate for himself. And it would seem that it brought a blessing, for once more the wandering mind was cleared of the mist by which it had been over-shadowed, and when next the sick man spoke, he had regained the entire possession of his temporarily suspended faculties.

"Gertrude," he whispered faintly, "I have no time to lose. Listen to me. Take the key which you will find in my pocket-book—but give me back the book. I like to feel it under my pillow, for then I know that it is safe. Good girl! Good girl! Now, open that chest, and, at the top—at the very top, mind, you need not search lower—you will find a packet of papers. Bring it here."

Gertrude silently obeyed, and placed in the eager trembling hand the sealed envelope which lay ready on the surface of the chest.

"All right, all right," murmured the failing voice of the sick man; "and now lock the box carefully again, and give me back the key. There, that will do." And, for a time, he turned the well-secured packet over and over, gazing at it with a fondness incomprehensible to his companion. Now he clutched it closely between his open palms, as though he sought to make it grow into his flesh, that thus it might become inseparable from himself; then he patted it lightly with his fingers, as a playful mother would have patted the rosy and peach-like cheek of her nursling, and finally, he pressed it to his heart with a sigh so deep that it made Gertrude start.

Soon, however, he became aware that he was no longer equal to the excitement which it produced, and drawing the orphan closer to him, until her head was bent over the pillow, he

placed his wasted finger upon his lip in sign of caution, and whispered shrilly—

"You must have it—you must have it—So take it now. It will never be to you what it has been to me, but there is no help for that, there is no help for that. Little as I have to leave, it shall be yours. Sell the furniture, it will pay your journey home. Jackson has the duplicate, send for him. But do not trust too much even to *him*, Gertrude; I know what temptation there is in gold, and we have no right to tempt others. Look to yourself, girl, look to yourself. Love is all very well, and virtue is a mighty fine thing for those who can afford to dress it out in purple and fine linen, but it will not go far in a money-loving world, if it stands naked and shivering by the wayside, holding out its hand for help. No, no, proverbs are not proofs, except when they are built up upon the wisdom which is only taught by the close contact of conflicting interests. Send a man upon 'Change with his head crammed with stale morality, and a shabby coat upon his back before he has purchased the right to wear one, and you will see what his virtue and his necessities will do for him. Trash! Trash!—I have lived long enough to—"

The voice suddenly ceased—the unhappy man had fainted.

The scream which Gertrude was unable to suppress caught the anxious ear of the housekeeper, who, to the great relief of the agitated girl, entered the room, followed by the poor old clerk, whose stealthy step gave back no echo, as he rapidly approached the bed, and laid his hand upon the breast of the unconscious invalid. His first impression evidently was that his former patron had suddenly expired, but he at once discovered his error, and a few drops of etherized water, forced through the clenched teeth of the wretched man, ere long restored him to consciousness. The hard, keen light had, however, departed for ever from his eyes, which, during that death-like swoon, had become dull and glassy; the breath, which came hot and halting from between his livid lips, heaved his chest almost to suffocation, and beads of damp stood upon his forehead, and dimmed the lustre of his grey hair.

Jackson shook his head, and a moisture stole to his eye. He, perhaps, was the only being upon earth who loved the dying-man then lying panting and struggling before him, but the human heart is strangely constituted, and there is as much of the affection of habit in the world, as that of actual sentiment. Thus the poor, hardworked, and ill-requited drudge, who remembered when he had been promoted from the invidious position of errand-boy to the honors of the raised desk, and the dignified appellation of junior clerk, that he should, in all probability, never have attained even to that dreary pre-eminence without the favor of the stern and exacting principal, (who, having remarked his economical management alike of coal, cinders, and writing materials, resolved to profit by so unusual a demonstration on the part of a subordinate) had vowed an affection and a fidelity to his unendearing master, which no severity or after-meanness had power to weaken, while time, as it passed by, served only to rivet the iron links forged by the one, and worn almost as a trophy by the other.

They had grown old together; their hair had silvered, and their step became less elastic from year to year, and each had noted the change in the other, although unconscious of it in his own person.

Even now, as Jackson looked upon the dying man, worn out alike by worldly anxieties, and the narrow penury to which he was himself condemned by his slender and insufficient means, the tear which started to his eye was impelled thither by no reflection upon his own advanced pilgrimage, but felt solely for the sufferer. Perhaps no thought of the dread debt which all must pay, had even yet connected itself with his visions of the future; he had no time for sickness, and less for death.

Mr. Spencer had withdrawn himself from the firm, and closed his ledgers and day-books for ever; his hours were no longer purchased and absorbed by business, but *he* was still at his post; his income must be earned, the bread of his family must be won before it could be broken; he came upon earth to work, and so he labored on, like the patient ox treading out the corn of others, and never caring to look beyond the narrow circle of his daily duties. The sabbath brought him rest, it is true, but even that was the merely negative repose of physical and moral idleness. As he lay back in his slippery and ill-cushioned horse-hair chair, with his eyes closed, and his lips quivering, he was generally reviewing in thought all the commercial transactions in which he had been engaged throughout the previous week, or, when by chance, the sunshine wiled him out, and he sauntered forth, with his meek and spirit-broken wife upon his arm, to bask in the warmer and purer air of Tower-Hill, or the Artillery-ground near Finsbury Square. he could command no other subject with which to beguile the way, and thus the bewildered woman, whose faded shawl had seen its seventh summer, and whose solitary silk gown had been chameleon-hued by time, was entertained, hour after hour, by the detail of operations involving thousands and tens of thousands of pounds, and, perhaps taught to repine that, of all the mighty mass of wealth which was yearly poured out under the eyes of her labor-bowed helpmate, so very, very minute a portion ever passed into his own possession.

It may be thought that this moral portrait of the obscure and hardworking drudge of commerce is overcharged, but we know that such is not the case. Even in the present day, many, too many of these human automata, these breathing machines, set in motion only by the peculiar spring adapted to their avocation, and rusted into uselessness for all beyond their own peculiar and narrow sphere of compulsatory action; men in whom even sense of physical enjoyment and moral dignity have alike become deadened, or at best distorted by the mindless monotony of their daily tasks, may still be found in all great cities, but more especially in our own mammoth-like and all-absorbing London. The world-grasping trader, whose argosies encumber distant seas, and to whom the winds

come from every quarter of the globe freighted with gold; the merchant-princes, whose ingots sway the fate of empires, and whose occasional ruin shakes the whole fabric of commercial Europe; these ask hands ready and willing, and obedient hands, to work out the design of the one master-spirit of the Pandemonium of gain, but with the head or the heart of the salaried slave, they have nothing whatever to do, so long as they interfere not with the just execution of his allotted task.

Brighter days, as it is hoped, are now dawning, nay, have already dawned, for the obscure but important class of laborers, who, like the miner, prepare the ore of commerce for the crucible, but it will require time to awaken within them sufficient moral energy to send them forth on the heart-gladdening sabbath free from the heavy cares and sordid speculations of their daily and hourly existence.

What refinement of intellect, what generosity of sentiment, can rationally be anticipated from the raw and almost uneducated youth, who grows on to manhood in the close and stifling atmosphere of gain?—Who, year by year, hears every quality of the head and heart exposed to the test of wealth?—Who learns, and who never forgets, that the "best man on 'Change" is he who buttons his snug great-coat over the largest amount of bank bills? Human nature will be human nature still, under every phase, and although the generous spirit may for a while contend, it is ultimately silenced by the potent spell of self-interest and self-advancement.

Yet it is beautiful to reflect how comparatively few of these slaves of the lamp wholly degenerate—how steadily they toil on, surrounded by what they hold to be the greatest good on earth, and yet preserve their honesty. Health and hope may alike fail, but their task is before them, and they perform it nobly to the last, rejoicing or sorrowing as the coffers of their employers are filled or emptied, and making a common interest of what they have almost taught themselves to feel as a common cause.

And Jackson, poor, humble-hearted, long-enduring Jackson, was one of these. The opulence of the house to which he belonged was his glory and his pride, and almost seemed to reflect its prosperity upon his own squalid home. He would not have resented a personal affront; his courage would have failed him for such a purpose, but a syllable which reflected upon the credit of his employers would at once have aroused him to indignation and defiance.

And now, as we have said, his heart was full. His world was a narrow one, and he could ill afford to lose one of the objects about which it had closed in. He spoke to the dying man—once—twice—in a meek, low voice, which faltered with feeling, but no answer was returned. It was evident that the little strength which yet remained to him was expended in the firm clasp which he still retained of the important packet.

At length his lack-lustre eye wandered languidly round the apartment until it rested upon Gertrude, who sat weeping silently apart. For an instant an expression, almost of fierceness, convulsed the muscles of his face, but it passed away, and he motioned her to approach. She obeyed, and then, with considerable difficulty, he placed the papers in her hand, and once more closed his eyes with a groan which no mere bodily anguish could have extorted from him.

Despite his affliction, a gleam of satisfaction irradiated the hard features of the observant clerk. He even nodded his head significantly towards the agitated and bewildered girl, as he murmured almost inaudibly, "It is done at last. It is done at last, and now he will be easier."

Then he drew still nearer to the sick-bed, and bent over the sufferer as if to compel one last look of recognition, but he watched in vain. Mr. Spencer had resigned his most cherished hold on life, and was still battling with the necessity to which he was compelled to yield. He lay for a while still, quite still and motionless, while the laboring spasms from which he had been previously suffering were subdued, and he breathed lightly and almost imperceptibly: nature was, however, only pausing for a brief space, in order to rally all her remaining energies for one last effort, and as the anxious watchers stood around him, he suddenly sat upright in his bed, with extended arms and clutching fingers, as he shrieked out:

"Give me back my gold!—My gold! I have toiled for it, fasted for it, and it is mine!—ALL mine! Give it back, I say! Has it not cost me alike body and soul! Thieves!—Thieves!—Will no one help me? Miserable old man that I am, give me back my gold! I cannot die till I have counted it once more—only once more—and then ———"

But again the crimson tide gushed from his lips, and he fell heavily back upon the pillow; there was a sharp struggle, a low sigh, and Mrs. Sharp drew Gertrude from the bedside.

"You had better leave the room, ma'am," she said, as she supported the tottering steps of the orphan to the door; "You can be of no further service here, for the poor gentleman is gone."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE poison worked at Westrum. It was in vain that Mortimer sought some cause of quarrel with his unwelcome guest, for Trevor was too listless and too well-bred to take offence where he persisted in declaring that such an intention was impossible, while, once more thralled by the beauty, and fascinated by the accomplishments of his brilliant hostess, he became cautious in his demeanor, and measured in his attentions. The master-spirit of Mrs. Lamerly was, moreover, at work, and the presence of Mortimer always sufficed to call forth all her playful and pretty coquetry, addressed, as those around her supposed, to the fashionable baronet, but which she tempered by such appealing glances towards Frederic, as encouraged him to believe that he had at least an equal share in their display.

A heart cast back upon itself is easily awakened to renewed happiness, and we already know the morbid yearning of Mortimer for the affec-

tion of those about him. Much, therefore, as he despised the friend of his wife, he could not continue insensible to her evident preference of himself. True, she appeared to put forth all her powers in order to dazzle Trevor, but when they chanced to meet without witnesses, the brilliancy of her eyes was softened by an expression of meek and womanly devotion, which, to a nature so sensitive as his own, was infinitely more attractive than the most radiant smiles. All her coquetry disappeared, all her factitious graces were laid aside, and her very voice faltered as though it trembled to meet his ear. Yet still he did not love her. Even slighted as he was by Sybil, she had been too thoroughly the ideal of his fancy to fade at once from his heart, and a gnawing unhappiness, which to him appeared a presentiment of evil, clouded his spirit.

Nor was the position of Sybil herself one of less constraint and difficulty. The unfortunate relationship which she had invented between herself and Sir Horace, naturally invested him with privileges which he could not otherwise have claimed, and although he never addressed her in the language of gallantry, there was, nevertheless, a peculiarity in his manner of which it was impossible for her to remain unconscious, while they had so many tastes and prejudices in common, that his society possessed a charm in her eyes of which she could not divest it.

Too indolent to indulge in the sports of the field, utterly unoccupied by business of any kind, and consequently at the disposal of the circle in which he chanced to move, Trevor found many opportunities of renewing his old friendship with Sybil, and of profiting by the advantages due to her indiscreet deception, while Mortimer was engaged in the superintendence of his estate, and attending agricultural and county dinners, and it was singular upon those occasions, how capriciously Mrs. Lamerly turned all the battery of her baby-graces upon Lord John, or the Honorable Theodore. Lady Clara sneered, and Mrs. Babington raised her fine eyes in horror, but the widow heeded neither sneers nor glances; she was accountable to no one for the variations of her mood, and so she calmly lisped out her piquant slanders, and revenged herself by an indifference to all comment which, in a better cause, would have been almost sublime.

Meanwhile, the intimacy between Sybil and her old lover strengthened with every succeeding day, and unconsciously she recovered the elasticity of spirit which appeared to have abandoned her since her marriage. Every sentence became once more an epigram, and every impulse a fascination. The calmer temperament of Frederic had, in some degree, checked the exuberance of her nature, but with Trevor she was once more her former self. Her vanity was flattered, and she soon ceased to remember all the imprudence and the mortification of the past. Encouraged by his evident admiration, and the delight with which he participated in those sarcastic, witty, and pungent conversations in which she felt that she was unrivalled, she too soon forgot that he cared for nothing save the gratification of the moment, and gave her self up irresistingly to the spell of his sympathy.

With the most intense selfishness did Trevor watch every gradation of feeling which she exhibited towards him, and had he trusted himself to speak upon such a subject, he would calmly have declared that he was neither her mentor nor her guide; that he was in no way responsible for her actions, and that past experience had not tended to discourage him in his present pursuit. But Sir Horace had few friends, and no confidant, save indeed the diplomatist's widow, and even she had volunteered the office, and was endured rather than encouraged. His secret was therefore safe, and the self-deluding Sybil left free to shape out her own destiny.

Surrounded by persons who, from peculiar causes, were at once authorized and inclined to be indulgent, Mrs. Mortimer had no one near her save her mother, who would have put forth a hand to lead her back into the path of prudence, and even that mother appeared wilfully to close her eyes against the growing evil.

But it was not so. No change of place or society had any longer the slightest effect upon Mrs. Delamere. Always languid, listless, and hypochondriacal, her days succeeded each other in the most insipid monotony. Scarcely did she appear conscious of the change of season, or the progress of time.

The boldest flirtation might have been carried on in her very presence, and she would never have remarked it. Her early years had been those of indolence and inertness, by which her mental faculties had been enervated; a period of pain and anxiety supervened, in which, true to her acquired nature, she weakly resigned her own will and wishes—her own better will, and worthier wishes, into the keeping of her daughter, and if at times a sickening dread of the ultimate result of that daughter's actions bowed down her feeble spirit, she no sooner saw her doubts removed, and her terrors terminated, by a marriage which surpassed her hopes, than she sank into a moral lethargy, from which she made no effort to escape.

Satisfied that Sybil *was* married, she never cared to remember that she might yet have many trials before her, dangerous to so vain and ambitious a nature as hers, and as her counsel or opinion was never asked upon any subject, so neither did she seek to proffer it.

Nothing, in short, save actual bodily absence, could have created a more effectual separation between mother and daughter, than the system which they had severally adopted, and if an appeal was, by some strange chance, made to Mrs. Delamere by a third party, the never-failing reply of, "Sybil knows best," was the inevitable result of so bootless an attempt to identify her with the events which were taking place about her.

Nevertheless, every incidental attention or mark of affection which she received from her child, would light up the dull eyes of the old lady for a moment, but these gradually made a less demand upon her maternal feelings. The spirit of the world, with all its exacting follies and engrossing vanities, had fastened upon the

heart of Sybil, and left her little leisure for sympathy in the whims and wishes of a voluntary invalid; while so perfect was her power over the weakened nerves and failing faculties of her mother, that after she had once or twice warned her of the danger of betraying the falsehood of her implied relationship to Trevor, poor Mrs. Delamere almost succeeded in persuading herself that it really existed, and when Sir Horace, half in jest, and half in scorn, occasionally addressed her as his aunt, she replied to his remark without the slightest symptom of discomposure.

Thus all conspired to aid the projects of the vain and worldly baronet; too cautious to commit himself in the presence of Mortimer, by word or look, he had made good his footing at Westrum, while Mortimer himself, too weak to declare and enforce his will, even where he felt it to be right and fitting, lest he should once again be made the scoff of the idle and the impertinent, and cited as a jealous husband, and moreover somewhat engrossed by the clever coquetries of Mrs. Lamerly, suffered the growing intimacy of the *soi distant* cousins to progress as it might, satisfied that, upon the first legitimate occasion, he should be able to terminate it by a word.

Such an experience is at all times hazardous, but especially so with persons of the temperament of Mortimer—men who are contented to live on *au jour la journée;* procrastinating for the sake of momentary peace, hedged in by morbid prejudices, and never glancing beyond a certain and narrow range of vision. Men, moreover, who have been reared and fostered in the worship of self, and who must be injured in that precious self before they can force themselves into energy.

An imprudence, or rather be it said, an indiscretion on the part of Sybil, would have aroused him on the instant, because it would have touched his honor, but he had nothing tangible to work upon. The whole tone of his wife's society was objectionable, but it was nevertheless considered a privilege, even by the most prudent and correct of their country neighbors, to be admitted within its charmed circle, and he dared not, therefore, complain. They had talked of retrenchment on their return to Westrum, yet far from taking steps to retrieve their former excesses, they were, even under their own roof, and in that comparatively obscure part of the country, still living considerably beyond their means. Yet here also he feared to remonstrate. Had he not assured Sybil, when she formerly rejected his hand on the plea of her own ruined fortune, that he could so amply supply her every wish, that she would never have cause to remember so unimportant a circumstance? It is true that he had not speculated upon the outlay requisite to gratify all the elegant caprices and high-bred exactions of a vain and worldly woman; that, accustomed to the quiet and unostentatious comfort of his mother's household, he had never calculated upon the amount of expenditure necessary to maintain, in proper keeping and consistency, a large establishment, with its concomitant equipages, attendants, and table. He saw himself surrounded by guests about whom he cared nothing, and who returned his indifference.

He was no longer at home in his own house; he had no interest in common even with his wife, and yet he hesitated to break the spell which was darkening about him. His only hope lay in the attainment of the office for which he was still soliciting, but hitherto he had merely received professions which had brought forth no fruit. Still, the *ignis fatuus* lured him on. He was afraid to believe that he could ultimately fail, and when he ventured to expostulate with Sybil upon the subject, she coolly dismissed it with the remark, that so long as they continued in the country nothing could be anticipated in the shape of definite success. People must be upon the spot to carry a point of so much importance, and meanwhile he was, if not enlarging his circle of friends, at least binding them to his interests by hospitality and kindness.

Mortimer listened, and even if he did not quite believe, he at least yielded, and Sybil's point was gained. Her days passed on amid admiration and amusement; she forgot the past, and she would not look into the future, and thus week after week went by, and the winter was drawing to a close, and her party rapidly dispersing; Lord John took flight for the last month of the dead season, to dullify dutifully with the duke, his brother, at his old castle in the Highlands; the Honorable Theodore to Baden-Baden, at once to increase his debts and to distance his duns; Mrs. Babington to her aunt's in Dorsetshire, to try the effect of her matured charms on a rich cousin recently arrived from India, and Lady Clara to Paris, to make her annual curtsey at the Tuileries. Mrs. Lamerly, however, still lingered; she had no rich cousins or ducal brothers—no footing at the ,French court, or stake at the *rouge-et-noir* table, and she found it so difficult to tear herself away from her little pet Eva, and her comfortable home at Westrum, that day succeeded day, and she still maintained her post.

At length, however, when even Trevor, despite the well-worn privilege of his cousinship, found himself compelled to depart in his turn; as Sybil made no sign when her dear friend more than hinted that she was ready to sacrifice herself till the commencement of the London season, Mrs. Lamerly was reluctantly forced to follow his example, and then, for the first time since their marriage, Frederic and Sybil found themselves alone beneath their own roof.

Much as Mortimer had desired such an opportunity of retrenchment, it was not, however, without something like regret that he saw the carriage of the widow drive off. She had amused his idleness, and better still, she loved his child. He had now, moreover, no opportunity of escaping from his reflections, and they were far from consolatory. He had been married little more than twelve months, and he had already exhausted three years' income, lost the affections of his wife, trifled with his self-respect, and compromised the future prospects of Eva.

For a few hours he felt melancholy, and even the caresses of his little girl had partly lost their charm, but as the evening drew in he be-

came less sad, and more irritable. A feeling of indignation mingled with his self-reproach. He began to consider himself as more sinned against than sinning, and as the victim of circumstances which he had neither possessed the power to foresee nor to prevent; while at intervals something like anger against the supine indifference of Sybil to interests which were so vital to himself, mingled with his musings.

They had retired from the dining-room, where they had partaken of a *tête-à-tête* dinner almost in silence, a nervous attack having confined Mrs. Delamere to her chamber for the day. A single lamp burnt upon a console at the extremity of the apartment, while a small reading-table stood beside the chair of Sybil, who lay listlessly back among her cushions, with closed eyes, mechanically passing a paper-knife along the already opened pages of a review. From time to time, however, she looked up with ill-concealed impatience at the gorgeous time piece upon the mantel, as if to chide the tardiness of the jewelled hands, while Mortimer occupied the other side of the fire-place, and sat gazing upon the mimic pageantry of towers, and rocks, and monsters, presented by the burning mass before him.

A cloud was upon his brow, and his lips were rigidly compressed. The enchantress who had wiled him from himself was placed so near to him that their extended hands could have met, but the enchantment was nearly over, and those hands were not outstretched.

As he arrived at the last phase of his reflections Mortimer suddenly raised his head, and looked earnestly at his wife. Her eyes were once more closey, and this fact only increased his irritation.

"Perhaps, Sybil," he commenced abruptly; "I shall find no better opportunity than the present for endeavoring to impress upon you the necessity for an immediate change in our mode of living. So far, I have only been weak, but, should I suffer it to be pursued much longer upon its present scale, I shall become dishonest. The subject is an unpleasant one for both of us; it must be so, but it is my duty not to shrink from it. The unfortunate delusion into which I was betrayed by my ambition, has, I think, by this time disclosed its utter fallacy, and consequently, the immense outlay which was intended to further its success must finish with it. My fortune, ample as it is, or rather was, will no longer suffice to maintain so large an establishment, and we must also remember that we have a daughter."

"You have chosen a strange moment in which to sermonize," was the calm reply, "nor is the tone of your communication calculated to reconcile me to its import. One would imagine that I was the person to blame for the outlay of which you complain."

"I had no intention to reproach you, Sybil, but, even as you have shared my pleasures, so did I believe that you would be willing to bear your portion of my anxieties," said Frederic: "It is but another disappointment to find that I have been deceived."

Mrs. Mortimer raised herself proudly to a more erect position, as, with a scornful gesture, she asked petulantly: "And I—think you that I have not also had to contend against mortification and disappointment? Did you imagine that I have no cause for regret? Did I not frankly confess to you before our marriage that I could never bear to be confounded with the common herd who are satisfied to vegetate, and have not moral energy to live? Have I not subsequently urged you to escape from this social nullity? And how have you responded to my appeal? Discouraged on the very threshold of success, apathetic where you should be resolute, and looking to the means when you should care only for the end, you have negatived all my previsions, and I am condemned to see you fall back contentedly into the insignificance from which I have been laboring to withdraw you."

"Sybil!" exclaimed her husband, starting to his feet—

"We are both, it would appear, unhappy in the selection of our subject to-night," was the cold response of Mrs. Mortimer to this involuntary demonstration of indignant anger, "but we shall do well to understand each other. My good offices are still at your service, should you care to accept them, although I cannot submit to be lectured like a froward child."

Mortimer pressed his hand upon his burning forehead. He feared to trust himself with words.

After the pause of a moment Sybil again spoke, and it was with less asperity. "Listen to me, Frederic," she said: "Let us not forget the respect which we owe to ourselves by bandying reproaches. You know the ambition of my nature, nor have I to learn the supineness of yours. I cannot forego the hope that I shall see you assume that station in the world to which you are entitled, but I know enough of public men, and of public life, to feel convinced that, without some effort and some sacrifice on your own part, it is vain for you to anticipate success in any undertaking. You just now quoted your child as a reason for withdrawing from a contest in which the attempt itself does you honor, and now I quote her as an incentive to exertion. A brilliant position in life will advantage her more than all the hoarded gold which you could ever accumulate in obscurity."

"But what if I am ruined in the process?"

Sybil shrugged her shoulders. "You talk as though you had no resources."

"They are, at least, not inexhaustible."

"At all events," said the lady, as with one of her most sunny smiles she extended her hand to her husband; "They will suffice to renew the trial. The coming season will, beyond all doubt, decide the question of your success. The first and most difficult step is already taken. Your pretensions are known, and your eligibility for the post you solicit has been admitted. The rest is a mere question of time, and the judicious employment of private and powerful interest."

"Sybil," said Mortimer, as he clasped the proffered hand, and, thoroughly appeased, looked fondly in her face: "that smile has thrown me back upon the past. I shall not seek to

resist it. Only encourage my endeavors by a renewal of the affection which I feared that I had lost, and I will again have faith in your prophecy.

Nor did the conversation end here; for Sybil, far from wishing, as she declared, to owe the concession of her husband simply to his consideration for her opinion, was desirous to convince his reason; and she accordingly proceeded to do this by the very effective method of alarming him with the fear of ridicule. What would the world say should he return into obscurity, after so brilliant a *début?* What *could* be said, save that his ambition had not extended beyond a momentary appearance, destined like that of a wandering ground-meteor, only to gleam for an instant with a cheating light, and then to be once more absorbed in the obscurity from which it had so uselessly and idly emanated? Should he now retire from the contest moreover, all the expenditure of which he complained would have been made in vain, and surely, this fact required some consideration. And she urged all this so gently, so placidly, with so persuasive a smile, and so convincing an accent, that Mortimer, already dreaming a renewal of the halycon days of their early marriage, was only too ready to admit the feasibility of her arguments and too eager to prove his assent to her propositions.

And so the town-house was once more engaged; the equipages retained; the club subscriptions paid up; and the land-steward silenced for another season.

CHAPTER XLIX.

Gertrude had scarcely reached her room, when the solemn promise which she had made to her departed relative, that she would immediately after his decease take possession of the important pocket-book, recurred to her mind; and terrible as she felt a return to the death-chamber to be at such a moment, she did not hesitate to redeem it. For an instant she paused, however, to collect herself, but only for an instant; and then with a calm step, she recrossed the threshold of the silent apartment, and approached the bed. Beside it knelt the meek and faithful clerk, holding within his own the hand of the dead man; and as, upon hearing the light step of Gertrude, he raised his head, and looked up inquiringly, she saw that there were traces of tears upon his pale and withered cheeks.

Instinctively she laid her hand upon his shoulder and smiled a sad smile, which he appeared instantly to comprehend; for, rising from his knees, he hastily wiped away the tell-tale moisture, and faltered out in a trembling whisper; "I know it, my dear young lady, I know it. I have no right to be squandering time upon my own grief, when I should be thinking of you. But Madam," he continued, with a fresh and irrepressible burst of emotion; "he who lies there was my first friend; almost, I may say, my only friend; to him I owe the bread by which I live. It is hard to part from one's only friend—very hard. The happy and the prosperous cannot understand this, for they have so many that they scarcely miss them as they fall away each in their turn. They do not know what it is to have but one, and to lose him."

"Sincerely do I trust, good old man, that he appreciated your attachment," murmured Gertrude, considerably affected.

"I cannot say, I cannot say, Madam," was the melancholy reply, as he stood with clasped hands contemplating the rigid features of his former patron; "None on earth can ever know what were his real feelings; he kept his own secrets, just as he worked out his own fortune. He always stood alone in the world, and he was able to do it, for his will was strong, and he needed no help from others. I shall never know what he felt for me, neither shall I ever forget what he did for me. But for him I might have been a beggar."

"Your gratitude must have brought a blessing to his death-bed."

"I trust it may, young lady, I trust it may. Bless you, at all events, for uttering such a hope! And now, madam, what orders have you to give me?"

"First, Mr. Jackson, be good enough," whispered the orphan, while a slight tremor passed over her, and she clung to the chair near which she chanced to be standing for support, "to give me from beneath the pillow of my poor uncle a pocket-book which you will find there."

She was silently obeyed.

"And now, if you please," she pursued, "we will go down stairs to the sitting-room, and I will explain to you the nature of the services for which I shall intrude upon your kindness."

The clerk bowed respectfully, cast another long look towards the bed of death, and then opened the door of the chamber for Gertrude to pass out, but she also paused to contemplate for a moment the countenance of the dead man. The eyes had already been reverently closed, and the luxuriant masses of silver hair drawn more closely about the pallid brow; the outline of the face was strikingly fine and intellectual, the forehead high and broad, the lips well set, and full of firm and almost harsh expression, the nose perfectly chiselled, and the whole character of the head calm and noble; but as the glance of Gertrude travelled on along the sheet by which the body was covered, she shuddered to perceive that even the pang of death itself had failed to relax the firm clenching of the bony hands. There was something frightful in this resolute grasp which had fastened upon nothing, when life, and all life's possessions, were passing from him, and with a deep sigh, she bent for a moment over the corpse while she breathed out a silent prayer, and then slowly left the room followed by her deputed counsellor.

On entering the little parlor she found that the shutters were already closed, but that, by the active and judicious zeal of Mrs. Sharp, a comfortable fire had been kindled in the grate, while a couple of candles, placed upon the table, gave the room an appearance of comparative comfort. Thankfully did Gertrude throw herself upon a seat, as she motioned to her meek and silent companion to follow her example, and

ien gave an unconstrained course to her tears, id wept for awhile in silence, until the awe and chaustion produced by the scene through which he had just passed became gradually relieved. or did the old man attempt, either by word or esture, to check this overflowing of her surnarged heart. His respect for the niece of his atron was too profound to enable him to offer he slightest interference with her feelings, and ius he sat mutely before her, with his dim, but ow tearless eyes riveted upon the dingy almaack above the fire-place, and losing himself in peculations and probabilities, which, although me of them might point, however faintly and oubtingly, towards his own interests, were verthelcss mainly directed to those of the soliry and evidently helpless girl who now looked him for support.

Perhaps he was not unthankful for this temorary pause. It is, at all events, certain, that e no sooner saw the orphan wipe away her ars, than he drew towards him the tattered riting-case, and requested her permission at nce to inform his employers of the melancholy vent which had just occurred, and to request eir promised permission to absent himself om his desk until his presence should no longer e required beneath the roof of his late master.

Gertrude was grateful for the suggestion, and his necessary missive written, it was immeiately despatched to its destination by a trusty essenger, while a second, more brief, and remiring less precision, was at the same time conigned to the post, to warn the wife of the writer hat she must not anticipate his return until the orrow.

"And now, madam," he said, as the door osed upon Mrs. Sharp, and they were again lone, "you have only to inform me of your ishes, and I am ready to obey them. The poor entleman has, without doubt, already made uch communications to you, as will enable us carry out his instructions."

"He has indeed done so, Mr. Jackson," relied Gertrude, as with a trembling hand she roduced the pocket-book, and proceeded to unasp it; "this case, as he told me, contains the m which he wishes to expend upon—" she aused, unable to proceed.

"I understand, madam," said the old man, hile, with an innate refinement which did him onor, he withdrew his eyes from her face, "and have only to ask if I can be of any service on he melancholy occasion."

"I depend upon you wholly, my good sir," eplied Gertrude, drawing the note from its hidng-place; "I am so utterly inexperienced in all natters of business, that I shall be unable to stir step in this melancholy affair without your id. Will you, then, take pity upon my helpessness, and dispose of the money as you may udge best, being careful, however, to expend it ll, for this one purpose, such having been the xpress command of my uncle?"

"You shall be obeyed, madam."

"But—that is not all," pursued Gertrude after painful pause, during which her cheek and row had become crimson, "will you forgive e, Mr. Jackson, if I ask you to let me see the—he—in short, to acquaint me afterwards with the precise manner in which it was disbursed? Believe me, I earnestly entreat of you, when I declare that no doubt of your honor induces such a request, but I must do my duty to the end, painful though it may be."

"Once more be assured that I understand you, madam," said the humble-minded and broken-spirited clerk, without one symptom of surprise or indignation. "It is no less my duty than your own to obey *his* will. You shall duly receive my accounts, with which, I trust, you will be satisfied."

Gertrude instinctively extended her hand to her aged protector, for such at that moment she truly felt him to be, but if her inferential distrust of his probity had failed to move him to emotion, such was far from being the case with this exhibition of condescending courtesy.

Everything is comparative in this world, and thus the niece of the opulent head of the house of Spencer, Owen and Co., was, in the eyes of the junior clerk of the firm, so august a personage that, for a moment, he doubted the evidence of his senses, but when he not only saw that small white hand remain outstretched towards him, but also a sweet smile of confidence and encouragement pass over the fair face of the orphan, he rose respectfully from his chair, and having ventured to clasp it in his own, bowed over it reverently, and then burst into tears.

How much of contumely, and harshness, and injustice—how much of hope deferred, and sickening anxiety, and withering privation, had that old man taught himself to endure unmoved during a long life of drudgery and toil! He would have smiled in wonder had any one taken sufficient interest in his fate to marvel at his stoicism, for he had long ceased to feel the consciousness of his endurance; it had become matter of habit that he should be buffeted and browbeat by the world; it was the sure inheritance of poverty, and he had accepted it as such. But to the words, and looks, and tones of kindness, he was all unused, and therein, at least, he was no stoic. It seemed to him almost as though he were robbing another of those signs of sympathy,—as if it could be but a glimpse into some unknown world in which he had no share. And yet that world of love and peace, even transient as was the glance, appeared so beautiful; his self-respect, although in his toil-worn breast such a feeling could endure only for an instant, was so awakened, that he could not support the shock, and thus he stood before the distressed and frightened Gertrude, weeping like a child.

"It is nothing, Madam, it is nothing," he at length sobbed out, as he remarked her look of dismay; "I am better now, but the thought that I was holding the hand of my master's niece in mine, and that she was smiling so kindly upon me, was more than I could bear. It is an honor, Madam, that will go down with me to my grave, and I will prove that I am grateful for it. There will not be many such memories to cheer the death-bed of Thomas Jackson."

"I entreat you not to talk in so sad or erroneous a manner," said the orphan gently. "It is I, Mr. Jackson, who am the obliged person,

and who shall have much to remember and to thank you for. And now, what is our first duty?"

"True, my dear young lady, in the joy of my own heart, I had forgotten all else. But it has been so very, very seldom my fate to meet with kindness, that I was for a moment beside myself. Now, however, I will lose no more time, for there is much to be done."

"Are you going to leave me, my dear Sir?" asked Gertrude, as with irrepressible alarm she saw him take possession of his hat.

"I must do so, Madam, for awhile."

"But you will return, and share my melancholy dinner, will you not?"

Again the old man raised his eyes to hers in bewildering incredulity, but there was no mistaking the expression of the sweet face that was turned towards him, and stammering out an answer which was unintelligble to Gertrude, and in which she could only distinguish the words *honor*, and *happiness*, and *gratitude*, he bowed more profoundly than ever, and then hurriedly left the room.

It was a relief to the painful feelings of the orphan to find herself compelled to withdraw her thoughts for a time from the melancholy associations of the morning, in order to give the necessary instructions to Mrs. Sharp for the preparation of the meal to which she had invited her late uncle's humble dependent, nor was it without an expression of delight, which she vainly attempted to suppress, that the worthy housekeeper received her orders. Never before had there been such a prospect of plenty beneath that roof since she had been its inmate, and as Gertrude put the small sum necessary for the purpose of providing the unaccustomed luxuries into her hand, she looked almost as incredulous as the poor clerk.

"I am sorry to give you this additional trouble, Mrs. Sharp," said the gentle girl, "but Mr. Jackson is so very kind, and my uncle respected him so much, that I could not bear that he should feel himself neglected. Above all, do not forget the wine, he will have much fatigue to encounter to-day, I fear, nor will you stand in less need of some additional support."

How Mrs. Sharp longed to throw her arms about the neck of the considerate young creature who had even remembered *her* at such a moment! but respect restrained her, and she could only falter out her thanks.

"All shall be done as you desire, Ma'am," she added, after an instant's silence, "and should you require anything in my absence, the nurse is already in my master's chamber, and her daughter waiting any orders that you may please to give, in the next room. I ventured to engage her without your permission, as I feared that you would feel lonely when I was obliged to leave the house."

Gertrude very sincerely expressed her thanks for this consideration, and felt considerably relieved by the consciousness that, on the departure of the housekeeper, she should not be condemned to the sole companionship of the death-room. Moreover, her conversation with the worthy woman, inconsequent as it necessarily was, had tended to restore her to composure and accordingly she had no sooner withdrawn than Gertrude seated herself at her desk, to inform both Ernest and Miss. Warrington of the near cessation of her duties in town, and her approaching return to Bletchley.

She could have chosen no more judicious employment, for the death of her uncle once communicated, her imagination bounded into the future, and she forgot her present trials in the contemplation of her coming happiness, and thus she poured out her whole heart to her lover, and confessed to him that now, when they were so soon to meet again, she felt all the wretchedness of their brief separation, but she should return to him, as she trusted, a wiser and a better woman, for she should be more than ever able to appreciate all the blessings of her destiny. And then she had a thousand affectionate messages to send to Mary and Eleanor a thousand things to ask of them when they were once more together, and so she wrote on and the time passed away unheeded, until a gentle knock at the door announced the return of her guest.

This was succeeded by the appearance of the housekeeper with the preparations for dinner, and although, as she came and went, Gertrude and her new friend were several times left together, Mr. Jackson carefully abstained from any allusion to the business upon which he had been engaged, nor did the orphan venture to question him. The common sense of the old man taught him that the subject was not only likely to increase either the appetite or the spirits of the delicate girl, who was now in some degree under his charge, and so he talked respectfully of the weather, and the state of the streets, and endeavored to turn her thoughts to other and less depressing topics.

He was repaid for his care by seeing a faint smile at intervals rise to her lips, and as the pleasurable impression produced by the letter which she had just been writing had not worn off, she seated herself at the table with less repugnance than she had anticipated, and if she did not profit by the comfortable meal before her to an extent which satisfied the anxious Mrs. Sharp, she nevertheless compelled herself to partake of it.

Meanwhile, the modest old man who shared her hospitality was still less at ease than herself, for even his feeling of regret for his lost master could not overcome his sense of confusion at the strange situation in which he found himself so unexpectedly placed, but gradually as he saw with what anxious and even affectionate attention his young hostess supplied and almost anticipated, his wants, and found himself cheered by a glass of tavern wine, which, questionable as might be its quality was to him, nevertheless, a most unaccustomed luxury, he resumed a certain degree of self possession, and was able to partake with comfort of the good things before him.

But even this dinner, strange as was such a meal in that abode of famine, could not endure for ever, and when the cloth was drawn, the candles snuffed, and the fire renewed, Gertrude and her companion were once more alone.

For a time both were silent. They had so few subjects in common upon which they could converse, and even these, with one exception, were already exhausted, yet still the old man shrank from renewing that one. He felt that all he had to tell was so sad and so harrowing, that every moment gained was a pang spared to the inexperienced and sensitive girl, but ere long he began to feel the futility and even danger of any further delay. From one moment to another he anticipated the arrival of those whom he had summoned, and he consequently rallied his courage to prepare Gertrude for their appearance.

There is always something sad, if not revolting, in the visit of those unsympathising servitors of dissolution, who first break upon the stillness of the house of death; the very nature of their errand is fearful—they come to claim all that is left of what was once life, and will, and action—to tread heavily over the floor where others have previously moved with a noiseless step—to talk in hoarse although suppressed voices where the dull echoes have latterly been hushed—and coldly to pursue their avocation in the very presence of eternity.

Perhaps it is well that there is no possibility of delaying this first trial, for where the ties of love have been rent asunder, who would have courage to sanction so unhallowed an intrusion?—Who could summon to the bedside, so lately the scene of agony and prayer, the unsympathising eyes and hands of mercenary strangers? Human nature is ever prone to resist where resistance is possible, and suffering certain; happy is it, therefore, that it is taught in so solemn a moment to feel its own impotence, and to submit.

In Gertrude's case the greater anguish of such a trial was spared, but still it was not without a shudder and a sickness at the heart, that she learned the near approach of her lugubrious visitors. Vainly did she endeavor to combat her emotion, for alas! her thoughts reverted to another and a dearer death-bed, and she remembered what she had formerly experienced. Nor was this all; for memory is as ingenious to wound as to console, and as she dwelt upon the loss of her earliest friend, all the sorrows which had succeeded that bereavement came freshly before her.

The sullen tread of feet in the narrow passage, and the murmured sound of strange voices, at length announced the advent of the expected functionaries, but it was not until the stairs had ceased to creak under their steps, that the kind-hearted old man, who had averted his eyes from Gertrude as he saw her suddenly conceal her face in her handkerchief, and struggle for composure, rose silently from his seat, and followed them.

Poor girl! she felt very wretched, and more thoroughly alone than she had ever yet done. Fain would she have shut out every sound, and still, with that morbid yearning to the terrible so inherent in a sensitive nature, she strained her ear to detect their movements, and followed them in fancy through all their gloomy task. It was a great relief to her when they at last departed. The first sad act of the drama of death was over, and she breathed more freely.

CHAPTER L.

When the old man, who was now her sole support, again entered the room, which he did a few minutes subsequently, he was even paler than before, and there was an expression of anxiety upon his care-worn face, which he could not conceal; he however seated himself in silence, and made no attempt to break the stillness. Some time consequently elapsed in dark and dreary thought on both sides, until Gertrude, more and more convinced by the uneasy working of his features, that he desired, but had not courage, to make some necessary communication to her, resolutely addressed him.

"You have something to say to me, Mr. Jackson, by which you fear that I shall be distressed?"

"Not distressed, I trust, my dear young lady, but you have already suffered so much, that I cannot bear to add to your trial by telling you that you have still a painful duty to perform. Mr. Spencer perhaps informed you that he had left a will?"

"It is in my possession," replied Gertrude quietly.

"Are you also aware that I hold the duplicate?"

"I am."

"And this will, Madam, do you desire at once to ascertain its contents? If so, I must summon Mr. Collins, by whom it was drawn up, as I believe that it would not be legal, and certainly, in any case, it would not be advisable to open it in his absence."

"We will, if you please, defer all such considerations until after my poor uncle's funeral. Under any circumstances, I could not permit myself to exhibit what I should regard as a disrespectful anxiety, by suffering its contents to be investigated at an earlier period, while now, as you are well aware, it is a matter of no consequence whatever."

The worthy clerk looked up in the most profound astonishment, but he made no comment upon her words.

"We have, fortunately," pursued the orphan, in the same calm and unexcited tone, "received from his own lips all the instructions necessary to enable us to fulfill his latest wishes as regards himself, and to those only I am anxious to confine my thoughts until they are scrupulously accomplished. The rest of our task will then be reduced to a mere painful ceremony."

"But, my dear young lady," urged the old man deferentially, "would it not be well so to arrange as to enable you to conclude all your painful duties on the same day?"

"I shall be most grateful to you, if you can accomplish so desirable an object."

"Leave it to me, leave it to me," said her companion, flattered by the confidence which she reposed in him. "My present principal, Mr. Owen, will wish to be invited to the ceremony, for he has already mentioned the matter

to me, while, as I before ventured to observe, we cannot dispense with the attendance of Mr. Collins. Are there any other persons whom you desire to summon?"

"I am a stranger in London," replied Gertrude, gratified to find that her uncle would be followed to the grave at least by two of his former associates, "but you may probably be aware of other individuals to whom the attention is due."

Jackson shook his head. "He lived much alone, Madam, as I have already told you, and made few friendships. He was an able man in his office, and found there all the amusement that he required. I believe that we can do no more."

"So be it, then," said the orphan, "I leave everything in your hands, satisfied that you will act with kindness and judgment. And, my dear Sir, should some small increase of funds be necessary, do not scruple to say so. I have not much in my power, but——"

"Not a pound, not a shilling, young lady," was the rejoinder, "it is not from a residence like this that people look for an expensive procession. I have already made my calculation; we are amply supplied, and, in accordance with my poor master's directions, have only to assure ourselves that the money is well laid out."

Gertrude sighed; to her it was so difficult to reconcile the idea of wordly prudence with the exigencies of the death-room. She had yet seen too little of life to be aware how often the sublime is merged in the vulgar; how small interests jar upon lofty duties, and how tenaciously the demands of every day existence retain their hold under the most solemn circumstances.

The week which succeeded was a trying one to the lonely girl. The shrouded and coffined corpse, the closed windows, the measured tread, the suppressed voices, were all full of dark and gloomy association, but slowly as it seemed to wear away, it at length terminated, and from her narrow window she saw the modest procession leave the house. Her tears fell abundantly, as she remembered that the cold corpse which they were then bearing to the grave had once been warm with life, and had, if not loved her, at least felt for her, during a few short days, the interest of a relative, and she was thus bound only to two other beings on earth, while even one of those two had ceased to admit the claim.

Moreover, the house of death is always desolate when the one object of all the thoughts and cares of the survivors is borne from it for ever, and not even the unaccustomed stir and lightsomeness which so soon succeed, can for a time disperse the sadness by which it has been so long invaded.

Wearily and heavily, therefore, did the time pass by until the return of the funeral party, at which period the orphan was aware that repugnant as it might be at such a moment to her feelings, she must prepare to meet and thank the friends of her uncle, who had thus testified their respect for his memory.

Beyond this consideration Gertrude never looked. She was aware that the will of her deceased relative was to be read, and she had been warned by the careful old man, who had superintended all the arrangements, that she could not reasonably absent herself. It was therefore a duty to be accomplished, and she prepared to fulfill it, only marvelling at the necessity of a will where there was nothing save the squalid remnants of poverty to bequeath. It seemed like a mockery under the circumstances, and a mockery so solemn that it could produce nothing but pain.

"Would that my poor uncle had trusted to my good feeling!" she murmured to herself, as she smoothed back the glossy braids of her hair, bathed her swollen eyes, and cast a last languid look at her mourning dress, which, since the death of Mrs. Mortimer, she had never laid aside; "He had so little to leave, and the two faithful, although humble friends, who have tended him to the last, have so richly earned that little, that he had only to express a wish, or to confide in my sense of justice, to have dispensed with this last needless ceremony. But such has been his pleasure, and I have only to obey."

Calmly, therefore, although affected by a nervous tremor which she could not control, as she remembered that she was about, after a period of utter seclusion, to meet persons to whom she was totally unknown, she awaited the message which was to summon her to the parlor, and when the gentle tap of Mrs. Sharp sounded at the door, she rose without a word, and followed her with the important document in her hand.

As she entered the little sitting-room, both the gentlemen gave a perceptible start, but in the next instant they bowed profoundly as they were presented to the pale and beautiful girl, who, in her close mourning dress, and with downcast eyes, stood timidly before them. A chair was already placed for her beside the table, and in a few moments she recovered her self-possession.

The common-place condolences exacted by the occasion were courteously uttered, and as courteously received, and then, as if aware that their presence must be rather irksome than desirable to the desolate young creature by whose grace and beauty they had been so forcibly impressed, the two gentlemen exchanged a glance of intelligence, and Mr. Collins respectfully inquired whether Miss Mortimer was prepared for the reading of the will. Gertrude replied, by placing in his hand the sealed packet which had been delivered to her by her uncle, while the old clerk at the same time deposited upon the table the duplicate which had been committed to his guardianship.

The seals were broken, and the man of law, already aware of the contents of the parchment, commenced reading, in a calm and clear voice, all those technical preliminaries which betray no trace of what is to succeed, but as he advanced in his task his accent became slightly animated.

Mr. Owen leaned forward in his chair, with an expression of genuine satisfaction upon his mild and benignant countenance, and the kind-hearted old Jackson, who, during the last few days had learned to love the orphan as he had never before loved anything on earth, bent his

aged head upon his breast, and rubbed his thin hands together, as though his delight were almost irrepressible.

Suddenly, however, he started, and a vivid flush rose to his cheek. He could scarcely credit the evidence of his senses! And yet it was so—his name had been really mentioned in the will of his first patron. There could be no mistake, and the kind and congratulatory smile of his present employer assured the happy old man that he had heard aright.

Then a deep stillness fell upon that narrow room, and for a short space, no one cared to disturb the silence. But ere long the genial feelings of the warm-hearted merchant could no longer be controlled, and extending his hand to Gertrude, he said affectionately: "My dear young lady, suffer me to be the first to congratulate you. My poor friend could not have disposed more judiciously of a noble fortune. Long may you live both to enjoy and to adorn it."

"Very little short of £80,000, Miss Mortimer," said the lawyer with a courteous bow, "exclusive of a case of jewels, which your deceased uncle has declared to be contained in a chest in his sleeping-room, and of whose remarkable value I am aware. Give me leave to wish you all happiness in their possession."

The orphan could only look her thanks, for, bewildered by an event which had been by her utterly unforseen, she was greatly and even painfully agitated. To what privations had not her generous relative—for it was thus that she considered his conduct—to what privations had he not submitted, in order to enrich her beyond her wildst hopes! And he was now in his grave, beyond the reach of her gratitude; she could not pour out before him all the warm feelings of her overcharged heart—she could never repay the mighty debt by which she was weighed down.

No thought of her increased importance, not even a recollection of the opportunity which she should now possess to repay, in so far as wealth could do so, the disinterested affection of Ernest Armstrong, crossed her mind at that moment. She saw only, she remembered only, the squalid bed, the fireless grate, and the comfortless desolation of her uncle's sick room. And he had submitted to all this for her sake, and she could not even tell him what she felt!

"And you also, Mr. Jackson," said his considerate principal, who at once detected the inability of the orphan to sustain a conversation, "I very sincerely congratulate you also, sir. The bequest of Mr. Spencer is honorable to you both. I was well aware that he valued you highly, and he has now proved it to yourself. A good servant, sir, will, under all circumcumstances, as you see, make a good master."

"A very pretty little legacy indeed," followed up the more matter-of-fact man of law. "I have seldom been better pleased, Mr. Jackson, than I was when I put that £100 opposite your name, for I had known you well for years. This young lady will pardon me, I am sure, for such a confession, as I had not at that period the honor of her acquaintance."

"You could not have rejoiced more than I do, sir, at such an instance of my uncle's justice," said Gertrude, for the first time breaking silence, as her warm heart sympathized in the evident happiness of the modest dependant, and once more her hand sought that of the old man who had modestly risen to reply to the flattering expressions of Mr. Owen. "I also owe you much, very much, nor will my claims upon your kindness terminate even here, if I can prevail upon this gentleman to consent to your becoming my escort to my home. May I trust, sir," she asked timidly, as she turned towards the smiling merchant, "that you will indeed spare our old friend to me for a few days? I am quite alone, and so shaken by the trials of the last fortnight, that I fear I could scarcely have courage to encounter the journey under any other escort."

"I am sure, my dear young lady, I may safely pledge myself that Mr. Jackson is at your disposal for whatever period you may require his services," was the ready reply. "He certainly does not look an objection, and I, as certainly, cannot advance one. But may not I also be made useful?—or Mrs. Owen, who would be proud and happy to receive you until you leave town?"

Gertrude burst into tears. Her spirits were exhausted, and she could scarcely express her acknowledgments. There was no possibility of mistaking the cause of her emotion, and accordingly both the gentlemen rose, talked together for a moment of their several engagements, and then, warmly shaking hands with the new-made heiress, left the room, attended by the happy old clerk, who appeared to himself to have suddenly entered upon a new existence, and to have thrown off the weight of at least twenty winters.

He had not closed the door after him as he retreated, and it was fortunate, for when, as the last carriage drove away, he returned to the room, he saw Gertrude upon her knees, and forthwith, retiring with a noiseless step, he made his way to the kitchen, where, in an emphatic whisper, he related to the wondering and delighted Mrs. Sharp, and her temporary assistants, the marvellous events of the last hour.

Poor old Jackson! He even looked at his thread-bare coat with a smile, for if he wore it longer, it would be that such was his good will and pleasure. He need not again shrink before a shower, as he remembered the dilapidation which must ensue to the hat of many winters, that he had so long fostered, and then he thought of his wife, and of her faded Sunday gown, of his home, with its many wants, and finally, overcome by a tide of feeling which had never before been unsealed within his breast, he leaned his venerable head upon a table, and wept for very joy.

Life lends us few such tears, and withered be the hand which would check their flow!

CHAPTER LI.

Nothing could exceed the exultation of Mrs. Mortimer upon finding herself once more in London, and in the midst of the dissipation which

she loved. All, save her own gratification and amusement, was again forgotten. Scarcely did she spare a thought to the lonely and now really suffering mother, upon whom the lethargic habits of years were beginning to produce the baneful effect of premature old age. Satisfied that during her absence, Mrs. Delamere could still enjoy her well-cushioned chair, her novel, and her ether draughts, Sybil did not care to remember that she was yet susceptible of other gratifications, and the kiss which she had pressed upon her brow when they parted, had been too cold to elicit any demonstration of deeper feeling on the part of the forsaken invalid.

It was only when Frederic affectionately took her hand, and entreated, with an earnestness not to be mistaken, that should she feel herself more dull than she anticipated in her solitude, or that her health required greater care than usual, she would immediately inform him of her wishes, when he would hasten to escort her to town, while Sybil made the necessary preparations for her reception; it was only then that the tears gushed into her eyes, and that she was aroused for an instant from her habitual apathy.

She protested, however, and with sincerity, that she could not encounter the fatigue and discomfort of such a journey; that all she required to recruit her strength was perfect quietude, which the departure of the family would ensure to her; and that as her existence, under all circumstances, had now for some time been one of estrangement from society, she should not suffer from their temporary absence. With this assurance Mortimer was compelled to satisfy himself, and he did so the more readily that Sybil did not appear to share in his apprehensions. She had been so thoroughly accustomed, and indeed encouraged, by her mother herself, to consider that mother during many years as a mere cypher, that it never occurred to her as just possible that there were duties incumbent upon her which she could not conscientiously neglect.

Thus it was without one feeling of self-reproach or compunction, that she drove away from Westrum, to recommence the existence of expensive folly which alone enabled her to realise her ideas of happiness. Moreover, although she was probably not aware that this consideration greatly added to her eagerness to escape the wearisome monotony of home, Trevor was already established in town; nor could she doubt that his time and his services would once more be at her disposal.

Trevor was the fashion; and fashion was Sybil's idol. It might be, as she shudderingly murmured to herself, the last occasion upon which her influence would be sufficiently powerful over her husband to induce him to renew the career of extravagance in which she had involved him; and consequently she resolved to fill her cup of enjoyment even to overflowing.

She had already had painful experience that Mortimer was not likely to remain for ever the passive tool which he had hitherto shown himself in her hands. A single interview had sufficed to prove to her that her power was already on the wane; and therefore like a skilful general, she determined to use it to the very dregs, while she yet possessed the opportunity.

A single week sufficed to settle the Mortimers once more in London, and to collect about them all their former circle. Sybil's opera-box was such a convenience to her female friends, and Frederic's well-ordered dinners so potent an attraction to his male associates, that day succeeded day in one endless round of pleasure.

There was no leisure for thought; and even Mortimer himself was no sooner launched for the second time upon the sparkling tide of London life, than he entered upon it with a zest almost equal to that of his brilliant and selfish wife. The renewed solicitations which he was induced by her persuasions to make in every direction which offered a prospect of success to his diplomatic speculation, rapidly enlarged his circle of acquaintance, and either filled his house with new and equally expensive guests, or withdrew him from it to share in other gaieties equally imprudent.

Mortimer had fallen into the dangerous error of believing in the possibility of an after-retrenchment, which would enable a man who, instead of contenting himself with the income arising from a fine property, lives for a time upon the principal, to redeem his past imprudence. He suffered himself to forget, or at least to disregard the fact, that he was not merely decreasing the actual amount of his ancestral fortune, but also crippling its future proceeds; or if occasionally some such startling conviction would pertinaciously intrude itself, he made a compromise with his conscience by resolving that this should be the last occasion upon which he would be guilty of the folly.

It is so easy to delay until to-morrow what it is unpalatable to undertake to-day.

Nothing could have been more unfortunate than the rapidly increasing estrangement of Mortimer from his home; and it is probable that one expostulation from Sybil would have awakened him to the fact; but this expostulation was never uttered, and it is doubtful whether she would even have remarked his constantly-recurring absences, had it not been from the sense of relief which they afforded.

Despite all her pride, she was aware of a certain restraint in the presence of her husband for with all his constitutional weakness, Mortimer was upright in thought and word, and discouraged by the gravity of his demeanour, and even at times by objections still more decided, the witty and envenomed *persiflage* in which she so much delighted; and by which she revenged herself, as she believed, upon a world that had undervalued her. It was only with Trevor, and individuals of his stamp, that her brilliant sallies and piquant sarcasms were appreciated as she desired; and thus it was pleasant to see herself surrounded hour after hour in her splendid drawing-room by kindred and applauding spirits.

The relationship of Trevor—a farce which still continued to be enacted, to the secret amusement of many of his friends, who were quite conscious of its fallacy—while it authorized a degree of intimacy which encouraged him in his dishonorable views, tended in no

slight degree to lessen the feeling of respect which some among them might still have been induced to concede to herself; and as he rode with her in the park, sauntered with her amid the noble shades of Kensington-gardens, or quietly established himself for the evening in her opera-box; sundry significant smiles were exchanged by the initiated, which were as full of malice as of meaning.

Still no word or look had ever escaped Trevor tending to put his victim upon her guard. He had but limed the twig, and he calmly waited to see her entangled through her own free agency. It sufficed him to believe that the moment would come, and that perhaps at no distant period, and meanwhile, he was aware that he was an object of envy to half his acquaintance. The beauty of Sybil was so radiant and queenly in its character, her wit so sparkling, and her fashion so undeniable, that her intimacy was a privilege to be coveted. It mattered little that she had forfeited the esteem of the wise and the virtuous; in the pursuit of mere selfish gratification, men do not require to respect the women whom they admire, and thus, turn in whatever direction she might, the beautiful and courted Mrs. Mortimer met only smiles and plaudits, and that tacit encouragement which vanity can always invest with words, and second by its own impulsive force.

As time wore on, however, and Trevor felt more secure of his influence, he ventured to try the force of sarcasm. Sybil had already essayed its effect over the mind of her husband, but she believed that she was herself beyond its power.

Nothing renders a woman more blind than her vanity.

"How sure I was," said Sir Horace, on one occasion when they were *tête-à-tête*, an occurrence which had, moreover, long ceased to be singular—"that all the pretty pastorals with which you favored me when I visited The Grange, were mere words, very sentimental and picturesque if you will, but still mere words. If I mistake not, you then told me that you were about to marry a country gentleman, and prattled charmingly of his tenants, his local duties, and the delights of a life of rural responsibility and rural leisure. You wanted to persuade me that you were about to become a true Baucis to your rustic Philemon, and you looked daggers because I ventured to hazard a doubt. Now, perhaps, you will admit that my skepticism was not altogether unfounded. You have been a wife two years, or thereabouts, and I find you once more in town, as devoted to its pleasures as of old, and as able to increase them in your own person."

"The interests of my husband—" commenced Sybil, biting her lip.

"*Femme modèle!*" interposed Trevor with a smile, "but hear me out. I know well that your passion for the world was far from being extinguished; that you were playing a part—Nay, don't frown—unconsciously, perhaps, but still playing a part. And what then? I am acquainted with so many charming persons who are doing the same. Pretty women, who have a store of admirable maxims upon their lips, of which they consider it their duty to prove the fallacy upon the first opportunity which offers; that I am not at all likely to blame you. Only, I would have you understand that I was not duped, although too courteous to contend the point."

"So be it," said Mrs. Mortimer evidently annoyed; "You have no mission from Government, and need not volunteer yourself as the Captain Cook of your acquaintance."

"Why should you be angry?" asked her companion with perfect composure; "Surely one may look back for a year or two without giving offence, especially when, as in your case, the retrospect can afford nothing but pleasure. Do you imagine that I could see you—*you*, Sybil Delamere,—whom I had known, courted, followed, and extolled, by all that was brilliant in London society, coldly and wilfully settle down into the Lady Bountiful of a country town, and become the victim of a social suttee for the sake of—"

"Spare my husband, if you please," interposed Sybil, but it was almost with a smile.

"I will—'Hector requires a demi-god to combat,'" said Sir Horace with quiet insolence; "But to return to yourself. Did you really believe that with all your art you could impose upon me?—that you could induce me to suppose that you preferred a shady lane to an opera-box, a back-parlor to a ball-room, or—be it said with all respect—a sighing Strephon to a man of the world? Fie upon you, my fair cousin! For once you undertook a task beyond your strength. I no more believed you than—"

"You believe in our relationship."

"Oh, excuse me, I have the most perfect faith in all that brings me nearer to you."

"Pray do not exert yourself to be absurd. A recollection of what it was which necessitated the deception should suffice to keep you silent upon the subject."

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer's somewhat precocious jealousy? But surely you are not unjust enough to make me responsible for his weaknesses?"

"Enough, enough," said Sybil hastily. "Why do you not marry? That is the best step which you could take. You are now at the very apogee of your fashion, and are free to choose where you will."

"Thank you, I never felt inclined so to forget myself but once, and then——"

"Well, sir," said Sybil with a frown, as he paused.

"Why, then, the folly was cured, thanks to you. I felt that my love would not suffice to win the only woman to whom I would willingly have surrendered my liberty, and the abortive trial rendered me wiser."

"A poor excuse," said Mrs. Mortimer, resolutely overcoming her confusion; "You must find a better."

"Be it so. I remembered that conjugal love has no wings—that it is 'of the earth, earthy,'—a lingering, grovelling deity of habit, rather than of taste, only fit to surmount the moss-grown pedestal of a cabbage-garden."

"Civil, at least."

"True, if not civil. Come, confess, what can be more monotonous, or, if not monotonous, still worse—what can be more oppressive than such a yoke, padlocked by a priest, riveted by custom, logged by the law, wherein, however you may be separated in spirit, you are chained in fact. I would rather bind day and night together, the roses of June with the snows of January, the fiery falcon with the timid dove—any contrast, however monstrous, for none could be so revolting."

"When you amuse yourself by imagining so extreme a case, all argument is useless."

"Can you confute mine?"

"Perhaps, but I am not in the humor."

"And you are right; it is scarcely worth while to make the experiment when you are forewarned of the result."

"Do you know that you are becoming impertinent?"

"*Tant mieux*—that will put the finishing stroke to my reputation."

Sybil was silent. What would she not have given to have been free to resent the insolence under which she writhed? But she *dared* not.

And the rubicon once passed, these conversations were perpetually renewed; until Mrs. Mortimer, already more than half inclined to consider herself a victim, became superlatively convinced of the fact. What had she, as she asked herself, in common with the man to whom she had given her hand? and her vanity readily and promptly answered, "Nothing." Did she sigh for his society when he was absent, or await with impatience for his return? No! Did she require his counsels? Did she value his affections? Again and again, No! She stood married, as she had stood single, alone! And yet not quite alone; there was another thrall upon her, of which she did not as yet recognise the strength. She believed that she had never been more able to suffice to herself than at the very moment when her weakness was apparent to all around her.

How idly, how carelessly, how unreflectingly, do we all talk of the London season! Of those few months of mummery and madness which absorb the means, and frequently destroy the morals of after life,—Of that periodical vortex which too often swallows up prudence, propriety, and good fame; points the finger of scorn at some, and prompts the withering smile of idle and inactive pity at others. And yet those two little words contain a mighty significance, they involve a mighty total, in small things as well as large; they exert a strange, and it would almost appear, an insurmountable influence. The opportunities of evil, too eagerly rendered available; the small beginnings of error, which, like the grain of mustard-seed sown in a genial soil, are fated to bring forth a many-branched and far-spreading tree, destined to overshadow the soul, and beneath whose boughs the winged vices of society may nestle, and amid whose leaves the thorns of remorse may spring and germinate.—Do they not produce all these?

Let those answer who have reaped remorse, disappointment, and ruin, in the bitter harvest of imprudence and folly.

The embarrassed squire, whose stately dame has dreamed for years that the first season of her pretty daughters in town, if properly managed, must see them at its close, if not marchionesses, at least millionaires, and who has consequently managed to sink in four short months the savings of as many years—the innocent girl, whose pure heart is sullied by the touch of falsehood, and whose young affections have been made the spoil of heartlessness—the young wife, who panted to see more of the world before she gave up all the best feelings of her heart to home-happiness, and who returns to that home only to find it cold and dreary, after the unnatural excitement of an admiration and homage which she never should have known:—let these answer!

But what, it may be asked, has this to do with Mrs. Mortimer? She, at least, was no novice in these paths of danger, she brought no unsophistication to lay as a sacrifice upon the altar of the world. And it may be that she did not. But still, even to her, the London season was not without its perils. It absorbed her husband in his own vain and futile pursuits; it left her comparatively free; it gave her opportunities of evil which she might have avoided beneath that husband's ancestral roof. She learned to trust herself, because the very errors of her nature lent her a factitious strength; she learned to over-value her attractions, because the world stamped them with its showy counterfeit; in a word, she learned to look on life as a mere showy pageant, in which she was called upon to enact a part, and to put forth all her energies in order to render that part striking and brilliant.

Having arrived at this conclusion, she felt how little she was supported in the struggle by the husband whom she had chosen. In the retirement of the country, Mortimer had, to a certain degree, maintained some sort of influence over her mind; she despised, but nevertheless she feared him, weak as he might be; she was compelled to respect his principles, and to admit his moral worth; but in town he had rapidly degenerated into a mere frivolous man of fashion, and even that character he supported with an awkwardness which was by no means lost upon her. Conscious that he was laboring to effect a purpose, and that all his friendships and courtesies tended to the same end, there was no freedom or spontaneity even in his follies, and he was aware that it was so. Day after day he saw his exertions fail, and his hopes wane, and consequently the worm of disappointment was at the core of all his pleasures. When alone with his wife he was morose, and sometimes bitter; in society he was merely reckless and insignificant.

Here, therefore, the ambition of Sybil found no answering impulse, and thus she retired into herself to gather strength. And for what? She did not know—she never asked herself the question. She only felt that she was like the drowning mariner, who clutches at every passing wave, in the hope that it may bear towards him the life-sustaining plank by whose help he is to accomplish his preservation.

Mephistophiles never murmured a more shrewd whisper into the ear of the devoted Faust than

when he suggested the worthlessness of all that he possessed, and the value of that he had not attained.

CHAPTER LII.

Thus were things situated in town, when wearied by the perpetually-recurring dinners at which Mortimer collected all the idle and dissipated men of his set, who had amused themselves by vaunting their interests in the very quarters where he had been so long soliciting the constantly delayed appointment; Sybil, resolved not to be torn for ever from the world in which she delighted, without one brilliant memory, issued without consulting her husband upon the subject, cards for a ball, in which she determined, moreover, to excel herself.

It is true that her list of female associates was sufficiently limited, but as a stone flung into stagnant water not only creates its own circle, but also produces other radiations beyond, so she at once perceived that she might simultaneously amuse her own friends, and at the same time afford them the opportunity of obliging others. Many a brilliant ball-room is filled by the same device, aye, and crowded. Some attend, as they declare, merely to oblige the person by whom they are bidden; others because they cannot resist pleasure, offer itself in what shape it may, and others, again, because they are curious to examine an *intérieur* of which they have heard so much, and which they never intend again to invade. Moreover the male portion of the guests were unexceptionable. Men whom every body knew, or wished to know, men of rank, and wit, and fashion, well-looking, well-mannered, and well-bred.

An unlimited order to the most eminent upholsterer of the day, had sufficed to render the really beautiful mansion of Mrs. Mortimer a scene of light and splendor. Turkish tents opening upon miniature gardens, with marble basins flinging up their slender threads of water, which, on rising into the perfumed air, parted in a shower of silver dust, that fell like dew upon costly exoties, and drew out all their perfume; Moorish chambers, with their quaintly gilded ornaments and velvet ottomans; a vast conservatory filled with tall tropical plants, and only lighted at intervals by painted Chinese lanterns, which left all in a voluptuous twilight; a ball-room blazing with tapers of pale pink wax; and a staircase garlanded with flowers, and bright with festoons of parti-colored lamps; enormous mirrows, cabinets of buhl, japan, and ormolu; vases of alabaster, burning within their precious cavities the most subtle scents; all, in short, which luxury could invent, or wealth could purchase, was lavished for one brief evening with unsparing hand.

Probably no one of his guests was half so much impressed by the magnificence of the whole scene as was Mortimer himself. Sybil had skilfully availed herself of his temporary absence from town to accomplish all her plans without the opposition which she foresaw that they would otherwise have experienced, and thus it was not until he entered his own house, after a quiet dinner at his club—which his wife had forewarned him would be impracticable at home—that the extent of her vain imprudence became known to him.

It was, however, too late to expostulate, and, moreover, no where could he find Sybil. He hurried to her favorite boudoir with a cloud upon his brow, but after having with some difficulty found his way there, so thoroughly was the interior of the whole mansion metamorphosed, he only saw himself at the entrance of an Ottoman tent surrounded by a low divan covered with orange-colored satin, the floor overlaid by a gorgeous carpet, and the walls hung with white Persian. More and more disconcerted, he retraced his steps, resolved to shut himself into his own dressing-room until the arrival of the guests should compel him to emerge, but in such a hope he once more deceived himself. On arriving at the threshold he discovered that the door had been removed, and that the opening was now veiled only by curtains of silk gauze, falling one over the other, and all differing in tint.

Greatly annoyed on finding that even his own peculiar apartment had been invaded—although it need scarcely have been a matter of surprise to him had he reflected for an instant, that Sybil, who had suffered such an intrusion into her own, should have been equally unscrupulous as regarded her husband—he thrust the gossamer curtains somewhat roughly aside and entered, in order to satisfy himself to what extent his personal arrangements had suffered from the idle folly of the hour, and he was almost angry to find that, for a moment, his irritation yielded before his astonishment and admiration.

Never, assuredly, was there a prettier conceit. The idea had been Sybil's, and the fashionable artist to whom it had been imparted had worked it out to perfection. It looked like the airy realization of a poet's dream, when he has sunk into slumber with passion in his heart, and a song upon his lips. As the vapory hangings fell behind the intruder into this nook of fairyland, no vestige of the entrance could be detected. The whole room, from the centre of the ceiling, (where a winged goddess of burnished silver held in her clasped hands the extremities of all the floating draperies, which, forming one continued iris over the whole dome of the roof, were ultimately fastened down along its edge by a slender thread of the same glistening metal,) was covered with the transparent folds of the silken cobwebs, which trembled and heaved with every breath as they fell, tier over tier, to the floor, perfectly unconfined, while on the carpet of white velvet, richly painted with groups of scattered roses, stood a table of white marble, whose pedestal was a Cupid crowned with myrtle, trampling upon an hour-glass and a scythe, the whole artistically wrought in silver, as was also the lamp, wreathed with passion-flowers, which, with a few newly-gathered roses, and a couple of feather fans, shaped like wings, were arranged upon its snowy surface. Two chairs, covered with silver tissue, in the form of conch-shells, were

placed beside the table, and this was all. It was evident that no amusement was to be pursued in this unearthly-looking temple save that of conversation.

Mortimer stood for a few moments entranced. He had sufficient poetry in his heart to appreciate the calm, luxurious, dream-like scene before him, and as the etherial hangings trembled beneath his breath, he forgot for a few brief instants the cost at which they had been so skilfully arranged.

Soon, however, a darker reflection crossed his mind, and the recklessness of Sybil, as it forced itself upon his memory, recalled him to other and less agreeable sensations. All his warnings, it was now evident, had been unavailing; she was coolly preparing his ultimate ruin, in order to gratify her own weak vanity, and she had, moreover, condescended to take advantage of his absence from his home, to plunge into a vortex of extravagance which she was well aware that he must disapprove, and would have forbidden.

It was consequently with anything rather than a smile that the master of this palace of pleasure, which was still loud with busy voices and hurrying steps, once more emerged from what, despite its beauty, he considered as his desecrated dressing-room, and having with some difficulty succeeded in finding one of his own footmen, was conducted to a small apartment, opening from the servants' hall, which had been hastily prepared for him.

His valet was soon in attendance; every temporary arrangement had been judiciously made for his comfort; a cheerful fire blazed upon the hearth, and could he have divested himself of all thoughts of the future, he would soon have recovered his equanimity. But, alas! the most painful reflections are always the most intrusive also, and as he seated himself in his accustomed chair, and took up a book in order to conceal his chagrin while his man gave the last finishing stroke to his preparations, the words danced before his eyes, and he saw only visions of unpaid bills and enforced mortgages.

Sybil, meanwhile, was radiant with happiness and triumph. She had resolved not to meet her husband until she was protected from his reproaches by the presence of her guests, and thus she had the whole long, glorious night before her. "After which," she whispered to herself with a smile, as she turned from her looking-glass to examine more minutely than she had yet done the snowy dress which her maid had spread out in all its graceful amplitude upon the bed; "*Advienne que pourra;* the deed will be done, and I shall have shown the envious women who affect to scorn me that they have not indulged their prudery without a sacrifice!"

And for whom and what had the selfish and heartless woman, who thus exulted in her own improvidence, committed so disgraceful a folly? She scarcely knew herself. It is true that her intimates had glibly run over a long list of well-sounding names, and announced to her guests of no common station. But would this promise be fulfilled? Lady Clara was rich in French countesses, baronesses, and marchionesses; Mrs. Lamerly engaged herself for sundry German Gratinnen and Italian duchesses; Mrs. Babington was strong in Spanish donnas, and Iberian fidalgos, and, better than all, the diplomatist's widow had giddily pledged herself for a foreign ambassadress.

As regarded the male portion of her guests, Sybil had no anxiety. She knew her power. She had but to make a sign, and she was aware that she should be obeyed. Were her friends only faithful and zealous, therefore, her proudest ambition would be realised, but, nevertheless, there were moments in which a feeling of anxiety, for which she scorned herself, made her tremble in spite of all her self-possession.

How laughable would it be, were it not so degrading a jest, to analyse the real amount of gratification to be derived by the mistress of a stately mansion, on seeing her spacious saloons filled by a glittering crowd to whom she is utterly unknown, and on hearing, in her very presence, the insolent criticisms of those who have thronged her rooms to feast and to revel at her expense. The actual pleasure which she experiences on being presented to one of these high-born, and hitherto unknown guests, from the impertinent stare and scarcely perceptible bend with which her identity is recognised, or by the total indifference with which, when they are wearied of the pleasure that she has gratuitously afforded them, they depart one after the other, reminding their personal friends of their common engagements, making social arrangements among themselves, and finally sweeping down the illuminated staircase to their carriages, without even the courtesy of a parting salutation to their exhausted hostess.

And it was to secure so questionable a triumph, and so equivocal a gratification as this, that the proud Sybil had subjected herself to possible mortification, and her husband to inevitable embarrassment;—to parade her vanity for a few hours in all its panoply of luxury and recklessness, and to be the theme of gossip for a week. Yes, even so it was; this had been her empty and paltry day-dream from the very period of her marriage, and, despite her occasional misgivings, her heart beat high, and her cheek flushed with excitement.

Even little Eva was forgotten, and not once, during that busy day, did she even see her mother. But what then? Had not that mother been fully engaged in her domestic duties? Had she not unweariedly superintended every arrangement, and regulated every movement of the anxious and noisy crowd by which her house was invaded? Certain it is, that as the last lamp was lighted, the last workman dismissed, and she stood before her Psyche in a snowy dress of white crape, looped with clusters of the wild apple-bloom, and her high smooth brow cinctured by a garland of the same graceful blossoms, no feeling of compunction for any duty unfulfilled dimmed the lustre of her eyes, or blenched the glow upon her cheek.

It was fortunate for the poor child, whose loving heart was already susceptible of neglect, that Mortimer even amid his annoyance and anxiety, had been more considerate, and he could have chosen no better antidote to his ex-

aspérated feelings than the visit which he payed to the nursery before he commenced his toilette for the evening. Eva was asleep whee he entered, and tears were hanging upon her long eyelashes. As he bent over her, she looked like a cherub which had wept itself to rest over the follies of the world.

"Miss Eva has been crying for you and her mamma, Sir," said Mrs. Harris officiously, as she heard her master sigh on detecting the tell-tale tears; "I thought I should never have got her to sleep. However, she is fast enough now, and it will be all right when she wakes to-morrow."

"And did not Mrs. Mortimer see her this evening?" asked Frederic in an unsteady accent; "not see her for a moment before she was put to bed?"

"Laws, no, Sir, my mistress hasn't had a moment of time all day. Poor, dear lady, such a deal as she has had to look after! No wonder, Sir, that she couldn't come up stairs to Miss Eva, for she hasn't even had her drive."

"That is conclusive," said Mortimer with a bitter smile.

"In course, Sir," was the ready reply, "and I tried to explain this to the dear child, but she is too young yet to understand such things."

"Probably."

"And so poor dear, she would fret, but as I said before, Sir, she'll be all right to-morrow."

"I wonder," murmured Mortimer to himself, "whether the dreams of children of this tender age are troubled by the sorrows of the day."

"That they are, Sir, for sure," exclaimed the quick-eared nurse; "only to hear how Miss Eva has sighed in her sleep to-night, you would know it directly."

"Ha!" said the fond father with a start, "then she shall have no more such dreams. Eva! My darling! Will you awake, and bid good-night to papa?"

The little girl opened her large blue eyes, gazed for a moment around her, bewildered by the glare of the candles, then smiled, and extended her dimpled arms to her father. Mortimer caught her to his breast, but as he clasped her, a sudden revulsion of feeling came over the only half-awakened child, and she burst into a passionate fit of grief.

"Papa, dear papa," were the only articulate sounds which she uttered amid her sobs, but they were all that the heart of Sybil's husband coveted at that moment. His child loved him—clung to him—wept over his absence—joyed at his approach. Life was not yet a blank. He forgot his gilded saloons, his vanished hopes, his gnawing anxieties, and in five minutes he was deep in play with the now happy Eva upon his knee, smoothing down her glossy curls, and sunning himself in her large eager eyes.

An hour passed by, and as the child had betrayed no symptoms of weariness, Mortimer still lent himself to all her pretty caprices, and listened with delight to her clear joyous laughter. It might be a weakness thus to lose all memory of the pomp and pageantry which awaited him below stairs, but certain it is, that he had never bestowed a thought upon the matter, until a discreet signal at the door warned him of the presence of his valet, who respectfully suggested the necessity of his not further delaying the duties of his toilette. Eva pouted, but she no longer wept. When her father replaced her in her little bed, she obediently withdrew her clinging arms from his neck, and with a last low murmured "Dear papa!" and a long, long kiss, suffered him to leave her.

Ere long, carriage after carriage drove to the door, and deposited a bevy of pretty women and fashionable idlers in the illuminated hall. The rooms filled rapidly, and as Sybil stood near the entrance of the principal saloon, and received her guests with the high-bred self-possession for which she was remarkable, many a haughty eye rested upon her for an instant in wondering curiosity. For the moment she had disarmed criticism. The elegant simplicity of her dress, rendered the more conspicuous by the magnificence with which she was surrounded, astonished those who came to smile or to sneer at the *parvenue* who filled her rooms by the agency of her acquaintance, for it was evident at once that Mrs. Mortimer was no novice. There was even an affectation of indifference to the comments of all around her in the studied plainness of her attire, to which no single ornament of any description had been appended, and a consciousness in her whole deportment of the uselessness of such adjuncts to heighten her superlative beauty, which betrayed the perfect woman of the world, careless or disdainful of the empty sarcasms of the impertinent.

Surprise followed upon surprise. No incongruity was perceptible in the splendor of her princely saloons; no paltry expedients, no ignorant deficiencies could be detected; all was perfect, and a low murmur of admiration, reluctantly extorted, and therefore the better appreciated, ere long met her ear on all sides. Noble and sonorous names were declaimed in her ear; jewels flashed, and feathers waved before her eyes; that sweet and subtle perfume with which a crowd of fair and fashionable women always freight the atmosphere about them, mingled deliciously with the breathings of flowers and the stream of costly essences.—and still Sybil remained calm and unmoved; no heightened color flushed over her cheek, no triumphant light danced in her large dark eyes. She was only realising the vision of years, and not a pulse quickened as her smile greeted each new arrival.

At length her first duty was fulfilled; the strains of music were audible from the ball-room; the confusion had in some degree disentangled itself; there were groups of talkers, solitary gazers, smiling couples established upon sofas in confidential *tete-a-tete*; gray-headed nobles and overdressed matrons established at the card-tables; in short, the skein was unravelled, and Sybil had time and opportunity to think only of herself.

Some scores of her guests had no sooner made their bow to their hostess upon the threshold, than they had utterly forgotten "what manner of woman" she was, and among these were mothers, who had brought their young and beautiful daughters under a strange roof, simply be-

cause they knew that there they would meet once more with a timid or undecided admirer, and that as the season was drawing to its close, every opportunity of collision had consequently become tenfold more desirable: young wives, weary of home, and greedy of admiration, and fair girls whose hearts beat high and whose eyes sought the floor, at every name which was announced, while caring only to distinguish one.

To these, and such as these, the donor of the *fête* was a personage too unimportant to occupy their thoughts beyond a moment. They had deeper, or at least more personal interests, and thus, as Sybil glided through her costly rooms, she did not escape the penalty of her weakness.

"What improvidence!" said a portly old lady, beside whose chair she was compelled to pause for a moment, the pressure of the throng rendering it impossible for her to advance; "And I understand these people are nobodies! It is really a practical impertinence. What would they say to this in your *belle France, Madame la Baronne?*"

"*Ma foi, ma chère,*" replied a small, meagre, copper-colored figure beside her, as she inhaled a huge pinch of snuff from an enamelled and diamond studded-box; "It is only your own England of liberty which can show such anomalies as this. *Le cher Empereur* was *roturier* enough in one sense, but even then, in order to elbow *nous autres* so familiarly, it was needful to be a *célebrité* of some sort. *Noblesse de robe,* or *d' épée or artiste,* or something more than a mere *rentier; Ah bah!* the good old days are over."

With some difficulty Sybil at last passed on.

"But should I be presented to Mrs. Mortimer, mamma," said a lovely girl deprecatingly, as the hostess was once more stopped by the broad shoulders and jewelled turban of a voluminous dowager; "What am I to do!"

"Be civil, Honoria, of course, but no more. You did not come here to form an acquaintance with this person, but to meet Lord Alfred. Once for all I tell you, child, that there is some strange story about her, and that is enough. All that you have to do is to remember why I brought you here, and to make a better use of the opportunity than you have done of others which I have given you. Recollect that this is your second season."

Once more Sybil moved on.

"And Saviatti really told you this story, and vouched for it?" were the next articulate sounds which met her ear, as, partially concealed by the draperies of a window, she stood behind a group of young men. "Upon my conscience, the jest was a good one! And so Trevor was done?"

"Aye, thoroughly, but he only lost his money. What say you to the simple Damon who like a silly sheep as he was, stepped into the breach?"

There was a light, mocking chorus of laughter.

"Nevertheless, she is a monstrous fine woman," remarked one of the party.

"Glorious!" was the ready response, "Incomparable for a wife *a la Regence,* but——"

"Suffer me to pass, gentlemen," said Sybil haughtily, as she emerged from her concealment, and stood before them. "My duties as a hostess compel me to disturb your conversation."

A general but silent bow succeeded, and, as the group made way, Mrs. Mortimer passed through it with the air of an empress.

Her comparative solitude was, however, now over, and even although her spirit burnt within her at the insults to which she had been subjected, she was too thoroughly mistress of her emotion to suffer one trace of displeasure to become apparent.

And still the revel progressed, the lights shone brightly, the music swept like speaking odors through the vast apartments; fond vows, and many false as fond, were whispered in the dim conservatory; hundreds exchanged owners at the card tables; the luxurious supper-room was perpetually filled and emptied of its votaries, and daylight, at length, struggled to penetrate through the satin folds of the jealous curtains.

CHAPTER LIII.

Mortimer had staked and lost heavily. He dreamt for several hours that he had found a counter-influence to that of his wife, but he deceived himself; her eyes had never beguiled him more surely to his ruin than did the cards that night. Eager to forget, and equally eager to enjoy, he had readily fallen into a snare, and surrounded by a bevy of his friends—those friends who are ever ready to fool to the top of his bent *l'amphytrion où l'on dine*—he had, after a score of desperate plunges, become their prey.

In vain did his brow burn, and his eye flash. Upon whom could he revenge his defeat? Those about him were honorable men, a shade or two more skilful, perhaps, than himself, with the cards and the dice-box, but still honorable men, and above suspicion.

Eva was asleep in her little bed above stairs—asleep, with a happy smile upon her lips. Occasionally, as a louder strain than usual burst from the orchestra, and came sighing along the stair-cases and passages, even to the remote nursery whose door had been flung back by the undernurse during the absence of Mrs. Harris, (who had abandoned her charge in order to secure her share in the dissipation of the housekeeper's room,) and stole, like a wandering spirit, to the snow-curtained couch of the slumbering cherub, she stretched forth her dimpled arms in a pleasant dream, and murmuring: "Papa, dear papa," again sank to rest.

Sybil had left the ball-room on the arm of Sir Horace Trevor, and was listening with delight to the enthusiastic encomiums which he lavished upon her taste, and the perfect harmony of all her arrangements. It soothed her to hear that, by one at least of her guests she was appreciated, but the one spot of flame still burned and festered upon her spirit. No, she had not revenged herself upon a world that she despised. Even beneath her own stately roof, among the flowers that she had wreathed, the luxury that she had created, the harmony that she had in-

voked, she knew that the world which she had resolved to subjugate paid her back scorn for scorn, but this conviction had not humbled her, it had only made her desperate.

"Wealth is a wizard," she answered, with a contemptuous smile, to one of his remarks. "The wife of a soap-boiler could have done all this, aye, and more, had her resources served her; but come this way, and I believe that I can show you something which no mere gold could have created," and, as she spoke, she led him towards the gauze-screened cabinet which has been already described.

"Just as I could have wished," she said, rather speaking to herself than addressing her companion. "The giddy fools have not hitherto discovered this retreat, and yet it is the pearl of the huge oyster which I have opened for their amusement. What say you to this fairy-nook, Sir Horace?"

"What can I say?" murmured Trevor after a momentary pause, during which his quick eye had glanced from floor to ceiling. "What can I say?" he repeated as they advanced towards the table, followed in their progress by a moving vapor of gauze, which floated above and about them, as the tinted clouds undulate beneath the beams of the setting sun, "save that the shrine is worthy of the goddess?"

Sybil smiled as she took possession of one of the vacant chairs, while Trevor established himself in the other, after having drawn it to her side.

"Nothing can be more poetical, more dream-like," he pursued, lifting one of the light fans from the table. "Why should it be but the mere vision of a night, to be subjected to-morrow to the rude hands of hirelings, and desecrated by vulgar intrusion?"

"Learn like me," said his companion, "to live in the present, to leave the future to its own developments. Do you know, Trevor, that the consciousness that *you* would appreciate this graceful phantasy sufficed to me, and I cared little though it should be overlooked, as you see it has been, by the soulless beings who have passed it by to bask in light, and to bewilder themselves by noise."

As she ceased speaking, Sybil turned with one of her most radiant looks towards her listener. She anticipated some acknowledgment, but for a moment he made no reply; his eyes were riveted upon the pretty plaything, composed of marabouts, and dusted with silver, which he was twirling in his hand.

The silence was only temporary, however, and it was abruptly broken.

"Sybil," murmured the baronet, without changing his position, or abstaining from his inconsequent occupation, "I had no idea that Mortimer had either taste or nerve for high play."

"And has he?" asked the worldly wife in an accent of the most supreme indifference.

"His prowess of to-night would seem to imply as much. When I left the card-room he was a heavy loser."

"He should not have ventured beyond his depth," was the quiet retort, and the words once uttered, Sybil began, in her turn, to amuse herself by collecting and clustering the scattered roses which were strewn over the table.

Trevor glanced at her as she leaned forward, and never had he thought her so beautiful. The opaque white of her dress contrasted in a striking manner with the glistering silver of the chair on which she sat. A slight languor, the result alike of physical fatigue and concealed mortification, hung upon her eyelids, and softened the whole expression of her face. Her very movements were subdued. The moment, as he felt, was propitious.

"Mortimer was rash, at such a time, and in such company, to tempt fortune," he continued, as he drew one of the roses from her hand, and after pressing it to his lips, placed it in his bosom; "but some men are fated to commence every undertaking with the left hand. If you do not exert your influence, he will soon undermine his fortune."

"What if no such influence existed!"

"*Conte des Fées*—Impossible!"

Sybil playfully shook her head.

"Is not the man human?"

"Very—I must not suffer you to wrong him, even by a doubt. Does he not live? breathe? move? frequent his clubs? and pay his tradesmen's bills?"

"But should the ruin come, Sybil?"

"Once more, I say, leave the future to its own resources. Where do you spend the summer?"

"In Italy, or——at Westrum."

"Oh, not at Westrum," exclaimed Mrs. Mortimer, startled out of her habitual composure; "we are to have *maison close* during the next nine months."

"Then, decidedly, it must be Italy."

"And who are your party?"

"I am weary of joint-stock tours, where the sum-total is composed of insignificant units. I covet a single companion, and will admit no more."

"Be wary, then," said Sybil, almost with a sigh; "you do not know the misery of an ill chosen and enforced companionship with one solitary individual."

"I can imagine it."

"No doubt," was the rejoinder, as the eyes of Trevor flashed with a sudden light; "but imagination is not experience."

"I shall not tempt that experience. I shall act upon sure grounds."

"We are all wise in our own conceit.'

"I know it, but the wisdom rarely extends itself beyond that conceit. I will be wiser."

"But why leave England, where you have so many resources?"

"Because I am sick of the folly and selfishness of all about me. I have lived for pleasure long enough, and will henceforward live only for happiness."

"Then, after all your disclaimers, you are really going to marry?"

"You are epigrammatic, Mrs. Mortimer."

"But is it not so?"

"And what if it were?"

"You will make a bad husband, Trevor."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And why?"

"Because you detest coercion, and were you mated with an angel, you would quarrel with her wings because she had allowed you to clip them."

"Well, perhaps you are right," conceded Sir Horace, fixing his eyes steadily upon her face; "perhaps I might despise her, when I remembered that she had weakly resigned the beautiful and glorious prerogative of freedom, and meanly chained herself to the steps of the altar on which she should have towered as the idol; that she had, for a mere puerile clinging to the convictions of a society which possessed no right—and perhaps as little inclination—to dictate her actions, tamely scattered upon the earth the leaves of the roses with which she should have crowned herself."

"You justify yourself like a libertine."

"The word is sufficiently comprehensive, at all events."

"Is it not applicable? What can I understand, but that you contemplate the companionship of a mistress?"

"You take strange liberties with our barbarous vernacular to-night, fair Sybil. However, in one sense, I admit the term, unpoetical as it is. Yes, the partner of my wanderings beneath the blue skies and flowery bowers of Italy, and wheresoever else her good pleasure may direct my footsteps, even though it should be beyond the cataracts of the Nile, or to the sandy deserts of mysterious Africa, shall, indeed, be the very mistress of my soul—the supreme sovereign of my destiny. I will have no will, no wish, no existence, save in her."

"Beware of such utter self-abnegation; she may deceive you."

"I have no such fear: I am fore-armed."

"By what occult power?"

"By my love—my claim—my—I will echo your own words—my perfect self-abnegation. I could have no better safeguard."

"You are a happy man, even in your voluntary delusion."

"Pardon me, I am not deluded—or—should it, indeed, be so, Sybil—"

Mrs. Mortimer started, and her cheek burned. She turned away; she would have spoken, but she could not control her voice.

"Listen to me, Sybil," said Sir Horace gaining courage from her visible confusion, and, as he spoke, he grasped her hand, and retained it despite her struggle to free herself from the clasp; "you are not happy. Remember you are not the acquaintance of yesterday, and that our hearts spoke audibly years ago. I love you—I know all the paltry and pitiful restraints of your present position. To-night, you are the queen of a brilliant circle—the admired and the envied mistress of a fairy palace, but the night, wiredraw it as you may, can only last some three hours longer, and then comes to-morrow—to-morrow with an irritated and reproachful husband, who, forgetting his own imprudence at the gaming-table, will visit upon you the results of an improvidence to which his fortune is by no means adequate. Look at the floating of the light draperies which are heaving about you as your struggle to escape my hold; to-morrow the hammer of the workman, a few nails withdrawn, and a few sturdy blows, will reduce all their gracefulness into a heap of rags. You will be once more alone with an angry and resentful husband, in a noisy and ungenial home, and after that—for more remains behind, Sybil—after that you have a long and dreary perspective before you, to which you cannot, you *shall* not tamely yield. Westrum, with, as you have already confessed, closed doors, a dreaming mother, and a sulking husband! And is this to be the end of all, Sybil? Was it to fulfil such a destiny as this that nature made you a mark for admiration and worship? That you were gifted with talents that dazzle, with a wit that fascinates, and with a mind which can appreciate and sympathise with all that is grand and beautiful?"

"Enough, Sir Horace, enough."

"Yet must you hear more," relentlessly pursued her tempter, "for I have resolved to convince your reason. For what, and why, do you willingly and wilfully bow your proud neck to such a yoke? To gratify the prejudices of an exacting and misjudging world which you would elevate into a censor? Nature, nature has been your benefactress; it is her, and her alone, to whom you owe allegiance; the world has to you been only a stepdame, or you would not be to-day the wife of Mortimer—of a man who cannot comprehend you, but who wears you as the ignorant *parvenue* wears her diamond necklace—not with an appreciation of its real brilliancy, but with a vulgar consciousness that it is an object of envy. What have the refined and town-bred Sybil Delamere and the country squire, whose soul is in his acres—what have they, I ask, what *can* they have, in common? As yet you have blinded yourself to this truth, for as yet you have not been utterly flung upon his insignificance for companionship and sympathy; he has left the reins loose, and the bit has not galled you, but you are already warned that the scene and the system are both about to change."

"Sir Horace, I will hear no more."

"Only one last appeal—Sybil, divine Sybil! Be at last just to yourself. You once loved me, and there are yet moments in which I fancy that I can detect some evidence that you love me still. I offer to you the devotion of a life, the resources of an ample fortune; an existence of splendor and indulgence; the undying fervor of a passion which you alone have been able to awaken—Sybil, do I indeed plead in vain?"

Mrs. Mortimer strove to rise, but her companion was already kneeling beside her, and his grasp was strong upon her dress.

"Are you not aware, Sir?" she asked, with flashing eyes, "that you are urging me to dishonor?"

"Sybil," murmured Sir Horace; "your ear is quick, and your eye keen; has not the revel of to-night, held in your own saloons, provided by your own gold, created by your own taste, taught you to despise so poor a chimera? There are noble dames yonder, rustling their satins, waving their plumes, and parading their magnificent nothingness—but is one of them at your side? Has one of them claimed com

anionship with you? Have you met respect, r even consideration from one of the haughty yes which have fastened admiringly upon the audy toys that you have scattered in their ath? Are you not aware that among the dittering mob which you have collected about ou there are friends of Saviatti, and that aviatti is——"

"A fiend! a demon!" fiercely exclaimed ybil.

"You help my argument," was the rapid ejoinder; "and as such the less scrupulous. ou have the effects of his idle indiscretion efore you. And, mark me, Sybil—Mortimer, eak as he may be on other points, is sensitive nd jealous of his honor! A husband—the act is proverbial—may be, and generally is, he last to hear that by which he is the most losely affected, but, trust me, he is eventually nlightened. Do you comprehend your position ow, my adored Sybil? And do you believe hat, loving you as I do, I can coldly abandon you to such a fate?"

"Trevor," whispered Mrs. Mortimer hoarsely, as her head sank upon her bosom, "you are unmerciful!"

Sir Horace still knelt before her, and was about to soothe the wounded dignity which he had so relentlessly excited, when the vapoury curtain was thrust aside, and the baby face of Mrs. Lamerly protruded like some frightful vision through the opening. A slight shriek escaped her lips, as she suffered the light folds of the gauze to float back into their places, and then succeeded a ringing laugh, as her lisping voice was heard exclaiming imperiously —"No, no, you shall not move a step further! It is the prettiest place you ever saw in your life; all white and silver, like a moon among the clouds, but you shall not see it. We should all be *de trop;* for Mrs. Mortimer is there with Sir Horace Trevor, and I think they are rehearsing a tragedy, or a comedy, or something of that sort, for he is on his knees, and she looks—but, upon my honor, I scarcely know how she looks!—it would have been so indiscreet to intrude longer."

Then followed a deep silence, broken only by the sound of retreating footsteps, and the agonized ear of Sybil detected that they were those of several individuals. The thickly-piled carpets soon muffled that light sound, and then all was still as the grave.

"Sir Horace Trevor," said Mrs. Mortimer, as she arose from her seat, ghastly pale, and with a quivering lip; "You have bought me at a fearful price! Leave me now. We shall meet again."

"To-morrow, Sybil?"

She coldly bent her head in token of acquiescence.

"Farewell, then, till to-morrow." He hastily raised her cold fingers to his lips, drew back the curtains of the door, and disappeared.

A wild and acrid smile convulsed the features of Sybil for an instant, and she clasped her forehead in her spread hands, as if to deaden the throbbing of her burning temples. One word, and one only, escaped her as she stood there—the word "Eva!" and she pronounced it with a shudder which shook her whole frame, and a gasp that seemed to threaten her for an instant with suffocation.

It was the last whisper of her guardian angel ere it took flight for ever, and she had echoed it involuntarily.

But even amid her anguish the proud spirit of Mrs. Mortimer scorned to bend, and after a severe struggle she succeeded in subduing every vestige of emotion, and with a steady step and a proud eye returned to her guests. She saw Mrs. Lamerly surrounded by a group of curious listeners, who were all too earnest in their attention to detect her approach, and towards them she firmly made her way.

"Why are you not dancing, Amabel?" she inquired with perfect composure, as she reached her side.

The diplomatist's widow started, flushed, and stammered out with some difficulty; "I am fatigued, Mrs. Mortimer."

"Mrs. Mortimer!" echoed Sybil, raising her eyebrows in affected and playful surprise; "Why Amabel, you are ceremonious to-night. Remember that you are in a simple English drawing-room, and not in the court circle of your dear, friend, the Margrave."

"I do not understand—" faltered the widow.

"What I understand, *ma chère*," broke in a little German Gräfine, who had been one of her listeners; "is, that you have betrayed me, and you know the proverb, '*Wie gesäet, so geschnitten.*' I shall not expect you to-morrow evening Good night." And, with a haughty and indignant bow, the ruffled beauty swept from the room.

"As she pleases," said Mrs. Lamerly, with a pout, "but I could quote, if I pleased, the old saying about glass windows and throwing stones. However, my turn will come."

Sybil turned away with a haughty mien, but her very soul was sick within her. She had heard and understood all. There were other demons in the world besides Saviatti, and how she began to hate and scorn that world! Trevor was right, and she would trample it even to the dust.

Her rooms emptied rapidly. The lights were beginning to fail, the musicians were putting up their instruments; group after group passed her by, on their way out without one token of observance or recognition. At length the very link-boys dispersed—the revel was over, and Sybil was left amid the relics of her brief splendor utterly alone—alone with her hopes, her fears, her stifled passion, and her corroding thoughts.

CHAPTER LIV.

The morrow came, and with it all the discomforts usual under such circumstances. Sybil had paced her room until wearied nature in its turn overcame mental disquietude, and throughout her vigil the perpetual coming and going of the servants, who had abandoned all idea of seeking their beds at so undue an hour, and under such an accumulation of duties, had fallen

upon her ear utterly unheeded. What were to her the sounds of the external world, when there echoed amid the depths of her spirit the hoarse and sullen reverberation of a more personal and absorbing agitation? She had not seen Mortimer since the departure of her guests; the avoidance had been mutual, for both had within themselves a consciousness of error to be concealed, and of weakness to be expiated.

Frederic had retired to his room, angered, repentant, and reflective; Sybil had sought hers fevered, undecided, but nevertheless desperate. The husband, boldly looking into the future, although with a sick heart and a stricken spirit, had passed his time in hasty and imperfect calculations, and those vague, but passionate resolutions of future prudence, which, like snowflakes in the moonlight, show so substantial and so brilliant, but which require only one touch of heat to annihilate them altogether; the wife had sought solitude to brood over the past, to deprecate the present, and to defy the future. She was aware that previous improvidence, first counselled, and ultimately encouraged and augmented by herself, had stricken deeply at the root of her husband's prosperity. It was true that the extravagance of a couple of seasons could not ruin Mortimer, but she was aware that it had sufficed to embarrass his movements and to cripple his resources. Sybil had always loathed and despised all monetary considerations, and she felt that she could never brook his justifiable, but nevertheless wearisome, reproaches upon such a subject. If she had sought to become his wife, it had been from no blind attachment to himself, but in order to regain, through his means, the social station which she had forfeited by her own levity, and to share with him the affluence without which she considered life to be but a mere mean and paltry game, to be played out to the end only by mean and paltry spirits.

And all this purpose had failed; she was still a mark for the insolent comments of the proud and the scornful. The memories of the past, like the stones cast behind them by the twin heroes of the mythology, sprang to life, armed, and ready to do battle, but it was against herself. The gold which she had lavished to purchase at least a temporary triumph, had melted as she scattered it around her, and scorched the hand that poured it forth.

And what remained?

Sybil had dismissed her attendant. It seemed to her as though every eye could read her secret, and as her thoughts fastened upon her last interview with Trevor, she thrust back the dark braids from her forehead, for even their light and accustomed pressure appeared to weigh her down, and then, rising from her chair, flung open one of the windows in order to breathe more freely.

There is always something awful in the return of a new day; in the doubtful light which creeps almost reluctantly across the sky, as though it feared to hasten on a mission which condemned it to look for so many hours upon scenes of error and of crime. To the virtuous and the pure there is a sublimity in its stealthy progress, but to the erring and the guilty its charm is lost; to them there is a sad reproa in its silent advent, and it is the hour of others the most difficult to fill with purely s fish thought. Even Sybil, as she bared l brow to the chill wind that heaved the curta behind which she stood, and looked out up the desolate garden of the square, where t night-dews still hung upon the branches of t stunted shrubs, and the dense vapors wc rolling off in folds of dull yellow and mur brown, was not altogether unaffected by its fluence.

Where were now the light and the revelry which her soul delighted? Where were nc the glance of admiration and the words of pi sion which to her was as the day-spring of h existence? She stood upon the dull and myst rious tomb of the past; upon the vague a shapeless threshold of the future, and both we alike, "without form and void." She heard on the low moaning of the cheerless wind; s saw only the gloomy awakening of a new da disturbed by the occasional footstep of one those rude sons or daughters of toil who nev calculate time save as a mean of gain, or of tho still more enslaved victims of vice, who fe that their task is ended when that of virtuo poverty begins.

Sybil closed the window abruptly, and thre herself upon the bed. Body and mind we both exhausted, and at length she sank sleep.

Did she dream of the husband who, much he was injured, still confided in her truth? the child to whom her own good name wou be the best and the meetest heritage? Of tl man who, wronged, deceived, and almost fo gotten, once more pursued her with words passion and of promise? No, she dreamt none of these things. Her heavy head presse the pillow like a thing of stone. Her slee was as the sleep of death; the condemned felo whose rest is to be broken on the morrow b the gibbet and the rope, sleeps this deep a mysterious slumber; the waveworn mariner the raft, the only link between him and eter ty; the soldier in his bivouac on the eve battle,—all, in short, whose nerves have bee braced to the uttermost for hours, and who su denly find themselves alone and unsupported b the pride which has sustained them beneath th gaze of their fellow men, have experienced th same deep, and dreamless, and death-like slee save, perhaps, the coward, whose fears for th morrow keep him waking, but Sybil was r coward. She had suffered, and she slept.

It was long past mid-day when her mai ventured to enter her apartment, and her re was so deep, despite her undrawn curtains, an the disorder in which she had flung herself upc her bed, that for a few seconds the woma looked upon her almost in terror. Her lon hair fell like a shower of jet over her face an shoulders, her hands were tightly clasped t gether, and there was an expression of su pressed but terrible agony upon her countenanc that mere physical fatigue could not have in pressed there.

No wonder, therefore, that forgetful of th reprimand which her unbidden officiousnes

night draw down upon her, the terrified Abigail ventured to awake her.

"Ha! is it morning so soon?" murmured out Sybil, who had started from her sleep at the first whisper.

"I beg your pardon, Ma'am," was the respectful reply, "but it is now nearly two o'clock. My master has been out for the last three hours, and desired me to say that he should not return home until the evening. Miss Eva has had her walk, and Mrs. Harris wishes to know if you will see her before dinner-time."

"No, no," said Sybil hoarsely and hurriedly; "I am too much fatigued. There—look!—upon the dressing-table you will find a locket, hung to a small gold chain. You know the one I mean—with my hair in it, at the back of her father's portrait. Tell Mrs. Harris to give it to her with my love, and to let her wear it till I see her again. Is there anything new? letters, or——"

"No, ma'am, only Sir Horace Trevor has been here, but when he found that my master was out, and that you were not up, he left word that he would call again at two o'clock, as he wished to see you, Ma'am, on some particular business, and so I made free to come into your room."

"You did right, Symonds, perfectly right," said Sybil with a slight shudder, as she partially raised herself, and, sweeping back her dishevelled hair, leaned her head upon her hand. "And now come here, Symonds, here, close to my pillow. Can I trust you?"

"Try me, Ma'am," said the woman stolidly.

"You must have seen that I am not happy," commenced Sybil, fixing her eyes steadily upon her attendant.

The Abigail shrugged her shoulders.

"You were with me when I married?"

There was a sign of assent.

"I did wrong," pursued the once haughty mistress after a short pause; "I mistook Mr. Mortimer, and it is probable that he misunderstood me. Things cannot go on thus, Symonds."

"Of course not, Ma'am."

"It is possible that I may travel before long. Are you willing to accompany me?"

"Do you take Miss Eva, Ma'am? I can't undertake to travel with children; it's out of my line."

The mother for a moment conquered the woman of the world, and Mrs. Mortimer turned aside to avoid the fixed gaze of her hired menial, but in spirit she had passed the rubicon, and she rallied on the instant.

"No," said she, with some effort; "I go alone."

"Alone, Ma'am?"

"That is, neither your master nor Miss Eva will accompany me."

"I see, Ma'am," was the reply, uttered with one of those intelligently-confidential smiles which are the first-fruits of error, to a proud spirit.

"I am quite at your service, and ready to go wherever you please. But you are forgetting the time, Ma'am. If Sir Horace Trevor should be here before you are dressed, is he to wait, or to come again?"

"Let him wait," said Sybil, with the superb expression of disdain by which the haughty lip so frequently conceals the secret of the quailing heart. "He is probably not in haste."

The Abigail pursed up her mouth. Had her mistress given her a printed book to read, knowing that mistress as she did, she could not have guessed the truth more thoroughly.

"Sir Horace was quite put out, Ma'am, when he found that you were not up," she ventured to remark, as she placed the velvet slippers beside the bed.

"Indeed!" said Sybil, with affected indifference.

"And then, Ma'am, he inquired for my master, and I told him that he was gone out for the day."

"You told him so?"

"Yes, ma'am, did I do wrong?"

"Oh, no, no! it is a matter of no consequence. By the bye, Symonds, you will not mention to any one that I think of leaving England."

"Of course not, Ma'am, if you wish it."

"I do, Symonds, and I believe that I can trust you. Is my bath ready?"

The first scene in the drama of guilt was played out, and Sybil felt that she was in the power of her own salaried dependent.

Sir Horace Trevor was once more beneath her roof long before Sybil left her room. He knew the spirit with which he had to deal, and he felt that the ball of the preceding evening had served him well. Her pride had been galled, and sufficient time had not yet elapsed for her to recover from the mortification she had experienced. To profit by a vulgar but expressive phrase, the iron was still hot, and he was too good a tactitian to suffer it to cool. Rejected by the world, and estranged from her husband, he offered her a refuge from daily increasing annoyance, and although he had long ceased to be jealous of her affection, and learnt its fallacy where it interfered with her own interests, he was still thralled by her beauty, and subjugated by her wit.

Too indolent to make amusement for himself, Sybil was precisely the woman calculated to supply the occasional void produced by satiety. His taste would do him honor in the eyes of his associates, and moreover, perhaps, he also had something to revenge. Her treachery had been the one crushed roseleaf on the couch of the fashionable Sybarite, and it was with a sensation of triumphant complacency that he reflected how soon her own hand would be employed to smooth it.

For her improvidence he cared nothing. His means were ample, and he could, moreover, disengage himself at any moment from a tie which must sit loosely from the first. A man does not take his mistress as he takes his wife; there are no life-long responsibilities to make him pause; a fancy prompts the imperfect union, and a caprice may equally annul it.

True, this is a feature in the arrangement to which he allows no prominence in the first season of vanity and adulation, but still the fact exists, and it is for the erring woman who is about to barter her honor and her fair fame against the temporary indulgence of her head

strong passions, and the mortifications of probable abandonment, to remember it in the hour of temptation.

The tiger gives no warning before he springs; it is for the traveller to be wary. The serpent utters no threatening before it springs; the intended victim must defend himself against the venomed tongue, and thus, in like manner, the woman who sees only the gorgeous skin or the gleaming scales of vice, and wilfully closes her eyes against the poison to which they lend a mocking and a worthless charm, finds little pity, and excites no sympathy. The man of pleasure uses his natural weapons as the beasts of the forests use theirs, with as much carelessness of consequences, and generally with as little compunction. Selfishness is the foundation of every vice, and where the seducer has all to gain, and his victim all to lose, it is scarcely to be anticipated that he will forego his own purpose in order to shield her from evil.

The antecedents of Sybil were perhaps also calculated to render Sir Horace Trevor even less disposed to shrink from the treachery which he meditated towards a man whom he had called his friend, and a woman whom he had, once at least, sincerely and honorably loved. He knew her reputation to be sullied, and her nature to be essentially egotistical, but she yet remained beneath the roof of her husband, and, weak and faulty as she had undoubtedly shown herself to be, the one great crime against society, the one reckless contempt of its opinion which finds no indulgence even with the most charitable, until it has been bitterly repented, was still uncommitted. She had yet a place among the matrons of her country—yet a chance of redeeming herself in the eyes of the world, and in her own. And he was about to overthrow this last bulwark, and to render her henceforward dependent upon him alone.

Thus, even under all circumstances, he might well have paused. But wherefore? These were considerations for Sybil, not for himself. These were the self-evident consequences of the step which she meditated, and she could require no prompter to point with officious warning to the fact. Moreover, this was the price which she must be content to pay for luxury, liberty and love—for her escape from a cheerless home, an estranged husband, and the trammels of encumbered mediocrity.

What wonder, then, that the worldly baronet stood fully acquitted in his own eyes?

It were idle to dwell upon the scene which ensued when they met. Sybil, with all her meaner passions in arms, smarting under a sense of what she considered as her wrongs, scared by the consciousness of her husband's well-grounded displeasure, devoted to self-indulgence, and shrinking from a future of monotony and privation, did not, and would not, pause to remember that she had not even the excuse of passion to offer for the baseness of which she was about to become guilty; that her attachment to Trevor was merely the impulse of gratified vanity, in which the softer and more womanly delusions of the heart had no share, and that she saw in his proffered love only the prospect which it held out of affluence, and gratified vanity, and that freedom from constraint to which she had so long been accustomed, that it appeared to her to be as indispensable to her existence as the very air she breathed. Trevor, full of that impassioned egotism which lends eloquence even to a bad cause, believing himself, moreover, enamored of the first love of his manhood, and mistaking the sullen murmurs of former mortification for the whispers of re-awakened affection.

How could such an interview end save in error? And so indeed it ended. Sybil forgot even her child in the intoxicating dreams of a future, over which she was to be the sole and unquestioned mistress; she forgot the husband who had given himself to her without a doubt or a misgiving, despite the warning voice which would have held him back; she forgot the mother, now hovering between life and death, whose whole existence had been one unmurmuring vassalage to her single will. She thought only of herself; she saw a new votary at her feet, a new jewel cast upon her path which the world had so lately strewn with thorns and brambles, and thus she listened, believed and yielded.

In such a case the preliminaries of the meditated flight were rapidly and readily arranged, and Trevor had no sooner left the house, than the twice-perjured wife ascended to her own room, and summoning her maid, busied herself, with a calmness which in a holier cause would have amounted to heroism, in making such arrangements as she deemed necessary. Ere sun set all was accomplished; her carriage at the door; the imperial freighted with her jewels, and a few indispensable articles of apparel, and then, and then only, while she drew on her gloves to depart, it might be that a thought of her suffering mother obtruded itself, as she suddenly desired Symonds to ascertain if any letter had arrived for her by the late post. The active and watchful Abigail was already prepared to answer. There were half a dozen awaiting the return of her master, but none addressed to her lady, and Sybil asked no more.

Perhaps, even in that last, that supreme moment of her destiny, had she paused as she passed through the hall to glance at the superscription of the letters so heedlessly flung down, she might yet have paused—yet have been saved. But, no! She had ceased to remember that she was a mother; how, then, could she have lingered to remember that she was a daughter!

Mistress Symonds, with a ready wit which equalled her cupidity, had found an easy pretext for the unaccustomed appendage which was to be affixed to the carriage, and nothing occurred to delay the departure of Sybil from that home which she was never again to enter. Assuredly, the path of vice is ever a smooth one, and if something like a pang shot to her heart as she passed the threshold, and if she cast one backward glance to the windows of the nursery in which her only child was at that moment either slumbering or sporting, unconscious that it would soon be worse than motherless, her step never faltered, her will never failed.

The place of rendezvous had been arranged, and on her arrival Mrs. Mortimer alighted; the

mperial was detached, and conveyed into the ouse; a trivial message delivered to the ser- ants, and the carriage dismissed. All this was ery commonplace in seeming, but not so in fact. A gulf, never again to be over-passed, had open- d between Sybil and her home—between the wife, the mother, and the woman, and those acred duties which, once violated, cannot be ighteously resumed.

With a mortal cowardice, in perfect keeping vith his character, Mortimer had delayed to the ast moment his return to a disorganized house, nd the exertion of an authority which he was onscious must be at once assumed, if he would till preserve himself from ruin, and it was con- sequently, late in the night when he once more ound himself under his own roof. The hateful ask of recrimination and reproach was thus de- ayed until the morrow, and as he ascended to his dressing-room, already restored by the acti- vity of his valet to a tenantable state, he con- gratulated himself upon an arrangement by which he had secured some additional hours of tranquillity.

His only inquiry was for his child, and satis- fied that she was well, and sleeping the sweet sleep of innocence and peace, he drew on his dressing gown, and seated himself at his writ- ing-table, resolved to bestow a few hours to the careful inspection of his steward's accounts be- fore he retired for the night. Upon the desk, however, lay the letters which had been men- tioned to Sybil, and he opened them mechanic- ally. The first which came to hand was brief, but a shadow darkened over his brow as he read it; scarcely did it comprise half-a-dozen lines, yet he pondered over them for seconds, and then, by a sudden impulse, he crushed the paper in his hand, and flung it impetuously into the fire which was burning in the grate. His correspondent had simply and courteously ac- knowledged a check for 900*l.*, lost by himself at the gaming-table on the previous evening. The next was longer; the writing more round, stu- died, and methodical, and treated of a debt not yet discharged, in less courtly terms. The third was a civil refusal to exert the interest which he had stooped to solicit in furtherance of his favorite project, by one of his most intimate as- sociates and most frequent guests, and a bitter smile convulsed his lip as he laid it down. There was, still, however, a fourth, and without even glancing at the superscription, he tore it open. In an instant he had mastered its con- tents, and starting from his seat, he rang the bell violently.

In another moment the summons was obeyed.

"Howton," he said, in considerable agitation; "I have received a letter from Westrum; Mrs. Delamere is dying, and not a moment must be lost if we can again see her alive. Send one of the men to order post-horses, throw together some linen, and whatever you may consider necessary, and let the carriage be at the door by the time your mistress is ready to start. Meanwhile I will go and prepare her. We must be on the road within an hour."

"I fear, Sir, that it will be impossible."

"And why so? Nothing should be impossi- ble at such a moment."

"My lady is from home, Sir."

"From home?—where?—when did she go?"

"She left at about six o'clock, Sir, accom- panied by Mrs. Symonds, and dismissed the car- riage after alighting at her milliner's."

"And what orders did she give?"

"Merely that the carriage might return, and that she would let them know when she required it again."

"Ha! I see it all now—I understand it all," said Mortimer in an accent of vexation; "your mistress has found herself inconvenienced by the noise and bustle of the workmen, and has consequently left the house for the night; but surely there must have been some note or mes- sage to explain this arrangement to me?"

"Nothing of the kind, Sir, or I should of course have been informed of it."

"Still I am convinced that I am right," per- sisted Mortimer, "and she probably determined too suddenly to pursue this plan to remember that I might be uneasy."

"I scarcely think so, Sir," said the man steadily, "for Mrs. Symonds had the imperial of my mis- tress's carriage taken to her room early in the day, and it was packed when she left home."

"A convincing proof of the correctness of my suggestion," retorted Mortimer, without one misgiving; "That fact alone would suffice to satisfy me that I have discovered the truth, as it was impossible that she could pass the night out of her own house without some preparation, but as it is equally impossible that she will re- main at her milliner's, and as we do not know to what friend she is gone, I do not feel that I should be justified, under the present circum- stances, in delaying my own departure until to-morrow. Prepare everything, therefore, with as much dispatch as possible, while I write a few lines to break this melancholy news to Mrs. Mortimer, and be careful that another set of horses are in readiness for her to follow me im- mediately on her return home."

The man bowed, and left the room, and if he marvelled at the blindness of his master, he had at least the discretion to remain silent.

Mortimer assuredly felt no extraordinary af- fection for Mrs. Delamere—hers was not one of those endearing natures which command attach- ment, but he respected her as the mother of his wife, and he was aware that the absence of Sybil only rendered his duty to that mother the more imperative. Hastily, therefore, but considerate- ly, he communicated in the note which he pro- ceeded to write, the absolute necessity of her immediate appearance at Westrum, urged her to fortitude, and even to hope, and informed her of the arrangements which he had made to fa- cilitate her journey. Not a word of reproach, not a sentence of harshness or displeasure es- caped him; he respected her sorrow, and forgo. his own suffering, in order to soothe hers. And when this was done, he stole to the bedside of his slumbering child, not to awaken her, for his moments were counted, but to look fondly and silently upon her cherub face before he left her, and to impress again and again upon the obse- quious nurse the necessity of constant vigilance and tenderness.

This was scarcely accomplished, when his

travelling chaise was announced, and five minutes afterwards the portmanteau and carpet-bags were packed away, master and man were seated in the vehicle, and it drove off in the direction of Westrum at the best speed of four swift horses.

CHAPTER LV.

By a singular coincidence Sybil and Gertrude quitted London on the same day. The one to immolate upon the altar of vanity all her dignity as a wife, and all her purity as a woman, and the other, to seek in the bosom of an attached family the reward of her past trials. The one impoverished by her own follies, and burthened with the ruin of her husband who had confided in her; the other, rich in hope, and about to secure the happiness and prosperity of all whom she best loved.

We cannot follow Sybil and her seducer on their journey. In so far as they are concerned our task is ended. Vice ever writes its own history in blood and tears; no honest pen can fitly chronicle a career of error and of sin. Angels bow their radiant heads as the dark shadows pass, and they bow them in silence.

Gertrude left London as she had entered it, pure, humble-minded, and gentle. Not even the officious congratulations of her legal adviser, nor the anxious courtesies of her late uncle's partner, had sufficed to impress her with a conviction of her increased self-importance. She only felt that she could now repay in some degree the disinterested affection of Ernest, and the friendship of his family. Her spirit was still saddened by the remembrance of the squalid death-bed beside which she had stood so lately, and she almost felt as though it were a sin to exult in the possession of wealth which had been purchased by such privations. Yet still she smiled as she remembered that she had left one happy heart behind her, and that the humble Mrs. Sharp, made rich beyond her hopes by the possession of the scanty stock of furniture at Walworth, and permission to follow her in a few months, in order to be established under her roof for life, had blessed her as they parted, and that the meek old man who now sat beside her in the chaise, proudly attired in a new suit of glossy black, was rescued from a drudgery unsuited to his years by a slight alteration in her uncle's will, which had exchanged the bequest to an income of the same amount.

How cheaply had she thus purchased two grateful hearts, and how the consciousness that she had done so, lightened the tedium of the way, and beguiled her of the memories which still cast a cloud over her young brow, and how her pulses bounded as the woods, and streams, and meadows of Bletchley came in sight; the village street, the dingy cottage, and finally the rigid figure of her aunt!

Miss Warrington looked doubly erect and doubly stern, as she saw her niece not only alight from an expensive travelling conveyance, but even introduce beneath her roof, and without her permission, a person to whom she was a stranger, but an hour had scarcely elapsed ere Gertrude was forgiven; thanks to the eager zeal of the honest clerk, who, well versed in the jealous captiousness of poverty, at once and effectually proceeded to exorcise the threatening spirit.

A messenger was despatched to the Manor-house to announce the return of Gertrude, and ere long, Ernest Armstrong bounded into the house. Welcomes and reproaches were poured forth volubly from his lips. Gertrude had no right to sacrifice herself the to selfish caprices of a stranger.

"My dear mother's only brother!" urged the gentle girl.

"And still a stranger," persisted the young man as he sat beside her, clasping her hand, and looking anxiously into her face; "And have you reflected on all the results of your ill-advised journey?—Upon your pallid cheeks, which we had taught to bloom again at Bletchley?—Had we not, Miss Warrington?—Upon a responsibility to which you were unequal, and a fatigue, against which you had not physical strength to contend? You smile! Well, then, I will ask only one more question; has it never occurred to you that the same quixotic delicacy of feeling which took you, like a lady-errant, to London in search of extraordinary adventures, and which may perhaps prompt you to delay a marriage already definitely fixed at some six weeks hence, may at least weary out my forbearance?"

The happy girl shook her head defyingly.

"Do not be too confident in your own strength, Gertrude," said Ernest impatiently; "Sydenham vows that Mary shall keep her word, and I vow——"

Gertrude playfully laid her hand upon his lips.

"And the villa?" she asked.

The young man looked up anxiously and inquiringly.

"You know, Mr. Armstrong, that you have promised me that villa behind the hill, with its pretty shrubberies, and fish-ponds, and balconies, and aviary, and flower-gardens. I have set my heart upon becoming its mistress. Are you prepared to gratify me?"

The orphan quailed for an instant as she saw the light fade from the face of her lover, and the smile die away upon his face. Could it be that, even for one brief moment, he had mistaken her? But no; Ernest rallied ere the sound of her voice had well ceased, and raising her hand to his lips, he said sadly, but firmly,—

"Alas, my sweet Gertrude, that dream at least cannot be realised! I have failed in my efforts to secure personal independence—miserably failed, and you must even be content to accept the home which my father offers to us under his own roof. Will you not do this, dearest?"

Gertrude was, even amid her gentleness, still woman enough to exult in her power, and while she returned the fond pressure of his fingers, she whispered softly,—

"No, I must have the villa. It will require—will it not?—at least six months to effect all the alterations which you proposed. When these are completed, and not before, I will, on my side, fulfil my promise."

With a gasp of agony, Ernest Armstrong started to his feet, but she held him back.

"Listen to me," she said with a pale cheek, and a trembling voice, "listen to me, and forgive me!—I have returned to you rich—fabulously rich—this gentleman—my aunt—will tell you all! Do I not owe respect to the memory of him who has enabled me to give myself to you without a blush at my own penury? I have played with your feelings, and I am self-condemned; pardon me, therefore, and grant my last request: defer our marriage, and hereafter I will have no will but yours!"

The tale was soon told, and even the lover was convinced, although he still murmured. Gertrude was restored to him, and, although in the first joy of meeting he was comparatively insensible to the fact that she had returned home a wealthy heiress, an instant's reflection sufficed to convince him of the effect which such a circumstance must naturally produce upon his family. The flushed cheek of Miss Warrington, the proud eye of Mr. Jackson, and the meek affection of the orphan, which almost seemed to ask forgiveness for a prosperity that rendered her his equal in the eyes of the world, all tended to awaken him to a perfect consciousness of the great and unexpected change which had taken place in her fortunes, and yet it was with a mingled feeling that he murmured, as he released her hand,—

"Gertrude, I rejoice for you—for myself—for all!—and still, I would ask you never to forget that I loved you before this strange event had come to pass.

"When I forget it, may I forget myself," murmured the orphan, overawed by his emotion. "But why should you look so coldly, Ernest? Is this gold to bring distrust between us?"

Who cannot guess the answer? And who requires to be told that the villa was ready long ere the six months of mourning had expired? Was Gertrude happy? Yes; she had with her all the elements of happiness! Her empire was home—her throne the heart of her husband—her ambition a career of virtue, purity and affection. She was no heroine, as romance-readers understand the term, but a gracious and graceful woman, strong in trial, gentle in prosperity, and firm in right. And yet she had one more pang to suffer, the last, but the keenest.

It was a fortnight after her return to Bletchley, and it came to her, as sorrow often comes, through the most common-place medium—the post. When she rose in the morning, she found a letter which Hannah had laid upon her dressing-table. The handwriting had been long unseen, but never forgotten.

Thus ran the letter:—

"Gertrude,—I used to shun, but I now welcome the idea that you once loved me. I dare not disbelieve the hope. If it were indeed a fact, I am saved; if it were only a fiction, strive, I implore you, for the sake of one as pure, as lovely, and as loving as yourself, to remember that we were bound together in early years by the ties both of relationship and affection. I have no right to appeal to you, nor do I arrogate one. I will not even seek to justify myself at the expense of another. I am conscious, too miserably conscious of all my weakness, all my inconsistency. But my mother—my mother—Gertrude, loved us both. Listen to me, for her sake. I am sitting here alone—alone! Do you comprehend all the meaning which may be condensed into that solitary word?—Alone, in the stately saloon of one of the stateliest mansions of London. My child is above stairs. I dare not trust myself at this moment to see her near me. I have just returned from Westrum; from the vault of my family, where I stood, as an empty niche received the body of—yes, Gertrude, of the mother of my wife, which I had bid them place beside my own,—and would you know where that wife was, at the very moment when I was thus engaged? I will tell you. In the arms of a paramour; a pretended cousin; of a perfidious friend, of a fiend, whose name will hang like a curse upon my lips in my death-agony. Go, sleep amid your riches, will you say to me, proud in your virtuous poverty. You do not know Sybil. She has ruined her child. For myself I care not. What have I to regret? Yet Eva is young, too young to have been contaminated by bad example, or humbled by compassion. Ah, Gertrude I cannot tell you what she is! Her glorious beauty may perchance be the reflection of her mother's, but her clinging love, her gentle nature, her endearing sweetness—these are all your own. Will you reject her? England is no longer a home for me. The principles which I imbibed from my mother's lips, ill as I have employed them, forbid self-destruction, and I will live on as some expiation for four years of weakness and of folly. But I cannot endure shame. The first finger which was pointed against me would sear into my spirit like a brand, and therefore, from henceforth, so long as I may be condemned to drag on an existence which has become weary and loathsome to me, I shall remain an exile. Yes, Gertrude, an exile from all that I have loved; my country, my home, and, above all, my child, my blessed child! But let me not weary you. I have looked my partial ruin steadily in the face, and I have ascertained that it may be repaired by time. Eva is yet an infant, and thus I have ventured to retain a sufficient income to secure me against want, which will be remitted to me by a confidential friend, who will know, and will faithfully preserve the secret of all my movements. When these remittances cease to be claimed, I shall be at peace, and, meanwhile, Eva's prosperity will be secured. Gertrude! this is a last appeal. Receive it as a request from the grave. I shall remain in England until I ascertain that my child is happy under your protection—happy in your love—safe in your example. I advance no claim upon your pity, your charity, your forbearance. Again I say that I *dare* not. Yet still I hope—

"Frederic Mortimer."

* * * * * *

"Who was the beautiful woman with whom you were conversing just now?" asked Lord Francis Lorimer of his friend Greville, between the pauses of a quadrille.

"Beautiful!" echoed Greville with enthu-

siasm. "She is an angel! You remember Mortimer, whose wife eloped with Trevor about twenty years ago, when we were somewhat younger than we are to-night, and were dancers instead of lookers-on. Well, that radiant woman was her daughter—a mere infant in the nursery—and see her now! One of the most lovely and estimable women in England. How proud —— is of her. By the bye, that was a glorious speech he made in the House last night! He's a rising man, depend upon it! There's good stuff for a minister there. And such a wife!"

"By Jove! she treads like an empress," exclaimed his listener.

"And feels like a woman," retorted Lord Francis; "I know but one wife or mother in the kingdom whom I value more than herself, and that is ——"

"Mrs. Armstrong," said Greville with an animated smile! "And glad am I to find that even amid your admiration for younger and brighter beauty, you can still do her justice. Had I fifty sons, I would strive to marry them all to the daughters of Mrs. Armstrong."

THE END

THE WIFE'S TRIALS.

CHAPTER I.

"Should I another love, then must I have
Another heart, for this is full of her,
And evermore shall be; here she is drawn
At length, and whole——"

Hymen's Triumph.

SEABROOKE PRIORY, the principal theater of our tale, had, as the name indicates, originally formed part of an extensive property belonging to the Romish Church. In the reign of Henry the Eighth it was cut, and carved, and distributed as best suited the views of that libel on kings; and while its hundreds of acres were shared among those who best abetted him in his tyrannic sway, the Priory itself, and the rich lands in its immediate vicinity, were bestowed on the especial favorite of the day, or rather hour, caprice being as much the characteristic of this monstrous blot on history's page as cruelty.

Through the hands of various masters did this fair specimen of nature and art successively pass —now belonging to a Papist, when matins and vespers rang out, and other ceremonies of popery prevailed—now owning the rule of a Protestant courtier, till the civil wars threw all into confusion, and the stern, uncompromising Independent, denouncing all who differed in opinion from him, as tares fit only for the burning, seized upon Seabrooke as one of the strongholds of the scarlet abomination, or the scarcely less hateful prelatic schism, and confiscated it to the uses of the state.

Afterward came the Restoration; when, sadly shorn of its fields and pastures, its sweep of rising ground to the east, and its river to the west, it fell into the hands of a parasite of that court, whose profligacy and infamy were the disgrace of the nation which permitted them. Again and again, and each time more speedily, did it change owners, and at every change, like the bottle containing the imp, fetch less; till, when the South-Sea Bubble was nearly at its height, one who had speculated fortunately, was equally fortunate in realizing before the explosion occurred, and thrice fortunate in escaping the disgorging process, which fell with ruinous effect on so many, purchased all that remained of the Seabrooke estate for a sum which furnished its late possessor with funds for discharging a so-called debt of honor.

"Cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd," as were the limits of this once almost regal property, so eminently beautiful was the situation, that had it been converted into some huge and tall chimneyed factory town, its natural attractions could scarcely have been defaced; while a fair stream, which soon swelled almost to a river, flowing through land that richly repaid the tiller's toil, seemed to defy alike distribution or disfigurement. All around was beauty and fertility, proving that if the world-denying monk knew how to select his residence so as best to draw tribute from wood, earth, and water, he looked at scenery with the eye of the painter, and often with the feeling of a poet.

The Priory, though still so called, was no more the Priory of past generations than if it had actually been razed to its foundations and rebuilt —for, except the foundations, few traces of its original arrangement were left—passages along which many a holy man had glided with thoughts fixed on sacred subjects, had since resounded with the warlike tread of him whose trade was slaughter, and whose thoughts were of deeds of violence and blood—the spot where the simple cells had stood, whose walls had echoed many a sigh of regret, many a groan of remorse, many an agonizing cry for pardon, when the overburdened spirit must speak or die; adorned now with the rude luxury of more modern times, received its reeling occupant through the various stages of debauchery, from tipsy excitement to the most degraded state of drunken insensibility, and resounded with ribald jests or fierce imprecations. The very gardens, with their fragrance and loveliness, were less fragrant, less lovely, when thronged with the fallen angels who were occasionally invited to the Priory revels, for "the trail of the serpent was over them all."

Thus it had gone on with a downward tendency, when, much to the astonishment of his compeers of the Stock Exchange, Mr. Ashley became the purchaser; nor was this astonishment lessened when they found that he not only intended to keep his bargain, but to lay out a considerable sum of money on its improvement. This was carried on with a good sense, which showed that he had well understood his wishes, and calculated his means. Gradually, by advantageous sales or exchanges of out-lying patches, and equally advantageous purchases of alienated land near the center of the property, he possessed, in the course of a quarter of a century, one of the most compact as well as beautiful estates in England. Thrifty but not penurious, never generous but always just, for years and years after his death, he was cited as the greatest benefactor the Priory had ever called master; and this title was inherited by both son and grandson, who carried on his plans without attempting to extend them.

The building itself was completed by his grandson, and had received but trifling alterations since his time, when decending still through the Ashleys, a race whose enterprise and love of accumulation seem to have ended with the origional purchaser, the Priory, with its valuable tenements, hereditaments, etc., etc., became the property of Horace Ashley, the very last male heir of a family which had lately boasted of six sons. The father of Horace, a younger son, fell in battle, leaving a widow, and their only child. She was of noble birth, but poor, and on the death of her husband gratefully accepted the offer of a relative, that at his expense Horace should be educated for his father's profession; but death after death among the Ashleys, at length left this boy the possessor of a property which, at his birth, had seemed as far removed from him as a kingdom.

After completing his education, no longer as a soldier, but as a wealthy landed proprietor, he set off, as was the fashion, on his travels; and in France was introduced to the family of Lord Westrough, to whose daughter, Lady Frances, a beautiful girl, he became passionately attached. Horace, from early delicacy of health, had been much with his loving and true-hearted mother—to him she was a type of womanly virtues and excellences—a model of all that was lovely and good; and the virtues he had ever found in her were, by a poetic and chivalrous temperament, believed to exist equally in the lovely Frances.

His proposals were received with scarcely concealed delight by the noble but needy parents; and by the lady herself with, at least, no opposition. He returned to England the happy lover, and was making extensive and costly preparations for the reception of the fair *fiancée*, when he received the dreadful intelligence that she had privately married the handsome but profligate Captain Templeton.

Horace never recovered from this shock to his best and tenderest feelings; but too benevolent to visit on his fellows generally the treachery of one, he became neither a misanthrope nor a recluse; if love had been rudely crushed in his heart, other feelings still beat warmly and kindly to those around him—if one had been false, he had troops of friends true and constant—and though sad himself, he had the blessed privilege of bringing joy to others. Ah! why had not this noble nature been early taught, that where respect is lost, love should not be allowed to linger; a lesson which is still unknown to some of the best and gentlest, who have mistaken the glitter of tinsel for the luster of pure metal.

Doubly endeared by this trial to his mother, who sought with all the ingenuity of real affection to mitigate the effects of this bitter disappointment, he resided henceforth with her, chiefly at the Priory; and when, at an advanced age, she died, he spent the remainder of his days in carrying out their joint schemes for improving and benefiting all around him. At length his own career of unobtrusive goodness ended, and great was the curiosity to know to whom the large and productive property at Seabrooke would descend.

It then appeared that he had never forgotten her, through whose heartless conduct his whole life had been clouded. Captain Templeton had died about eight years after his marriage, leaving a son and daughter, with their mother, entirely dependent on relatives. The daughter, by a little management, had been received by her great-aunt, and resided with her in Scotland; but as Lady Anne's income was small, poor Laura might easily have learned how hard it is to eat the bread of another, had not a kind friend, whose incognito it was easy to guess, from time to time forwarded sums of money for her especial benefit.

Lionel lived with his mother and an unmarried uncle, and was destined for his father's profession; the silly mother's predilection for a scarlet coat and gold epaulettes not having been cured by her dearly-bought experience, that they may cover a heart quite poor in all noble sentiments and upright principles. Petted and spoiled when a child, insolence and selfishness marked his boyhood, nor was there any one circumstance in which he was placed that tended to root out, or even weaken, these hateful qualities; for though often obliged to conceal them, and to seem humble, because he did not dare to be overbearing; or to affect courtesy when he longed to insult, because self-interest counseled restraint—these fostered vices of his character broke out with double violence when they could do so with impunity.

At the death of his uncle, which happened when he was about six-and-twenty, he and his lady mother found themselves almost destitute. His uncle's income died with him, but the little he had saved purchased a trifling annuity for Lady Frances; while other relatives, having been alienated or estranged by the exclusive appropriation of their deceived kinsman and his means, studiously kept aloof.

Nothing so mean as selfish pride. Lady Frances, quite unconscious that the heart she had wounded could still smart at her touch; quite thoughtless or regardless that in referring to past times, and in pleading the cause of her son, the man, childless and solitary, would feel doubly desolate; she skillfully alluded to some service he had recently rendered government, and entreated his aid to procure for Lionel some subordinate appointment then vacant.

The reply was distant, cold, almost haughty. In serving government, Mr. Ashley claimed neither reward nor recompense; but understanding that Mr. Lionel Templeton had been educated for the army, he placed at his command a commission in a regiment leaving for active service in the Peninsula, and had the honor to remain her Ladyship's obedient servant.

Brief was her remark—"Unless he had altogether refused, he could not have done less nor worse." She knew not that this formal, business-like letter had cost the writer many hours of sharp anguish. "He is a regular old bore," was the grateful criticism of the son; and he also little knew that this very commission had been procured with difficulty and great cost, at a period when men were eager to distinguish themselves on the battle-field, for the express purpose of removing him from the pernicious influence of his weak mother, and by placing him among men of honor, and the stern realities of an active and responsible duty, to afford him a chance of becoming wiser and better.

Though taking but little part in the busy hum of men, Horace Ashley was not entirely ignorant

what passed in the modern Babylon, and lis-ned with a painful interest to the proceedings of ady Frances; for though all he learned proved r to be utterly destitute of any quality that ins respect or esteem, by him she was remem-red as the beautiful girl, who had realized his sions of the fair spirit that was to minister to m through life. Her folly, with regard to her n, he greatly deplored, and when applied to on s behalf, responded to the appeal, as we have en, with the kindest intentions, and in the most fectual manner.

At first, Lionel vapored and gasconaded about efusing the commission; he upbraided his mother r having subjected him to this impertinent med-ling, and insinuated that Mr. Ashley had taken is opportunity of showing her how a beggar ould be answered, though at the time she pro-osed making the application, he, with the hope obtaining something more agreable to his notions ease and enjoyment, had warmly seconded the fort. With the next post, however, a change ame over him; it brought a convincing argument, the form of a bill for one thousand pounds, to rocure the outfit and pay necessary expenses; he donor, as it appeared, not anticipating a refu-l of his offer. Lionel then took another tone; nsolence was exchanged for meanness, bravado r fawning, ungrateful sneers for expressions of lmost servile obligation.

Happily for his comfortable estimate of himself nd his importance, this new-born abasement did ot survive the touch of the money; this singular umility vanished at the sight of the commission, nd his letter of thanks was manly and gentle-anly—accompanied by one from his mother, an dd mixture of platonism and sentimentality, in hich she talked a good deal of namby-pamby bout former friendship and days long past, and inted that Lionel was most anxious to express is thanks in person, to one who had been so kind friend; but as no notice was taken of this sug-estion, it is presumed no answering anxiety was elt to see him; and so he went with his regiment o win battles and gather laurels; to try for ame and fame on those fields where liberty and life are both so often lost.

Lionel was not deficient in either ambition or ourage; and though the discipline to which he vas subjected was galling to his pride and opposed o his habits of self-indulgence, he had sense enough to know that during the stirring times of war, he who aspires to high rank as an officer must prove his claim to promotion by being a good soldier; and promotion did follow his endeavors, for his name was honorably mentioned in the General's dispatches, and friends in England sud-denly recovering their memory, began to call on and congratulate Lady Frances; when an engage-ment took place in which his regiment suffered severely, and he, as it was supposed, fell mortally wounded—supposed only—for his body was not found, while a soldier who fought near him, but who escaped, declared he saw him fall—struck from his horse by a violent blow on the head.

These dreadful tidings and the harassing sus-pense were fatal to his mother; and when, more than a year afterward, he appeared, great was the astonishment at his escape; greater still at his silence. It was quite true that he had been violently struck on his head, and he supposed, while in a state of insensibility, he must have been ridden over, as when consciousness returned he suffered acutely from various contusions and a fractured arm. He ascribed his escape en-tirely to the intervention of a priest, whose religious duty led him into the ranks of friend or foe to help and console—by him he was taken to his convent, and there nursed till perfectly recovered—but he always seemed careful to avoid entering into any particulars connected with his long absence, and was equally uncom-municative regarding the reasons for his strange silence.

To his wealthy friend he wrote announcing his return, and again received substantial proofs of his favor and generosity; and the gay and hand-some Lionel, now Colonel Templeton, became the hero of various fashionable coteries, while the fair, the young, and the wealthy made him the hero of their romance.

Among those who combined all three of these gifts was the Honorable Ellinor Grantham, to whom Lionel contrived to make himself so agree-able that she consented to give him herself, and, what he by no means undervalued, all her rich belongings also. Ellinor's brother, Lord Gran-tham, who was not the least in love with the all-conquering Colonel, reminded her that Lionel, before he left England, had established for him-self a character which was composed of several unattractive, not to say ugly, features—that it was hinted he was dissipated, whispered that he gambled, and openly asserted that he was selfish and false. But Ellinor did not believe either the hint, the whisper, or the assertion; and they were married, her romantic confidence leading her to place the whole of her large fortune at his disposal.

A few months after their marriage they went abroad, and traveled about from one place to another, during which time two girls were born, with whom Colonel Templeton and his wife sud-denly returned to England, summoned by the death of Mr. Ashley—who, to the breathless astonishment of almost every one, had left the whole of his beautiful estate, Seabrooke Priory, to Colonel Templeton, in trust for his son; five thousand pounds to the Honorable Mrs. Temple-ton for her especial and independent use—ten thousand to Laura Templeton, and legacies of greater or less amount to his particular friend, the Rev. Charles Vernon, and his family, who also held in trust a handsome sum for charities.

CHAPTER II.

"'Twas no fantastic object, but a truth—
Then dumb magician, that without a charm
Dost make my entrance easy, to possess
What wise men wish and toil for."

The City Madam.

By some it is thought that adversity is the true touch-stone of character; some, on the contrary, maintain that prosperity is more trying; but the truth seems to be, that each only develops those qualities which, but for its aid, would have re-

mained dormant or unobtrusive. The man who with cheerful resolution sets his shoulder to the wheel which adversity has driven deep into the mire, and, having extricated it, will help or teach another to do the same, is very likely to bear prosperity with equanimity, and a generous sympathy for those less fortunate; while another, who has shrunk from exertion when most needed, and submitted to a paralyzing dependence, or degrading pauperism, would be very likely, were wealth to become his, to overvalue it as a miser, or squander it as a selfish spendthrift

"Do you know any thing of Colonel Templeton?" inquired Mrs Vernon of her husband, as they took their hitherto privileged walk in the beautiful grounds more immediately near the Priory, a few days before his arrival.

"Not much," was the cautious and rather equivocal reply, even to his beloved wife—for had he finished the sentence, it would have been thus, "to his advantage."

"He has been living chiefly abroad since his marriage, has he not? I wonder whether he resembles Mrs. Sinclair? if so, he must be very handsome!"

"He is said to be a very handsome and fascinating man," said Mr. Vernon; "but owing to their early separation I should expect but little similarity in character between brother and sister, whatever there may be in looks. This opportune legacy will, I hope, relieve the Sinclairs from their dependence on Sir Alan, and, by reconciling him to the match, induce him to exert his influence in a more fatherly way than in trying to banish them to the fever-giving coast of Africa."

"But I thought he gave his consent to the marriage," observed Mrs. Vernon.

"So he did—but he then believed Miss Templeton was heiress to something better than Lady Anne Ferguson's old chairs and tables—even now, I believe, he resents what he considers a trick much more than the loss of fortune."

The speakers were the rector of Seabrooke and his wife, whose characters may be briefly expressed in the wish, that all in situations of similar responsibility possessed similar excellence. He was an intelligent and benevolent looking man of about thirty-five; she, a gentle reflection, a few years younger. Mr. Vernon was the nephew of the late Mr. Ashley's dear friend and traveling companion—the only one, except his revered mother, who knew all the particulars of his disappointment and its trying effects—and after her death the only one with whom he could ever revert to the past. When the event which doomed him to solitude had calmed down from the sharp agony which wrung alike mind and body, into the patient endurance, if not quiet resignation, which time produces, Mr. Ashley turned to take a survey of what, amid this great wreck, had been left—and he found his mother and his friend—these he at first believed to be all—but gradually mother and friend convinced him that there were still noble and inexhaustible resources, from which much happiness—yes, happiness, so they said—might be derived. He was at first skeptical, but he tried them—tried them well—and they were not found wanting; and hence the large, but judicious, expenditure of his handsome income in plans which slowly, but surely, did lasting and extensive good.

Mr. Vernon it was who gained information for him of Lady Frances and her children, though neither he nor his nephew Charles thought it needful to enter into the details of that chit-chat which dubbed her ladyship a fool and her son a *vaurien*. But when Mr. Ashley, pleased with what was publicly told of Lionel, and especially with his marriage into a family so much respected as that of the Granthams, talked of making him his heir, then Mr. Vernon suggested that the property should be entailed on a son, arguing that the income arising from it was so ample as to admit of a style of living not only generous but lavish; and, in short, that, under any circumstances, it was always better to restrain those who had been educated in such thoughtless indulgence, as it was notorious Colonel Templeton had been. Thus then it was settled, and little did the Colonel know to whom he was indebted for the clog to this magnificent bequest, which he so often found irritating and galling.

On Mr. Vernon's death, which occurred shortly before the death of his friend, the living was given to Charles Vernon, who, with his wife and family, took possession of the rectory, and entered zealously on the performance of his important duties.

Both church and rectory had been repaired by the first Mrs. Ashley, who was grieved to think how long the work of ruin must have been allowed to go on unchecked. She found both in a state of decay and neglect, only too sadly typical of the minds and morals of the people generally. But now few things could offer a more striking contrast between the past and the present. The church, one of those rare specimens of Gothic architecture occasionally found in England, had been restored, not destroyed; while the rectory, built to harmonize with it as much as due regard to internal comfort would permit, was a model of taste and beauty—it was within an easy walk of the church, and nearly two miles from the Priory, of which there was a lovely view from the study windows; from the drawing-room, over the gently-sloping lawn, the sea was visible; toward the north it was sheltered by the eminence on which stood the church, and by a well-contrived plantation of hardy trees. But oh! the rectory garden—let us peep at it over its shining laurel hedge, though it may be very early spring—for it is always pretty from the suggestions of taste which the mere arrangement called up. Look at those well-contrasted evergreens, keeping watch over the hidden treasures, till suns and genial weather shall disclose them—see those beds of varied and fantastic shape, and imagine what they are when the inhabitants come forth in all the glory of their gay attire—hundreds of roses of various hue and form, when summer comes, will fill the air with their clear, delicious perfume—and then that formal piece of arabesque, how dazzling must be the effect when the artistic contrasts of color shall burst upon the delighted eye.

But all this time the Colonel is waiting, and not very patiently either, for it may be whispered as a secret, not to be elsewhere divulged, that at the very time this rich inheritance came to him, he was meditating an appeal to the hoards of his

nseen benefactor; sickness, increased family, nforeseen expenses, or any other fabulous plea e might have invented, would have been used—ad he done so, certain peccadilloes, which seemed lways to dog *his* steps, might have become nown, which would have stood between him and is bequest; but all was safe—here he was, again et up in the world, and once more going to start air.

"I think I must quarter you and the children n your brother, while I run down and see what his place is like," said the Colonel, the day after heir arrival at Dover.

"Could we not accompany you?" suggested is wife; "Cecil's house is not over-large, and I ear we may incommode them"—for she remembered that a correspondence had passed between ier husband and brother, which had not been of he most oily character; and that when the last housand pounds of her fortune had been demanded, her brother, roused from his usual indolence, had warmly and sharply remonstrated. But it suited Colonel Templeton to forget this—n short, he never remembered any thing that nterfered with his arrangements; besides, it also suited him to be friendly with his wife's brother, whose station and character reflected credit which wealth alone could not; and he rather piqued himself on thus maneuvering to send Ellinor with one olive branch in her hand, and the other in the nurse's arms, to Lord Grantham, who would, he hoped, receive them as pledges that the deluge was over, and that sunshine might be looked for.

Lord Grantham was a good-tempered, easily-managed, indolent man; who, happily for himself and his children, had married an amiable, cheerful wife, possessed in abundance of the energy and activity he wanted. Not easily repulsed or abashed, it was through her reiterated solicitations that one of her relations, who was in office, bestowed a snug little post on her husband, the late lord having sadly encumbered the family estate; it was through her laughing but persevering entreaties that the godfather of her eldest son gave him a cadetship; and she was so determined on it, that an Indian director, whom she besieged, capitulated, and promised to give the second boy an appointment in the East; while she never scrupled smilingly to avow, that she kept her hands ready to catch any windfall that might suit the youngest, a mere babe; and all this was done so heartily, so fearlessly, so frankly, with so complete an unconsciousness of departing in the least from the strictest propriety, that those who looked on became unconscious also; perhaps the more readily and easily, because she was always so ready to help others—when she had helped herself—that it was impossible for friends to censure very severely that by which they occasionally profited. Then, she was so true and honest in all she did; so courageous in suiting her expenses to her husband's income; so judicious in training her boys, by early self-denial, bravely to meet the privations they must encounter in making their way through the world; that every one, especially men of sense or experience, felt a pleasure in forwarding her views and lessening her cares.

In person she was exactly the woman we should expect to see—eminently "*la femme de la situation.*" Tall, well-formed, promising to be what is politely called a fine woman—*Anglice*, stout—her clear complexion, bright, well-opened blue eye, and mouth of unrivaled beauty, all gave tokens of a genial, happy temperament.

"How I ever was induced to marry that dawdle Cecil, I can not imagine," she remarked one day to old Admiral Western, who had been laughing at her naval speculations for the third boy, and had pronounced her the head of the family.

"I suppose, my love," replied Lord Grantham, quietly looking over his newspaper, "it was because you did not know what to do with your superabundant energy, and so, in pity to your overloaded self, bestowed it on one who so greatly needed it."

"Most likely some such charitable motive influenced me; though, now I come to think of it, how he had the courage to ask is still more wonderful."

"Perhaps it was leap year," slily suggested the Admiral.

"And you would insinuate that I asked him," she replied, laughing; "well, even that is not utterly impossible."

"Right," retorted the old sailor; "there is no harm in asking, *you* know—eh, Lady Grantham?"

"None that I can find out; but I perceive you are thinking of that plan I mentioned respecting Alfred."

"What, Alfred the little, dear Etta?" asked his lordship; "why, the child can not speak plainly yet."

"An excellent reason why his mother should speak for him; and Admiral Western has kindly promised to use his influence for him, when he needs it."

"You take time, indeed, by the forelock; and that reminds me, I have ordered the man to bring up the pony, which, I think, will match the one you have. He should be here by this time."

"Indeed, Cecil, I am sorry you have taken this trouble, as, with many thanks for your kindness, I must beg leave to decline the gift."

"But I thought you said you would like a pair; and the truth is, I do not like you to drive only one."

"You are quite right as to my liking, but not quite wise, dear husband, about your own. I must have a governess shortly for Cecilia; she can no longer be left to nurses; and it is clear how it will be decided when it is education *versus* two ponies."

"She is a capital wife and mother, too," said the Admiral to himself, as he left the house; "and I certainly shall not forget that boy when he is old enough to need my aid."

"And now, Cecil, I must talk to you about the Templetons; they will, of course, be coming home to take possession of this handsome property, and I hope that any little asperity which may have occurred during your correspondence with the Colonel, will not, for Ellinor's sake, lead to an estrangement."

"If it should suit him to be friendly, it certainly will not," replied Lord Grantham; who, though indolent and apathetic generally, had a

nice and correct appreciation of character, and had rightly read that of his handsome brother-in-law, and being besides a most affectionate man, loved his sister tenderly. "You know my opinion of Templeton, and that I always consider it an evil day which bound Ellinor's fate with his—her large fortune is entirely gone, and had it not been for this unexpected bequest, I know not what they would have done. We have nothing to spare, and there is not another rich aunt to endow my sister again with twenty thousand pounds."

"It is useless to regret Ellinor's infatuation in refusing to have any portion settled on herself; such romance, or, as I read it, folly, is wholly incomprehensible to me," said his wife; "but I understand there is a small legacy left under this will, entirely at her own disposal: let us hope that experience has made her wise, and that she will take care of this—though, of course, she will now have some provision made for herself and children."

"Do not deceive yourself, Etta; there will be none, unless the will enjoin it: but here are the letters—Dover post-mark, doubtless from them—from Ellinor. Read it, my dear."

"Dear Cecil:

"We feel so sure of your kind welcome, that I purpose coming in person to receive it; therefore, if Henrietta can take us all in, babies and nurse, directly I receive your answer I shall start for town. The interval will be very profitably spent in recruiting my strength by needful rest, as the letter which summoned us found us at Baden-Baden, which place we left immediately, and traveled without stopping, to cross by the first boat. Lionel has just started for Seabrooke, but thought the journey too much for me and the children, and, relying on your ever-ready hospitality to receive and shelter us I only await your reply. This all seems to me a dream, almost too delightful to be true, though, to make it complete, I must find you and your dear ones all well. Best love to Henrietta from your tired and sleepy, but affectionate sister,

"Ellinor Templeton."

"Can we receive them?" asked Lord Grantham, turning to his wife with an anxious look.

"Can we? dear Cecil, what a question! Ellinor will take one spare room, the nurse and children the other; and Watkins must admit them during the day to her domains. Shall I write or will you?"

"Oh, you, by all means, and say we long to see her."

"My dear Ellinor:

"As usual, Cecil makes me amanuensis—I suppose because he fears he shall not make you understand how rejoiced we shall be to receive you: perhaps here I shall also fail, so let it pass till our meeting tells it for us—a pleasure which we are glad Colonel Templeton's thoughtful care so early procures us. We both congratulate you sincerely on your accession to the Seabrooke property, which we also venture to hope will be a sufficient inducement to your remaining in England. *Au revoir.*

"Henrietta Grantham."

"Thoughtful care!" repeated Mrs. Templeton, again reading the brief but kind note. "Gretchen," she continued, in German, addressing a healthy-looking woman, who was amusing one pretty little girl, and singing lullaby to another, "we shall leave immediately; collect the few things we have unpacked—I will dress Miss Helen and take care of the baby."

CHAPTER III.

"Si l'homme savoit rougir de soi, quels crimes non seulement cachés, mais publics et connus ne s'épargneroit-il pas?"—La Bruyère.

On the evening of the same day, once more was Mrs. Templeton seated in the very comfortable drawing-room of her brother's small but well-appointed house, hearing of much that had occurred since they had parted, though evidently determined that they should hear little from her in return.

"And Cecilia," she asked, "where is she? Has she kept her promise of being her mother's image?"

"Oh, she is with my sister Lucy, who so sadly spoils her that I am going to have her home now for a permanency. I mean to engage a really clever governess, if accomplished all the better, but not essential, and to resign Cecilia to her guidance for the next few years; your other question is not so soon answered."

"Merely," interrupted Lord Grantham, "because every body calls Cecilia a very handsome girl, and Etta is afraid, if she acknowledges the likeness, she may be called vain; but her fear does not change the fact of resemblance.

"For shame, Cecil," she said, justifying his compliment by a most becoming blush, and a smile which displayed the beauty and wealth of her mouth; and turning to her sister-in-law, she added, "but I wish your fairies did not look so delicate."

"Helen is by no means really so, nor my little Constance either, but our journey was both hurried and fatiguing."

"Which also may account for your pale cheeks," said her brother; "so I vote that you seek a good night's rest, and to-morrow shall bring its full share of news and gossip."

"I really shall not decline the prescription; the fact of being once more under this roof insures success, and so good-night."

"Cecil!" said Lady Grantham, fixing her clear eyes on her husband, with rather more than their usual sparkle in them.

"I know, my dear Etta, all that your indignant looks mean, but it is evident she has taken her resolution, and it is not for us to interfere, especially unasked."

"Quite my idea," she replied; "but good heavens! what can it all mean? Left with only a foreign nurse, with scarcely the luggage of a lady's nurse, and apologizing for a shabby toilette! Oh, Cecil! Cecil! what does it all mean?"

"Simply this," he answered quietly, but in a tone of deep feeling; "Ellinor has made a mis-

ake; whether she is yet aware to what an extent, I know not; but I repeat it, our course is plain."

The following morning Mrs. Templeton and her ress looked better, though still both looked worn; ne, however, expressed great pleasure at again pending a short time with her brother and his rife.

"I have a few words of business, which must ot be delayed, to say to you and Henrietta," she ather abruptly observed, as they sat at breakast; "are you too busy to grant me an audince?" turning to him.

"Ellinor, you are satirical," said Lady Granham, "or you are ingenious in imagining impossibilities. Now, my dear sister, when did you ver know Cecil to be either very busy or very lurried?"

"He was very busy when he was trying to seure you," replied Ellinor.

"And I am sure I was dreadfully hurried to each your mother's house the day we were married," he remarked, interrupting her.

"Oh, because you had forgotten all about it, and were behind time," his wife maliciously rejoined, with her merry laugh; "but what is this business that must not be put off?"

"It must not," said Mrs. Templeton; "and on that account I wish to name it to you and Cecil. You know the late Mr. Ashley left me five thousand pounds entirely at my own disposal; it was a blessed thought, and deeply grateful do I feel—I mean," she said, correcting the energy of her tone and manner, "that it is pleasant to have a few pounds at one's own command;" and again feeling that she was on self-forbidden ground, she boldly plunged in "*medias res.*" "This money I mean to place so that I can not, under any circumstances, touch the principal, which I shall settle on my daughters, the interest to be used as I like. Can this be done, and can it be done immediately?"

"Yes; and I will send for my lawyer before you leave."

"And I propose an amendment," said Lady Grantham; "drive Ellinor to him before luncheon: let him receive her instruction, so that if summoned away, it may still be done and sent to her for signature, or any other legal formality."

Bravely and stoically bidding back her tears, and denying herself the pleasure of falling on her sister's neck, Mrs. Templeton said, "Thank you for the suggestion; I should very much like to have it done at once, but as that, perhaps, can not be, we will avoid all needless delay."

"And Lionel?" asked Lord Grantham; "what will he say?"

"He must be so astonished at his unexpected wealth," she replied, "as not to think or care about mine; in short," she continued emphatically, "I have decided in this case for myself, and do not mean to have any interference."

A few days after this, came a letter from the Colonel to his "dear Ellinor," thanking her brother for his hospitable reception of "his treasures," desiring the said Ellinor to draw upon his banker to any amount for replenishing her wardrobe. ("Not before it is wanted," mentally remarked Lady Grantham.) To be ready to join him in the course of a week, if he should be prevented fetching her, and to arrange with Lord and Lady Grantham for a long visit to the Priory, whenever it suited them to give him that pleasure.

The next day was spent in making the necessary purchases, among which Mrs. Templeton contrived to include a few handsome presents for her niece and nephews; and at the end of a fortnight came the summons for her to meet the Colonel at the Priory, which her brother and sister promised to visit, when she should write and say she was ready to receive them.

No one who had not been well acquainted with the change which a few years had wrought in the character, feelings, and, above all, in the hopes of the trusting, loving, inexperienced Ellinor Grantham, could have imagined the soothing and restgiving effects of her short visit to her brother's house, where, for the first time, she was received as the Honorable Mrs. Templeton. Three years only had intervened; but in that short time what lessons had she not learned! thrice blessed are they who forever remain ignorant of them! She had, during that period, learned that her love was a mistake; that her confidence was a mistake; she had dreamed a dream in which she had ever by her side one with a noble and true heart, one who gave her love for love, who was generous and honorable; who shielded and protected her from trial and sorrow, by bravely interposing himself, and she had been rudely awoke, never so to sleep and dream again!

The journey to Seabrooke, with her helpless companions—for Gretchen, though a most valuable aid in her own country, was certainly a charge in England—was extremely tiring; and Mrs. Templeton was anxiously looking for the last change of horses, when, on arriving at the inn, she was much gratified and surprised to find Colonel Templeton awaiting her arrival.

"I calculated you would be here about this time," he observed, "and therefore drove out to meet you; Gretchen and the children can follow with fresh horses, but I shall like to drive you myself to the Priory."

"I shall greatly enjoy the drive in an open carriage, for, truth to tell, I began to find the journey long."

Is it really true that she will never so sleep and so dream again?—Quite true.

"I see you have not brought your own maid down with you; does she follow with the rest of the luggage?" asked her husband.

"I have not engaged any one to attend on me; you did not mention it, and our luggage is in the post carriage. With respect to the children, I prefer looking out among the country people for some one to assist Gretchen, and Lady Grantham will kindly supply and forward any thing I may have neglected."

"Very well, then give her *carte blanche*; it will not do for you to want any thing which my position demands; for I can tell you, Ellinor, that it is different now from what it was a year or two ago."

"It is indeed," she thought—not said. Three, four years! What a long time that was—it was the whole life of her love—within that period it had been born, neglected, ill-used, had pined away, and died!

They drove along several miles in silence, till at length the scene became one of such exceeding

beauty, that she was roused from her listlessness and revery, and exclaimed with something of old animation, "Oh! Lionel, what a lovely place this is! I hope the Priory is within a drive of it."

"We are now driving on my property," he replied; and checking the horses, he pointed to an opening: "yonder you have a peep at the building."

"Charming! charming!" she murmured, tears filling her eyes as she looked on the peaceful beauty of all around. They then drove slowly through an avenue of trees—and such trees!—through which she caught glimpses of meadows and plantations, stream and park, all in a state of such order and beauty, as showed that the eye of taste had directed the hand of skill. And now they suddenly came on an extensive opening, and the whole front range of the Priory burst on the view.

"There," exclaimed the Colonel, his handsome face beaming with pride and pleasure, "there is Seabrooke Priory; and look behind, Ellinor, there is the sea in the distance, and the little bright stream winding through my property, to reach it."

She rose and looked, while a throb of gratification stirred her heart. Oh, how glorious! how lovely! it was not sublime, it was not even grand—but it was nature in one of her most fascinating forms—it was beauty in repose and at peace. The emerald sea with its life-like movement, the azure sky, the silver stream, the varied and rich tints of field and wood, all were "Lieder ohne Worte;" and then, when she turned to the gray and majestic old building, her future home, whose folding doors were flung wide open to welcome the new owners, she thought that, if place could give peace, here it must be found.

"Why, this is quite a territory," she said with enthusiasm; "it is a little principality."

"By Jove! you are right there, Nelly. I wonder what some of those foreign fellows we met in Germany would think of this place; it would lower their paltry pride a little, if they could see me here."

"Heaven in its mercy forbid that desecration!" was her silent ejaculation.

"But here we are;" and as he handed her out, he saluted her cheek, bidding her welcome to Seabrooke Priory—a welcome which was echoed by several servants in waiting, and improved upon by a respectable-looking woman, who introduced herself as Mrs. Dawson, with the additional wish her station permitted her to make, of—

"Welcome, madam, to the Priory, and health and happiness to your ladyship."

"I thank you," said Mrs. Templeton, smiling her usual sweet smile on them all; then addressing Mrs. Dawson, she remarked, "Our daughters, with their nurse, can not be far distant, and as the latter is a foreigner, let them be brought to me directly they arrive."

"Would your ladyship like to see your apartments, those the Colonel has ordered to be prepared?"

"Yes, for I am weary, though the drive through this beautiful neighborhood has taken away half the fatigue."

Attracted by the beauty, gentleness, and grace of her new lady, and quite won by this compliment to her native place, Mrs. Dawson, in high feather, led the way across a spacious hall, up a flight of marble stairs, and along a corridor, adorned, seemingly, with rare and costly works of art, to a suite of rooms splendidly furnished, which she said the Colonel had selected: "And, indeed, madam," she continued, with a smile, "he has chosen what are considered the best, both for convenience and prospect. If you will please to step here, you may see part of the village—that house, near the church, is the rectory, and yonder you can just see Hurstwood Hall—it used once to be a very gay place, but since the death of Lady Blanche, the old Lord sees no company, and young Lord Stanley is abroad. Can I have the honor of doing any thing for you till your maid arrives?"

"Nothing, thank you, but I should like you to accompany the children when they come. I must introduce them to you, and bespeak your indulgence for any spoiled ways," said Mrs. Templeton, greatly pleased with the manner and countenance of the housekeeper.

"No need of that, madam," was the reply; "bless their innocent little hearts! more need for you to forbid my spoiling them. My late dear master used always to say, when the beautiful darlings from the rectory came here, it was well there were no children for me to spoil;" but here her comely and sunny face was overcast, as she turned and left the room.

And Ellinor stood alone—mistress of that noble mansion—almost all she looked at from the windows of that room was hers—hers, as well as her husband's, and yet, not once had he associated her with himself in the exulting thought of ownership. Was it only a careless omission—or was it part of a selfish system?

CHAPTER IV.

"And eyes forget the gentle ray
They wore in courtship's sinjing day,
And voices lose the tone that shed
A tenderness round all they said;
Till, fast declining, one by one
The sweetnesses of love are gone."
Lalla Rookh

Brought up in her father's house, if not amid all the luxuries of vast wealth, at least with all the comforts and refinements suited to her rank, the Honorable Ellinor Grantham, though ever ready to sympathize with sorrow, and, as far as her at one time limited allowance permitted, to help and relieve poverty, had, however, no very clear idea of all that this word poverty implied. She knew that at many aristocratic houses where her father was ever an honored guest, there was a style of expenditure which his encumbered property forbade his imitating; and also, that among many families she highly esteemed, an economy was practiced which he disregarded; and these formed the only degrees of comparison with which she was actually conversant; and though she must have been both stupid and selfish, had she ignored the extremes of destitution and misery which sigh and die in the holes and corners of great cities; beyond relief through some deputy,

she knew not of them—never came into personal contact with them.

This knowledge was reserved for her wedded life—it was to be acquired by the Hon. Mrs. Templeton—the instructor, her husband—the lessons, his vices. From Paris, its luxuries, its refinements, its *Bal Masqué*, its *coulisses*, and its gaming-houses, she took her first lesson—she read from the lives of faithless wives, of betrayed lovers, of broken hearts and ruined fortunes, whole pages which sickened and disgusted as she read—from Germany, with its sentimentalities and its grossness—its mouthing patriotism and its wearisome egotism—its *Cursaal* with a *rouge et noir* table licensed by some princely pettiness, and its immorality reeking of beer and tobacco, but concealed by song and poetry—she learned a still sadder and more peace-destroying lesson; and it was there she buried her dead love, and with weeping eyes and trembling hands inscribed on its tomb—Ichabod—the glory is departed!

Shortly before the birth of Constance, she found herself, with the little Helen and the good Gretchen, in one of those lonely villages so common toward the north of Switzerland. Lionel had been absent more than a week, and her anxiety for his return was much increased by her wish to seek a place offering better accommodation, and by her absolute want of funds to meet daily expenses. She knew he had gone to receive a remittance from England, by means of which he had promised to remove her to Basle; but day after day passed, and no longer daring to delay, she sent for the landlady, and frankly stating her embarrassment, inquired how she could most advantageously dispose of a few ornaments, so as to defray the debt already incurred, and secure the services of a doctor.

After some consultation, during which she met with great kindness, Mrs. Templeton learned that the pastor would be the one most likely to inform her; and to him she sent. He was a Protestant, and to the active benevolence, so needful in the discharge of his duties, united the simplicity and straitforwardness so common among the Swiss clergy.

After satisfying her inquiries regarding the sale of her trinkets, he advised her to secure, at once, medical attendance; and he not only recommended an attentive and skillful man, but offered to send his wife to see her—an offer most gratefully accepted; and expressing himself really grieved that he could not do all he wished, by at once advancing a loan, he left her much quieted.

Neither doctor nor wife arrived much too soon; and in a small Swiss inn, with none but foreign eyes to look kindly at her, none but foreign tongues to cheer her, did the Hon. Mrs. Templeton give birth to her little Constance Franciska, so called after the lake near which she was born, and the friendly Madame Rotthal, the pastor's wife, who found it both easy and pleasant to love and assist this desolate, beautiful young mother.

At length, remittances arrived from Lionel, who desired Ellinor to join him at Baden-Baden; but, alas! for her generous, grateful spirit! when just debts were paid, there was barely enough money left for the expenses of the journey; however, a few articles of silver, the relics of a once splendid toilette present, were tendered as keepsakes, and Ellinor vowed the first opportunity she had of showing these good Samaritans her grateful remembrance of their kindness should be eagerly seized; the few very trifling ornaments which Lionel had left of her costly *cadeaux de mariage* were sold to procure some needful clothing for the children; and after an affectionate parting from those who, when she was sick and a stranger, had visited her, she set out for Baden-Baden. Nor was it till she arrived in London that she had ever had any thing like the sum she required to purchase the most trifling tokens of her gratitude; and then she took from the money sent for dress, a portion, which she spent in useful presents to her Swiss friends, and which were forwarded with a report of herself and children.

Now, as she looked on the fair prospect which lay before her, she thought of that foreign lake and its mountains—of those foreign friends—of her lovely baby, of the wayside inn, and its scanty appointments; and then her attention was for the first time directed to the luxurious details of all around her. She stood in the sleeping-room of a suite of apartments, which seemed to occupy the whole length of one wing—on one hand was the dressing-room, beyond the bath-room—and on the other side was an elegant boudoir, magnificently furnished, leading to a conservatory, from which a flight of steps led to the most perfect gem of a flower-garden that could be imagined. She had just glanced at all this unwonted luxury, and was trying to banish painful retrospections, and thinking, that if wealth can not give happiness, it may still give comfort, and that she would henceforth try and be contented with her lot, when Mrs. Dawson brought Gretchen and her little charges; and then the mother's face wore a smile, and looked almost sunny, as she listened to Mrs. Dawson's honest praises of the children's beauty.

"We will now visit the nurseries," said she. "Gretchen will be glad to feel at home, and I must apply to you to recommend some respectable young person, who will be able to help her—though that must be by instinct," she added, with a smile, "as Gretchen, my much-valued nurse, can not speak many words of English."

"I know a young woman whom I can safely recommend, and who, I think, will suit; she has been very often at the rectory with the young folks, and can be sent for at once."

"To-morrow, perhaps, you will settle her here, and to-morrow also, Mrs. Dawson, you and I shall become better acquainted, as I shall prefer being quiet after dinner."

We have, most likely, all read the tale in Eastern romance, where the beneficent fairy transforms a rude hut into a sumptuous palace; in which, from attic to cellar, all is furnished with a profusion and splendor quite marvelous. Some such fairy seemed to have furnished Seabrooke Priory, though certainly she either did not know Lionel Templeton, or never intended such as he to profit by her gifts. It is true, it was not a palace—true, that diamonds and precious stones were not used instead of nails—but if the chairs and tables were not of silver, there was an immense fire proof closet full of silver

articles of unusual value: and if the walls were not hung with cloth of gold, in the state drawing-room were pictures selected with the eye of a connoisseur, worth more than a hundred times their weight in that precious metal—so valuable indeed were they, that with the greater part of the plate, some antiques and articles of *virtu*, they were catalogued as heir-looms; this restriction was, however, for the present forgotten, or not felt by the fortunate man, who had so lately and unexpectedly had greatness thrust upon him.

So well satisfied was he, that he even invited Ellinor, the next day, to walk through the house with him, and accompany him to the extensive and well-arranged gardens; nay, what was more extraordinary, on her declining a further walk, on the plea of fatigue, he promised her a carriage and pony for her own use—and still more wonderful, he kept his word, and the next week she had it.

Their neighbors gave indications of friendly intentions; among the first were the rector and his wife; and to her great delight, Ellinor found Mrs. Vernon one of those women it is so easy to like, and this feeling was soon extended to her excellent husband. Two fine boys, and one little girl, rather younger than Constance, formed their family; and when their other neighbors had visited and been visited, Mrs. Templeton began to feel at home—to look more cheerfully to the future—to be tranquil and thankful.

CHAPTER V.

"Il faut juger des femmes depuis la chaussure jusqu'à la coiffeur exclusivement, à-peu-près comme on mesure le poisson entre quatre et tête."—LA BRUYÈRE.

"HERE is a letter from Seabrooke," said Mrs. Sinclair, as she and her husband were seated at breakfast in the handsome drawing-room of an hotel, looking toward Edinboro' Castle. "I see it has been forwarded from Craigalan; Lionel wishes us to visit them before we leave England—read it, and decide on the answer—of course, if convenient, I should like to see them, for his wife is still a stranger to me."

"Certainly, then we will go, my dear, and as I have not yet been introduced to either of them, I join in your wish. We can very well spare them a fortnight if we start at once, so write and say all that is proper."

And she must have thought "all that is proper" was a very comprehensive term, judging from the length of her letter; but then Mrs. Sinclair was reputed a very clever woman, and, perhaps, one proof of cleverness is the ability to write long letters.

When Lady Frances Templeton and her husband found their finances in that state of debility that the grasshopper becomes a burden, it is no wonder that the weight of two fine healthy children was almost unbearable. So her ladyship wrote to a childless aunt, the widow of a Scotch gentleman, to inform her that Lionel had accepted an invitation from Sir Alan Sinclair, to pass a few weeks in the Highlands, during the sporting season; and that, as they passed through Edinboro', they would, if agreeable, like to pay their respects to her.

Lady Anne Ferguson was old enough, and worldly wise enough, to have known better; but she wrote to bid them welcome, without restricting them as to number. Lionel the second was safely hooked to his uncle's purse, therefore it was Laura who must travel and be introduced to her great aunt. Though she was really a very beautiful little creature, the truth must be told, that, had she been Medusa and all her snakes, Lady Anne could not have felt more petrified than when this fashionably dressed doll was presented. "What on earth could she do with this child?—who was to take care of her?" inquiries rather intimated than expressed.

"Laura is so independent, she gives no trouble," said her mother, in answer to the old lady's thoughts, "and she was so desirous to come and see you, we really could not refuse her; one of your nice fresh-looking Scotch lassies will easily do all she wants. Doubtless, Mrs. Margaret knows of one." Mrs. Margaret suggested her own niece. "Nothing can be better, such recommendation is sure to be safe, and Laura will be really well off."

But the difficulty seemed how her fond parents could be really well off, and leave her in this northern elysium. And after they had stayed so long, that Lady Anne was as impatient for their departure as Sir Alan was *said* to be for their arrival, Lady Frances protested that they could no longer postpone their visit. "But as we shall be absent only a few weeks, and Laura is so happy, so improved in every respect, it is quite cruel to take her away; and really, aunt, I think you have bewitched the child, she is so fond of you." And thus flattering Lady Anne, who had long ceased to bewitch, and adroitly propitiating her waiting-woman, Mrs. Margaret, or scaring her by hints of what might happen to her pretty niece in a house full of sportsmen, a reluctant consent was given, and Laura was left.

After the visit to Sir Alan had extended to more than two months, the Templetons returned with a large party to London, but did *not* take Elinboro' in their way—it was not convenient, therefore Laura was to await an escort. In short, for some "most exquisite reason" or another, the little girl remained with Lady Anne till her father's death, when there was a committee of ways and means held, respecting her mother's affairs; and the old lady having become strongly attached to Laura, consented to keep her, "at least for the present," as she guardedly expressed it.

Years rolled on, and Laura, a handsome, clever girl, won the love of Archibald Sinclair, the younger son of her father's friend, Sir Alan, who readily consented to the match, for Laura was universally considered her aunt's heiress; and as Lady Anne lived in good style, this term, to him, signified something like thousands. The many hundreds which had been received from the invisible friend, Lady Anne never alluded to; he evidently shrunk from having his good deeds known, and why should she not respect both his secret and his modesty? and when on the engagement being made public, a munificent gift of

a thousand pounds reached Laura, it was still thought needless to talk about such fairy gifts, and Sir Alan was the more deceived by the ostentatious display made at the marriage. But when, three years after, the old lady died, and it was discovered she was but an annuitant, having sunk the small property left by her husband, great was the wrath of Sir Alan; he felt he had not only been mistaken but tricked, and a suspicion that his handsome daughter-in-law was cognizant of the truth rendered that fair creature's presence so little desirable that he plainly intimated, as Captain Sinclair, his eldest son, was expected from Canada, Archie could take this opportunity to visit his wife's relations in the South.

Before doing this, there were a few gleanings from Lady Anne's property, which furnished them with the means of living, till Archibald ascertained the result of an application he had induced his father to make in his behalf; the reply to which was, the offer of an African appointment of most unpromising aspect, which, however, would be kept open for his acceptance still several months; and he was in correspondence with some really sincere friends, respecting another plan which looked less desperate, when the legacy already named came to his wife.

Mr. Sinclair, an honorable and energetic man, immediately decided that the whole of this money should be settled on Laura; but though in most cases she was a cool, scheming woman, she did love her husband, and was so earnest in trying to convince him that at least a few thousands left free for immediate and judicious use, by at once relieving them from all embarrassment, would bring the best return, that he consented. Exertions were also made to obtain something less dismal than the coast of Africa, and, after some difficulty and delay, a post at Calcutta was promised.

But a change had also come over the prospects at Craigalan—Captain Sinclair was drowned on his return from America, and now Sir Alan wished his only son to remain with him. This Laura vehemently opposed, not because she was resentful—she was too calculating to give way to temper—but she saw visions of wealth and splendor in the glowing East, such as the wild Highlands, with their bleak extent of hill and valley, could never give; and she courageously resolved to try whether, by a temporary expatriation, she could not bring the treasures of the former to soften and gild the rugged features of the latter.

This plan, so consonant to her husband's active, independent character, met with his ready acquiescence, and even Sir Alan was reconciled to the idea of his son's being in circumstances, not only to keep up the old feudal style of living, but to restore the property to former splendor—a splendor which had been rather dimmed by certain mortgages, which threw a vail over it, an obscuration never pleasant in the eyes of landed proprietors.

"What will you do with Laurette?" asked Mr. Sinclair, "we can not take her with us to India, and it is time she was in training."

"I have not yet decided," was the reply, when luckily arrived the invitation to Seabrooke, and Mrs. Sinclair, who well remembered how cleverly she had been quartered, came to the conclusion, that she could scarcely do better than imitate so laudable and successful a scheme, and hence, in some measure, the lengthy epistle to which we have alluded.

CHAPTER VI.

"Instead of beginning with a scene that discovers something of the plot, I begin this play with a whisper.—*The Rehearsal.*

"I SUPPOSE that is Laura's reply to my invitation," said Colonel Templeton, opening the letter bag, which he always did when at home, and handing a letter to his wife; "what does she say?"

Ellinor opened the letter and read, "My dear sister—"

"Stop," said he, "I do not want to hear all that long rigmarole—just tell me if they are coming; I rather want to see her and her husband—the latter I have never met."

"Mr. Vernon, who is acquainted with him," was her reply, "speaks very highly of him; but in order to satisfy your curiosity as to their coming, I must first read the letter," which continued thus: "We had unfortunately left Craigalan when your kind invitation arrived; this will account for a delay in replying, which we both regret. From the tenor of your remarks about Africa, I conclude Lionel has not heard that Mr. Sinclair has obtained an Indian appointment, which presents so hopeful a prospect of rendering him independent of many pecuniary claims on the property, that, though it will exile us for some years, and though Sir Alan wishes us to relinquish it, we both, on due reflection, prefer going. The chief obstacle, or rather difficulty, is my little Laurette, who is precisely at an age to require a mother's care and a mother's guidance. There is no one here who could in any way supply my place—Sir Alan wishes us to leave her with him, but Mrs. Effie Sinclair, who resides with him is, on many accounts, unfit to undertake the charge. I had thought, through your introduction, to have consulted Lady Grantham, of whose excellent management I have heard from many quarters; for my own experience of northern education assures me it does not afford all, I think, a girl in Laurette's station requires. But here I am chatting to you as if we have been friends from childhood, instead of strangers—and yet, I must recall that word—the wife of Lionel is not strange either to my thoughts or my affection, and though he and I have been much separated, I trust he has so interested you in favor of his sister" (he had scarcely ever named her till very lately), "as to have secured her a place in your heart. They do say we are so much alike" (God forbid that the resemblance should extend to character, was the silent prayer of the reader), "that no one can doubt the relationship, and therefore hoping he has not monopolized all your love" (a sigh so deep that even the Colonel looked up from his papers), "I put in my sisterly claim for a portion. Of my dear husband I do not trust myself to speak—those who love goodness, honor, and truth, must love and respect him. Laurette—it is well the

paper reminds me there are limits to it, and that there ought to be the same even to a mother's garrulity—in brief, like herself, for she is petite, I earnestly hope she may win a place in your esteem and that of her uncle, as readily as I shall bestow mine on your dear little girls. I was very nearly verifying the old censorious remark, that the real substance of a lady's letter is in the postscript, but I remember in time to escape the charge, that we shall all, Laurette of course included, be delighted to find ourselves your guests on Friday week. Laurette has just come in. 'Well, darling, what message to Seabrooke?' 'Oh! mamma, a thousand, thousand kisses to my cousins and my beautiful aunt and uncle.' After that Orientalism, tame English can furnish nothing more expressive. With love to Lionel, adieu, your affectionate sister. LAURA SINCLAIR."

"What an interminable letter! but Laura could always say an infinite deal of nothing," was the fraternal remark, as Mrs. Templeton closed the letter. "Do they come, and when?"

"Yes, and on Friday week."

"For how long?"

"Mrs. Sinclair does not say, but she mentions an appointment to India instead of Africa, which will keep them there for years."

"To India! with Laura's handsome legacy (it was not equal to half the amount of his wife's fortune), I should think they might have managed to remain."

"She alludes to some incumbrances on the property, which Mr. Sinclair wishes to clear off."

"The more fool he, to go toiling and broiling for such a purpose. Why can not he help his father to sell?"

"Perhaps they may have strong feelings about family name and old inheritance. I like the idea of working to retain the property, it shows an independent and unselfish spirit."

"What nonsense you are always talking, Ellinor,"—she very rarely volunteered an opinion, but something in this letter had more than usually stirred her—"really it is quite wearying to be perpetually listening to such sentiment and absurdity; however, it is not my affair; I only know that all my ancestrial acres, if I had ever possessed any, and all my ancestors too, might be sold to the highest bidder, before I would be chained to the oar in this manner." And after this dignified exposition of his sentiments he whistled himself out of the room.

The Sinclairs came, but Mrs. Sinclair was baffled in her scheme of leaving Laurette as a pledge of her confidence in her brother's affection. And though no one could be kinder than Ellinor, it was not possible to persuade her that Helen, little more than three, and Constance, scarcely two years old, would be better attended to with a nursery governess than with their homely but sensible German nurse; and as Lionel never once responded to her hints, that in so large a house as Seabrooke Priory a few rooms especially devoted to Laura and a governess would never be missed, and only add to the cheerfulness of what she secretly thought rather a dull party, she, quite unruffled by disappointment, decided that Laurette must be placed with some lady near London, as the only means of securing the advantage of those accomplishments she deemed indispensable; and as Ellinor had requested leave to have her at the Priory during her holidays, a request which was readily accorded, Mrs. Sinclair left the matter there, thinking it very likely one of the holidays might extend to a permanent residence.

Happily Mrs. Sinclair, though like her brother in personal advantages, and with something of his calculating selfishness, had, in most other respects, an advantageous dissimilarity. She was affectionate and grateful, capable of understanding and appreciating honor and truth in others, and of practicing them herself, when no sophistry led her to fancy they would injure her cause—faint praise this. In short, she was one in whom dependence and narrow means had developed all that was paltry and mean; perhaps wealth might have equally brought about the same result, but it would not have been so glaring and contemptible. Be this as it may, the impression she made on her sister-in-law was decidedly in her favor, while to Mrs. Sinclair, Ellinor freely accorded the respect and trust his character eminently deserved; and they parted with feelings of mutual regard on the side of the ladies, though Laura was bitterly disappointed in the discovery she made of Lionel's real worthlessness, and his conduct to one whose goodness and gentleness merited a far better return.

A few weeks after the Sinclairs had left, Lady Grantham, with her characteristic frankness, volunteered a visit, which to Ellinor was particularly agreeable. She was strongly attached to both her brother and his wife; the cheerful acquiescence of the former in many privations, his firm opposition to expenses which his rank seemed to demand, but which his means forbade, were strong bonds of union between them, for Ellinor shared all her brother's horror and hatred of debt and dependence; and never, perhaps, had she so thoroughly valued the transparency of Lady Grantham's unaffected manners and candid nature than during this visit, following so closely as it did that of the Sinclairs, when Ellinor, with all her wish to feel kindly, had sometimes been oppressed by the studied manners and well-turned phrases of Laura.

The Granthams spoke in raptures of the Priory; the beauty of the situation and the magnificence of the house furnished an unfailing topic for praise and admiration, while his lordship thought sometimes, with a sigh, of his own deeply-mortgaged estates when he beheld Seabrooke, not only so lovely and well-managed, but so uncncumbered.

It happened that while they were at the Priory some races took place, which were to be succeeded by a ball, at which, of course, the Templetons, who had been generally adopted by the neighboring families, must appear; and it was during a discussion about the mode of going, that Lady Grantham inquired if they should be expected to go *en grande tenue?*

"Of course," replied Lionel, very decidedly, "it will be our first appearance in public, except at the races, and I mean it to be said, that I take two of the best dressed, as well as two of the most beautiful women in the room."

"As Colonel Templeton commands," she gayly replied, "to hear is to obey—easy, perhaps, as to

the best dressed—but to be so, I must ask you, Cecil, to desire Coutts to forward my jewel-case. Ellinor described all here as so Arcadian, that I had no idea of full dress. I suppose," she continued, turning to Ellinor, "you will wear your pearls, unless," with her charming smile, addressing the Colonel, "you have presented her with something more splendid."

"I do not know—I believe not"—stammered Mrs. Templeton, blushing to the very temples.

The Colonel struck in to spare her—no, not her—to spare himself. "By the way, Ellinor, has Storr returned your set? they were rather antique, according to present taste in the setting," he added, with ready wit; "remind him by this post, that he must hurry and forward them."

"He has sold them," said Lady Grantham, to herself only—she had not made many remarks about his sister even to her husband; nor was this mental assertion withdrawn or weakened when Mrs. Templeton, on the appointed evening, appeared looking very lovely and wearing a parure of pearls of great price, which scarcely enhanced her beauty. On Lady Grantham's admiring the resetting, Colonel Templeton carelessly remarked, "Diamonds would have been almost too ostentatious; have you seen Ellinor's?" and receiving a negative, they were brought, pronounced regal, and sent back to the—jeweler.

CHAPTER VII.

"Quelles intrigues ce présentent à nous dans les histoires! quel renversement des lois et des mœurs, quelles guerres sanglantes, quelles nouveautés contre la religion quelles révolutions d'état causées par le déréglement des femmes! Voilà ce qui prouve l'importance de bien élever les filles."—FÉNÉLON.

HELEN was now eight years old, and though her mother had hitherto found her chief pleasure in teaching her children herself, she began to find that, as Constance put forth her claims to attention, she could not give so much time to this duty as it required, and decided, therefore, on having some assistance, without relinquishing the superintendence—in short, to engage a lady who would be always with the children, and relieve Gretchen from that constant attendance which her faithful love so willingly gave, but which was no longer needful or advantageous to the little girls.

On all subjects connected with her children, Mrs. Templeton decided and acted without reference to her husband; she never yet had consulted him in any of her arrangements; there seemed to be some secret compact, that here she was quite independent, though, on almost every other occasion, she was passive, waiting merely to do what he proposed. She therefore wrote to Lady Grantham, and the result was, the arrival of a lady-like young person, who had been well educated, but who from the death of relatives and loss of fortune was forced to exert herself for a maintenance.

Thus recommended and heralded, she was received by Mrs. Templeton with all that thoughtful kindness which adversity teaches the benevolent and gentle-minded how to practice. A set of comfortable rooms was prepared, and with the ready aid of Mrs. Dawson, who loved her quiet lady and pretty children, every thing was arranged so as to make the stranger feel at home.

When the Colonel was absent in town, or elsewhere, as he often was, Mrs. Templeton would invite Miss Grant to walk, or drive, or sit with her, when free from her duties with the children; or she would ask leave to be herself a guest in the study; and thus all went on pleasantly and successfully for more than a year, when Mrs. Templeton was grieved to perceive a great change come over her young friend, for so she kindly termed her. She at first thought that the monotony of her duties was becoming wearisome; but Miss Grant applied herself more assiduously than ever to their performance, frequently declining invitations to a drive or a walk, under the plea of preparing for the lessons of the following day.

"You do not look well," remarked Mrs. Templeton, one morning; "give the children a few days' holiday, and let me drive you a little about this charming country. I am so indifferent about change or variety myself, that I forget you are younger and less sober minded." Then, seeing tears in Miss Grant's eyes, she added, cheerfully, "Come, we will be very gay, and drive over to Seaport; the children want a few playthings, so we will all go *en famille*."

These, and many acts of similar kindness, appearing only to increase the depression of her companion, Mrs. Templeton thought she had made a grand discovery, and resolved to try another remedy.

"Miss Grant," she said, one evening, when they were alone, and kindly laying her hand in a motherly way on her shoulder, "I am not so old as quite to have forgotten my youth," and she bravely kept back a sigh. "I think I have found out your secret."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Miss Grant, shrinking from her touch, and looking up wildly.

"Nay, nay, this excitement is wholly uncalled for; if you expect to find a severe censor in me, you are mistaken, I have no doubt, from all I have seen of you, that any one you love is quite worthy of the distinction. Am I not correct in my guess?"

"Oh! no, no," almost groaned the poor girl.

"In that case, there is the greater need of some friend to whom you can unburden your mind; can not I be that friend?"

Miss Grant looked earnestly at her for a moment, and then, in a paroxysm of tears, murmured, "Oh, never, never! this kindness will kill me!"

Mrs. Templeton, perceiving her efforts at present were fruitless, rose, and saying, "Well, no more to-night, but to-morrow we must again talk of this, when I think I shall have a little plan to propose, which I hope will please you," left the room.

Then did Miss Grant indeed give way to the very frenzy of grief, when she found herself alone—then, amidst sobs and sighs which seemed wrung from a broken heart, did she utter words of strange and fearful import; till, worn out with sorrow and weeping, she laid her head on her pillow, and fell into a feverish sleep, from which

she, however, awoke calmer, and better able to think what she must do.

The next morning, a kind inquiry, which Miss Grant's heavy looks called forth, gave an opportunity for renewing the subject, which was met so calmly, that Mrs. Templeton proceeded at once to say, she thought a short visit to her friends might be of essential benefit, and enable her to resume her duties with renewed energy. Rather to Mrs. Templeton's astonishment, this offer was eagerly accepted, and it was settled that in the course of a few days, she should have a holiday for at least several weeks.

She went, and at the expiration of the appointed time, Mrs. Templeton received a letter from her, in which she said, that not finding her health equal to the resumption of her charge, she, with deep regret, resigned it.

The post-mark of the letter was from an obscure place in Wales, but, greatly to Mrs. Templeton's vexation, no address was inclosed; and she, who truly regretted the termination of their acquaintance, and especially that illness was the cause, and whose kind and generous heart would have prompted her to say so, was obliged to keep silence, and trust to some future letter for information which should enable her to express this.

An interval of a few months then occurred, and again she busied herself with her children's education, when Lady Grantham paid a visit to the Priory; this time she was accompanied by Cecilia, a splendid hoyden of fourteen, but whose perfect temper and unselfish habits rendered her a favorite with every one.

Before they left, Colonel Templeton returned from one of those absences for which he never accounted by the most distant hint, and Cecilia quickly won him to humor all her whims, and laugh at all her tricks, by her undisguised admiration of him, and her fearless attacks upon what she called his bad habits. She influenced him as no one else ever had done—she made him put away his cigar, because she hated its horribly vulgar smell—she lectured him for reading his paper, instead of making himself agreeable—laughed when he frowned, because it made him look old, and insisted that he should go riding with her and Ellen, though he declared she disgraced him by her bad horsemanship; and when she alleged that, as a reason for riding all the more frequently, because he could teach her so well, he would yield, and order the horses to be ready, for, what she called, a good scamper before luncheon.

Still, with all this harum-scarum manner, Cecilia was never betrayed into any thing like vulgarity, a *soupçon* of pride and command in all she did giving it a piquancy which was very attractive to her uncle; while her high principle and daring truthfulness rendered her equally agreeable to her aunt.

After this short inroad on their quiet, the usual calm settled on the majestic old Priory, and once more were the children's studies resumed, this time under the direction of an older and more accomplished governess than Miss Grant—a lady whose family were friends of Mrs. Vernon's. At first, Mrs. Templeton thought she had made a mistake in this engagement. Miss Lee was much less accessible than her former favorite; she kept the study more to herself, and made it evident that her hours of leisure were strictly to be such. Occasionally this reserve was laid aside, and Mrs. Templeton then became sensible that, if she had lost in youth and simplicity of character, she had gained in all that valuable but hard-earned knowledge which experience and high intellect alone achieve: and again all seemed to go well.

Col. Templeton also was more at home, and frequently proposed excursions and drives about the neighborhood, in which he accompanied them.

Mrs. Vernon and her daughter Caroline, the latter a very desirable companion for the Templeton girls, were now frequent guests at the Priory; and when Laurette joined them during some of her holidays, and above all, when Cecilia Grantham was there, the mirthful sound of young voices, and the ringing laugh arising from cheerful young hearts made pleasant music, and broke the customary quiet of Seabrooke Priory very agreeably.

Scarcely, however, had Mrs. Templeton so fully realized this sunny change, as to have indulged in the hope of its being durable, than again clouds darkened her domestic horizon; and again they collected, lowering and threatening, from the same quarter.

Miss Lee, hitherto so unobtrusive and retiring, seemed restless and uncomfortable if left alone; she was often at the Rectory, or with the children, of whom she never liked to lose sight, hovering about Mrs. Templeton, in a manner strangely at variance with her former love of solitude and her remarkably studious habits. One evening—well did Mrs. Templeton remember it—after a day spent in a social picnic with the Vernons, to whom the Colonel had been unusually gracious, and during which every one had appeared particularly happy, she had retired rather earlier than was her custom to her rooms, and was writing to Lady Grantham, when a knock was heard at the boudoir-door. Believing it to be her maid, she uttered the usual "come in," and Miss Lee presented herself.

"I fear I intrude," she remarked, glancing at the writing materials, still, however, advancing.

"Not at all, my letter can well be postponed, and give place to a little chat with you;" but raising her eyes to her visitor's countenance, a foreboding of something, she knew not what, but which she was certain would be unpleasant, made Mrs. Templeton feel faint.

Miss Lee could hardly be called handsome; and yet there was so much character in the face and well-shaped head, so much intellect in her flexible and eloquent features, that no one could dispute the existence of mental superiority—there was also the irritability of a sensitive, perhaps a hasty temper, in her quick movements and decided action, though this was never suffered to appear in the well-disciplined tone or word.

By an evident effort, she replied to the friendly speech of Mrs. Templeton, saying rather abruptly, "I have come to a decision which is very painful to me, and which compels me to say that I can no longer discharge my duties to your dear children—that I must leave them and you—and at once"

"Is it so—and is it ever to be so?" murmured

Mrs. Templeton, more as if to herself than in reply to Miss Lee's communication; "but will you not tell me why you decide on a measure I must so deeply regret? is the place haunted, that some unknown evil spirit thus drives away first one, and then another?" and she tried to smile at her own absurd supposition.

But there was no answering smile on that resolute-looking mouth, no mirthful spirit was it that sparkled in those expressive gray eyes.

"Madam," she said quietly but sternly, "you have unconsciously spoken the truth—the place *is* haunted, and by an evil spirit that knows neither remorse nor pity—on whom the sacred considerations of wife and children have no effect—whose touch is contamination—and whose words and looks are dishonor—need I proceed?"

"No—yes—Heaven help me! what have I to hear—what have I still to suffer?" She hid her face in her hands for a brief space, then by an effort crossed the room and fastened the door.

"Now, Miss Lee," she said, seating herself by her, "speak, and tell me all—let no false pity stop you."

"Dear Mrs. Templeton," she replied, with a voice and manner whose gentleness contrasted forcibly with the inflexibility of her opening words, "when I entered this room such was my intention; and though I had anticipated a difficult duty, I confess the task is more painful than I expected; I therefore ask you neither to pardon nor excuse what I may say, for if you blamed me I should still say on. Do you know any thing, since she left, of the lady whose place I supply?"

"Only," replied Mrs. Templeton in a husky voice, "through one short letter. I much regretted her departure, especially as she left in ill health, and, I fear, in sorrow—but this you have often heard me allude to."

"Yes I have, but you do not, then, know that she is dead?" A faint shriek burst from the horrified and unhappy listener. "She died giving birth to a child, who died also—the father is Colonel Templeton!"

"Oh, this is too much, too much—my burden is greater than I can bear!" groaned the miserable wife.

Miss Lee, scarcely less moved, drew near; she took the passive hand, she pressed it kindly, and with a tremulous voice asked, "You do not hate me for telling you this?—believe me, nothing but a strong sense of what was due to you, to your innocent girls, to myself, to my whole sex, could have carried me through this distressing disclosure. And now you are quite overcome, shall I ring for your maid, or will you permit me to wait on you—or shall I go?—only say what will be the least painful to you."

"Stay," said Mrs. Templeton, endeavoring to rally her thoughts, "stay; my maid never sits up beyond a given hour, which is past—but you will be overtasked," she added, with her usual kindness.

"Not so; if I might choose, I would prefer remaining," and she did so; and after calming herself by a powerful effort, Mrs Templeton begged her to relate at once all she had come prepared to say.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Turn all your eyes on me; here stands a man,
The falsest and the basest of this world.
Set swords against this breast, some honest man."
Philaster.

"After the novelty of my situation had worn away, I hope I need not tell you that my duties were performed with punctuality and cheerfulness; naturally shy, I at first kept myself secluded, from both habit and choice. I felt that if your kindness allowed more familiarity, I could easily throw off my reserve; but I shrank from encountering a repulse for too much freedom. Pardon me, if I say that it was impossible to be many months domesticated under your roof without giving up all my energies to serve one so amiable as yourself, and, as I soon perceived, so unhappy. You remember, soon after my arrival, Colonel Templeton left for Paris—how pleasant was that period to me—you had encouraged me to emerge from my shell, and I ventured to look forward to the time when, having completed your children's education, I should be remembered as your friend—dear Mrs. Vernon was delighted at having been the means of introducing me to such a home, where for some years, at least, the future to me seemed sunny and cheerful.

"It was then that the Colonel returned; and again I would have withdrawn to my privacy; but this your kindness, which included me in all your parties of pleasure, prevented. At first Colonel Templeton's equivocal manner perplexed, without alarming me; and though I could not understand the meaning of various circumstances which occurred, they yet made me uncomfortable and uneasy. I really did feel so secure in my own integrity and freedom from all doubtful behavior; so sure that the very situation I filled was a safeguard, that it was long before a suspicion of the truth dawned on my mind, and very slowly did I admit it; it seemed too horrible—the father of my beloved pupils, the master of the house! Again he left for a short time; but since his return, a system of quiet persecution has been commenced, which has alarmed me. A fortnight ago I named much of this to Mrs. Vernon; she fancied, or hoped, I had been oversensitive, but she was far from blaming me, and enjoined the utmost caution, both in my own behavior, and in speaking of what might lead to so much domestic misery. To-day, this evening, the study has been intruded on, and"—she paused, more from indignation than embarrassment, being far too much roused for the latter feeling—"and Mrs. Dawson heard me order Colonel Templeton instantly to leave the room. This, after first rudely refusing, he did: I confess that I was much overcome by his insulting conduct, and gladly accepted Mrs. Dawson's offer to remain an hour with me; from her I learned the dreadful tragedy of my predecessor's fate, which has become known through the gossip of the Colonel's servant."

Such, in brief, was her statement of the case; but Miss Lee, as much out of pity to her pale listener, as respect to herself, had suppressed many things which marked the deep depravity

of her persecutor, and invested him with all the characteristics of a hardened profligate.

She finally expressed a hope that Mrs. Templeton would approve of her prompt disclosure, and equally prompt resolve; both were imperatively called for to prevent any recurrence in future of such proceedings; she now placed herself entirely in Mrs Templeton's hands, being most desirous of acting so as not to increase her difficulties.

"*Your* course is plain, dear Miss Lee—you must leave me. Pained and humiliated as I am at hearing this disgraceful history, believe me, I feel infinitely your debtor for your having with such honor and courage shown me exactly how I am placed. *My* path is, in many respects, and for many causes, neither so clear nor so easy to pursue. But after what you have learned, and the prudent use you have made of that knowledge, concealment of the sad mysteries of my life is impossible, as well as needless; though you will be the first, yes, the first, not excepting even my dear brother, to whom I have ever hinted at my situation or sorrows. My marriage was a love-match—on my side—I mean—Colonel Templeton married my fortune; when that was gone, he had no longer a wife I could not, if it were useful, tell you all I have suffered, or relate to you all the infamy I have passed through; it was no arm of earthly love which led me, uncontaminated, through these horrors; it was no husband's honorable solicitude which kept me from falling as low as any of the degraded beings among whom I, a young wife, a young mother, was thrown God was very merciful to me, and remembered me in my agony and trial; agony and trial to body and mind. He led me safely through, and once more has He brought me to the shelter of my home and my relatives, and for this, praised be His name." She paused, and for a few minutes seemed lost in thought; then looking up, and seeing Miss Lee's eyes fixed with inquiring sympathy on her, she remarked, "You look as if you thought I had redress in my own power; you forget my children, my beautiful, innocent girls; had I separated from Colonel Templeton, think you that they would have been left with me? if so, you know nothing of the cruelty and revenge of which a base and depraved nature is capable; besides, he does not wish me formally to leave his house; he knows that one step taken in that direction must lead to another, and in eyes of the world he has still something to lose, which he would gladly retain. Thus, then, the matter stands between us. I consent to remain, having entire liberty to do as I please with my children, for which an ample allowance is made; but beyond this I am fettered; if I move, so will they, and be taken from my loving care for years, perhaps forever; and, great God! to what might they not be exposed? for if once an open rupture were made I have every thing to dread from him. I am convinced he would pause at nothing by which I could be wounded. No, no, mine was the mistake, on me be its consequences, but oh! spare my sweet girls!"

She burst into a passion of tears, which were as freely shed by her auditor, but more silently; then raising her head, she added, "We are both too much agitated and excited to prolong this interview. To-morrow we will be guided by event in the mean time, if you can think for me, do so."

Inexpressibly touched by her gentle but s looks and tones, Miss Lee respectfully raised h hand to her lips; but Mrs. Templeton kissed h fondly on the cheek, saying, "Out of evil w come good, if from this bitter trial I gain friend."

And with strange and sorrowful feelings fillir the hearts and thoughts of each, they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

"Give sorrow, words; the grief that does not speak,
Whispers the o'erfraught heart, and bids it break."
Macbeth

The following morning every thing seemed proceed as usual; for the children always takir their breakfast in the study, Miss Lee's mann could cast no shadow of coming events, by whi their shape might be recognized when they d arrive. Had Colonel Templeton taken much n tice of his wife, he would have perceived that sl looked paler and more thoughtful than commor but this he did not, and, in fact, rather relieve her, by planning a little excursion for the ne day, which she understood as a proof that he w ignorant of the disclosure that had been mad in which she was correct.

Quite unable to enter quickly into difference character, and unobservant of the quiet digni and reserve which marked Miss Lee's behavior, had ranked her among the sentimental romant class to which poor Miss Grant belonged; a cla who have honor, affection, and sense enough carry them through life, respected and loved, kept from temptation; but who with no princip to sustain, no strong feeling of right to suppc them in the hour of trial, when that time com fall an easy prey to the destroyer.

Directly she was at liberty, and her husba busy with his agent, Mrs. Templeton hastened the study, and sending the children with Grete en to the Rectory, where they were ever welcon she informed Miss Lee of the result of her anxio vigils.

"It is evident to me that I can not, that I mu not even attempt to carry on my children's educ tion under this roof."

"I agree with you," said Miss Lee; "y would not be justified in making the attempt."

"But what then can I do? From the spe mens which I have too often met with of sch education, I have contracted a very strong repu nance to exposing either Helen or Constan especially the former, to the influence of girls whom I myself know nothing. I am not obje ing wholly on the ground of difference of statio though the effects of that are also to be consider —not because of less nobility or less wealth, b because, among unselected associates, vulgar opi ions, low sentiments, and paltry feelings are to dreaded; added to this, I own to a very decid prepossession in favor of home influence, whe the mother, as I trust I should be, is ready to s in concert with an intelligent instructress."

"My opinion entirely coincides with yours," answered Miss Lee, "and I know not why any dread of being misapprehended should deter me from trying to aid you; though this will involve a display of egotism to which I am not much addicted."

"Oh, help me, if you can," exclaimed Mrs. Templeton, with energy; "and give all false scruples to the winds."

"My sister, Mrs. Loftus," said she, thus adjured, "is the widow of an officer, who died about eighteen months ago in India. Her right to some property is disputed, but we are assured vexatiously and unjustly—still, while it is withheld, my sister is reduced to a very scanty income. She has two little girls, rather older than yours; and it is, I know, her earnest wish so to educate them as to render them independent of any adverse circumstance except ill health. To assist her, by pecuniary aid, I am here; but in order fully to carry out her views, she is very desirous of obtaining two, at the most three, pupils, to educate with them. This would justify the expense of engaging superior talent in various accomplishments, and it would make all the children feel, from an early age, that they are not to measure excellence by their own attainments, nor limit it by their own powers; superiority will thus encourage industry, not foster conceit—and inferiority will not depress, but keep them modest."

"Said I not well that out of evil comes good?" eagerly interrupted Mrs. Templeton; "my own vision realized—except," she added with a sigh, "the separation."

"But that only for a short time," suggested Miss Lee.

"True; and now the best way to arrange all this? Put me immediately in correspondence with Mrs. Loftus—that appears the first step I have never yet left the Priory for a night since my arrival, but to gain this great advantage I shall not hesitate to do any thing that is needful; and by cheerfully consenting to part from my darlings, I give them the best proof that my love is unselfish and wise."

"I think, nay, I am sure, you will like my sister," said Miss Lee; "she has seen much of the cloudy side of life, and I have often felt, when you have been discussing various subjects, that you and she entertained the same opinions."

"Shall you reside with her?"

"I rather think not; I have an unmarried brother, whose housekeeper I was till her bereavement and return to England, and when I came here she took my place. But if, through any arrangements you make, she can succeed in her plan regarding her children, I shall again resume the reins at my brother's till he marries."

"Then consider that quite settled," said Mrs. Templeton; "and now about yourself—what are your immediate wishes and intentions?"

"I was up very early this morning, and have collected and packed all my belongings, purposing to leave, so as not again to meet—in short, to go at once."

"Of course," said Mrs. Templeton, "Mrs. Vernon can not know of this last occurrence."

"Certainly not," replied Miss Lee; "she knows nothing since we parted yesterday—though, as I informed you, I had previously consulted her—and no one here, but Mrs. Dawson, on whose discretion I can fully rely, is aware that any thing unpleasant has happened."

"Will you object to remaining a few days at the Rectory," asked Mrs. Templeton; "I have so often heard Mrs. Vernon urge it, that I am sure she will be delighted. In making this request I am rather selfish, I shall be so glad to have you near while in correspondence with Mrs. Loftus; it will also remove any suspicion Colonel Templeton may entertain as to my being in your confidence, a fact he will never learn from me; it will also show him that you are well protected, and render him more cautious how he ventures to persevere in his insulting conduct."

"I shall willingly remain, as you see no objection, and most happy shall I be to further your negotiation with my sister."

"Then we will go at once," said Mrs. Templeton, "for I have decided on another measure, the result of our conversation last night. I have felt so great a relief from having in this slight degree opened my heart to you, that I shall no longer go about with this terrible secret, as if it were my crime instead of my misfortune, and deny myself the comfort of sympathy and advice. You look as if this resolve surprised you."

"I own it does," said Miss Lee, courageously; "the good sense and propriety, no less than the fortitude of your conduct, are exactly the qualities in which society at large are so deficient—I render a deep and voluntary homage to the character of those who can say—

> 'There is a silent sorrow here,
> It heaves no sigh, it sheds no tear;'

but perhaps I am rather stoical; I know I am not very fond of pity on my own account."

"I must try and make myself understood," said Mrs. Templeton; "otherwise, though I think we agree, you will fancy we differ. Colonel Templeton is my husband—no matter what else he is—his conduct will not affect my argument. While I consent to remain with him, I think nothing would be more reprehensible than for me to weary alike friends and acquaintances with his faults and my sorrows—my silence does not, at any rate, make the matter worse, my complaints certainly would; and it is this strong conviction which has hitherto guided my proceedings. But events may arise, when the aid and counsel of another may be useful, indeed necessary—when trials, which are never purposeless, may, by our unwise reception, become irritants, leading to murmuring and discontent, instead of blessed instruments for correcting and hallowing all our feelings. I am, therefore, determined no longer to close my ear to the voice of wise and friendly sympathy; nor to infold myself in an iron shroud, which buries alike my hopes with my disappointment. Am I now very wrong? To the many I am still dumb—but do not forbid the over-racked victim to groan—do not say the sharp pang shall force out *no* cry."

"Far from it, very far from it," said Miss Lee, with animation; "you are fully justified in the resolution you have taken; you would, indeed, be wrong if you refused this means of relief. What I meant to censure was, that the egotism which perpetually talks of itself in the most wearisome of characters, that of complainer—which parades

its sorrows before every one, and collects sympathy as a tax. Not that I ever thought it possible you, with your refinement and dignity of character, your studied avoidance of domestic and petty details, could ever descend to this level; but I was jealous, dear Mrs. Templeton, lest you should not, in every respect, fully offer an excuse for my deep admiration of your character."

"But you do not suppose me proof against a little delicate flattery," she observed with a smile. "Now we will no longer delay our drive to the Rectory, where I shall leave you, depending on your kindness to do all you can for me."

The children and Gretchen were sent back in the carriage, which was to return and fetch Mrs. Templeton, who was happily spared the feverishness of hesitation and doubt, by finding Mr. Vernon at home. With him she had a long and private interview; and though her beautiful face looked very sad, and tears stood in her loving, dark eyes as she kissed and bade farewell to Miss Lee, she whispered, "I was quite right, for though you must go away, I have wise and warm friends left here."

Colonel Templeton expressed no astonishment when informed of Miss Lee's sudden departure, though he felt surprised when, through his private inquiries, he found she intended to remain a week at the Rectory; and where, in spite of all his maneuvers, he never could see her; but undeterred by this, he took effectual measures to trace her thence to London, fully determining not to be baffled in his pursuit, by what he thought either prudery or deliberate artifice.

Helen and Constance were loud in their complaints at her absence, and most persevering in their inquiries as to her return; but in less than two months the negotiation had been so successfully carried on with Mrs. Loftus, much facilitated by her spending a few days at the Rectory, and saving Mrs. Templeton a journey to London, that, avowing herself weary and disheartened by these perpetual changes, Miss Lee having decided on remaining with her family, she now intended to place Helen and Constance at school, where, for the present, Gretchen would accompany them as their personal attendant.

Various were the comments passed by various individuals when the plan became known; but as these parties have been rather disrespectfully kept in the background, leave we the children to acquire as much knowledge as their brains will comfortably bear, and to gain as many accomplishments as they have talents for, while we become enlightened as to the neighborhood, or rather the neighbors of the Priory.

CHAPTER X.

"Si on n'goûte point ces caractères, je m'en étonne; si on les goûte, je m'en étonne de même."—LA BRUYÈRE.

THE Forresters of Forest Hill, as one of the oldest county families, claim precedence, though, as they never stood out in very bold relief on any occasion, not even during an election, they will soon be dismissed; they must, however, be put in the catalogue.

Mr. Forrester had married late in life a lady of suitable age; for if she had gained but little knowledge of life, it had not been for lack of time. By the death of her brother, the handsome estate of Hargraves became hers, and though this acquisition was by no means the reason why Mr. Forrester thought the lady suitable as a wife, it certainly had something to do with suggesting that idea.

Had Hargraves been a hundred miles off, it is probable he would never have cared for it or its owner; but Hargraves joined Forest Hill, and those who have ever noticed the effect of such propinquity on country gentlemen, will understand how it influenced the thoughts and feelings of Mr. Forrester. Therefore, if, as Miss Hargrave, she was good, as Mrs. Forrester she was better; but when she became the mother of the future heir of Forest Hill and Hargraves to boot, she was decidedly best. Mr. Forrester was proud, pompous, and cold, very kind to his dependents, among whom he was extremely popular; honorable and just, almost to sternness, in all his transactions; stately and repulsive, well-bred and exclusive. His wife was his reflection in almost every respect, except that, while the father was prouder of Hubert as his heir than as his son, the mother reversed this, being fonder of her handsome boy, her affectionate, her beautiful Hubert, than proud of him as the future representative of two families, which had been known and respected for many centuries.

Sir William and Lady Dallas, with their numerous but youthful family, come next in order. They were people of good property, who inhabited the Grange, a building which originally merited that name, but it had been gradually so changed, enlarged, and improved, as to resemble, in point of identity, that celebrated stumbling-block to metaphysicians, Sir Francis Drake's ship, which had been so often patched and repaired, that not one piece of the original remained. So with the Grange; now a handsome mansion sheltered from all ungenial influences, and surrounded with beautiful gardens, rich fields, and fertile meadows.

Nearly as it now was, Sir William received it from his father, the first Baronet; and having married a lady of large fortune, good connection, and fashionable tastes, the Grange became, *par excellence*, the focus of gayety and amusement. Their arrival as residents had been previous to that of the Templetons, between whom and themselves, in spite of many impediments to strong friendship, there sprang up much kind feeling.

Sir William was a frank, amiable man, and an indulgent husband, passionately fond of country sports and agricultural experiments; exactly the man whose active habits, intelligent mind, and ample fortune enabled him, without injury, to introduce those scientific measures, the failure of which would be ruinous to the small farmer, but which, when hazarded by the rich and enterprising landed proprietor, eventually lead to real improvement and final success.

And Lady Dallas, what was she? Miss Lee has already alluded to one of her habits, as being, in her opinion, particularly objectionable. Her ladyship was a complainer; it was not exactly from discontent, for she was too grateful to feel that;

still less was it low spirits, for when she had emptied her tiny vial of small troubles on the head of some luckless listener, who so gay as she? It often reminded a spectator of the little man and woman in the weather-house; as the one listened and grew weary or sad from sympathy, so she became gay and cheerful, and fluttered away, ready to chirp and sing with the first merry bird she encountered.

Kind but egotistical, teasing and complaining, but ever ready, nay, eager to serve others, it seemed as if she realized in her pretty little person the John Bull character of her countrymen —that she is never happy but when grumbling. Quite free from pride and envy, she was, upon the whole, popular; still she was occasionally oppressive and wearying, for, in a word, *tant soit peu*, she was a bore. She bored about her servants, her children, her relations, and what, in Mrs. Templeton's opinion, was most inexcusable, about her husband; and yet all this was the result of thoughtlessness and want of employment; it gave her an opportunity of talking about herself, and indirectly paying herself a compliment; she would tell of her trials—her trials, forsooth! and then allude to the magnanimity with which they were endured. This she would evince, by being the very butterfly of the place, driving about from house to house, and depositing everywhere her little amount of boredom. Added to this, she was essentially without tact, utterly insensible to the eloquence of the tone, the look, the manner, which, to the sensitive, speaks with the clearness of a trumpet, and tells that sympathy and politeness are exhausted, and that weariness is beginning; but on she went, humming, drumming, complaining, lamenting, "and inflicting her tediousness" on all who would permit it. As to comprehending the character of Mrs. Templeton, she was no more capable of doing that, than of reading the Arundelian Marbles; and not having the least suspicion, till many years after their introduction, of her real situation, she constantly made her the subject of her indirect animadversions, by canvassing her proceedings, and being astonished at her doings; and all this without the least malice or ill nature.

Lord Hurstwood, in point of rank, should have been first introduced, but as age, infirmity, and a severe loss in the death of an only daughter, rendered him quite a recluse, we pass him over; his son being a bachelor, and an absentee, in neither character has a claim on our notice, and will therefore remain unannounced till he becomes one of the recognized inhabitants of the county.

Toward the seaward side of the village was a pretty little place, claiming and meriting no more dignified appellation than that of Seaview Cottage, occupied by a lady, whom, almost simultaneously with the arrival of Miss Lee, Lady Grantham had introduced to the notice of the Colonel and his wife as an early friend of hers, recently a widow, in fact, a distant connection of Lionel's. Her husband, Mr. West, had held an excellent appointment, the income of which he not only spent, but exceeded; so that at his death, which happened unexpectedly, his widow had nothing but a small annuity, and very delicate health. Her only child, a boy, was most generously adopted by an unmarried relative, the next heir to the Westrough title and estates, the present Lord having only daughters.

Lord Ernest West had lost, by death, the lady to whom he was passionately attached, and since that event had led a very secluded life, having withdrawn to the solitude of Old Court, which, with a splendid fortune, he inherited from his mother, the late Lord's second wife.

Lady Grantham shrewdly suggested that in this adoption of the young Reginald, the possible heir to the title, there was some *arrière pensée* of contracting him to one of his lady cousins; and perhaps she was correct. But the undoubted consequence of this measure was, that Reginald remained at Eton at Lord Ernest's expense, and that his mother's income received a small addition, sufficient to insure her comfort.

Under these circumstances, Mrs. West received kindness and attention, not only from the Templetons, who readily admitted her claim, but from the whole neighborhood, whom her gentle and ladylike manners could not fail to please; while Reginald, a handsome, spirited boy, about fifteen, mounted on his pony, or driving his mother in her tiny chaise, was quite as much at the Priory as at the Cottage, or, as Cecilia observed, as he was on the road, and by whom in allusion to his equestrian tastes he was laughingly called the Honest Highwayman.

"How beautiful your flowers are," remarked Mrs. Forrester to Lady Dallas, as they walked through an elegant conservatory recently added to the Grange.

"Yes, they are very pretty; but I advise you, Mrs. Forrester, never to have your conservatory opening on to the drawing-room—sometimes I am quite overcome with the perfume from the cape jasmine, orange, and other scented flowers."

"You have only to close the double door; besides, your caution is too late to me."

"As to shutting the door, that is useless; Sir William is perpetually going through, and is so thoughtless, he always forgets—really his new plans and inventions keep us in constant confusion —only imagine, the new-fashioned flues were over-heated last week, and we were terrified by the cry of fire."

"But I was told you were *quitte pour la peur*," replied Mrs. Forrester; and as gardeners will over-heat even old-fashioned warming apparatus, it is better to have one which is so easily managed."

"Oh, you have no idea of the trouble all these things are; there was our coachman the other day"—but seeing or feeling from which quarter the wind was blowing, Mrs. Forrester, as she had often done before, shortened her visit.

"Is it quite true," inquired Lady Dallas of Mrs. Vernon, on whom she was calling, "that the little Templetons have been banished to a London school?"

"Perfectly true, that they are being educated near London, with two other children, but not that therefore they are banished."

"Happily," remarked her Ladyship, "I am not addicted to envy, or I certainly should envy Mrs. Templeton the perfect control she has over every thing. You, who can so easily educate your only girl, have no idea of the trouble I have with mine —I am perpetually obliged to change governess or

nurse, and the children always lose with every change—now here is Mrs. Templeton freed from all this trouble, and quite at liberty to go about and receive her friends as she pleases."

"I think," replied Mrs. Vernon, smiling, "that you do not seem to find either duties or imprisonment very severe in your case, for I hear of you at all the parties near and far."

"Oh, that is because Sir William can not bear to go anywhere without me—so different from Colonel Templeton, who goes about as if he had no wife."

Almost provoked at her folly, and yet afraid of opening the eyes of one with so clapper-like a tongue, Mrs. Vernon suggested that perhaps Lady Dallas was quite as fond of being with Sir William as he with her; a truth which was at once frankly and laughingly admitted.

But, unfortunately, her Ladyship had not yet exhausted her stock of astonishment and comment—a portion of both was reserved for the Priory. Thither she drove, and on the broad terrace was the Colonel, and he being an admirer of her pretty face and fashionable dress, though he sometimes thought, when wincing under her random lashes, that if he were her husband he should infallibly strangle her, hastened to hand her from the carriage.

"Really, Colonel Templeton," she said, as he accompanied her through the noble hall to the drawing-room, "I hardly ever come here without thinking what an enviable life Mrs. Templeton's must be."

"The same idea occurs to me respecting Sir William's," was his insidious reply, "whenever I have the pleasure of seeing your Ladyship; but she, scarcely hearing him, and certainly not attaching any import to the words, went chattering on, as if he had not spoken.

"I think this place a perfect Paradise. Ah, my dear Mrs. Templeton, how do you do? I was, as usual, raving about this lovely place—it is a real garden of Eden."

"But there was something ugly even there, was there not? or my memory deceives me," boldly chimed in the Colonel, with a laughing sneer on his fine face.

"Now, Mrs. Templeton, did you ever hear such unblushing asking for a compliment; but my real object in coming was to hear how your daughters are—I was so surprised to learn that they were at school—I assure you I have been trying to persuade Sir William to send our two eldest, but he will not listen to it."

"If I suggest that every husband is not like me, I fear your Ladyship will again, though without cause, reprove my vanity;" for he saw that Ellinor could scarcely command her tears from falling.

"Fear nothing of the kind, for it is exactly what I said to Sir William," she gayly replied, "I told him to come and take a few lessons from you; but now I am here, I hope, Mrs. Templeton, you will give me your recipe for governing husbands."

"I believe," said she, trying to echo the badinage, "it is by letting them have their own way."

"Now I appeal to you, Colonel;" but he was gone. Ellinor had answered to the spur, and she might be ridden or baited to death, just as her tactless visitor chose.

And suns rose and set on Seabrooke, and the bright-green tints of spring were exchanged for the rich, brown hues of autumn, but they brought little variety in the life of its mistress, except that afforded by visits from her children, every one of which rendered it more difficult again to part with them; still, the evident advantage of her plan rendered her the more firm in pursuing it; and as she beheld what, even to her fond eyes, had been faults in her children's characters, gradually disappearing under the influence of judicious instruction, she decided that no selfish indulgence to herself should interfere to deprive them of its benefit.

She perceived, with delight and gratitude, that Helen's timidity was exchanged for a gentleness strengthened by firmness; her original indolence for an active industry in pursuit of all intellectual acquirements; her dependence on others for an unobtrusive self-reliance, which gave an irresistible charm to her touching style of beauty. Nor had Constanee failed to profit by these favorable circumstances; her vehement temperament was subdued to a generous warmth and energy, which had nothing of self-will; her prejudices and prepossessions were more under control, and though she was still impulsive, the impulse was better directed; the rare amiability of both Kate and Fanny Loftus had very much modified and corrected her almost painful love of the beautiful, for they were, as regarded regularity of feature, plain children—and this had, at first, affected Constance disadvantageously; but as she learned to value their beauty of temper, and subsequently their beauty of intellect and talent, she felt that she could, she must love them, though they had neither the loveliness nor grace of her standard, Helen.

The ever-welcome visits of Lord Grantham and his wife occasionally interrupted the monotony of Mrs. Templeton's existence, still further broken by the joint presence of Cecilia and Laurette, who had now become lady-like and intelligent companions to their aunt. Laurette was very often at Forest Hill, the Forresters having formerly been old friends and guests of her grandfather, for Sir Alan was dead; and her parents were expected by the next ship, bringing with them wealth, honor, and what they seemed, by their letters, to value still more, a son and heir five years old, and a little baby girl.

CHAPTER XI.

"(*Enter Sparkish, fuddled.*)—If I can but meet with her, or any body that belongs to her, they will find me a match for 'em. If the champagne does not hurt my eyesight, the enemy is marching this way."—WYCHERLY.

As time has been rather anticipated, we will return to the period at which Helen and Constance left their home, and relate a trifling event which afforded a little diversion, if that term be not thought inappropriate to the peaceful revolution of the seasons.

About six months after the children's departure, the Colonel announced his intention of leaving home; this was nothing uncommon, only, contrary to his usual custom, he informed those whom it might concern, that his journey was toward the Highlands. But though he was an excellent horseman, he must on this occasion have been riding very carelessly, for he was thrown, had two of his front teeth knocked out, and his handsome lip so cut that not even his mustache could hide the scar—nor, till time the healer stepped in to cure the bruised gums, could the skill of the dentist hide the gap—in short, it seemed a mercy that it was no worse.

As disfigurement and pain are *not* counter-irritants, it is but reasonable to expect that neither temper nor manner would be improved by this accident, and, to tell the truth, they were not; and though all within his influence bore testimony to this effect, none perhaps more so than the servant who went with him on his Scotch expedition, and who being his personal and favorite attendant had more than a due share of his master's ill temper; indeed, so much was the man tried, that he in his turn, as was but natural, revenged himself wherever he durst; and on one occasion, when reproved by Mrs. Dawson, and reminded by her that it was a Providence *he* had not met with the accident, he very profanely denied there having been any Providence in the matter, and that as to mercy, he added with a sneer, there had been very little of that; and threw out hints and inuendoes which, had they reached the ears of his worthy master, would have led to his dismissal—that is, if the Colonel could have ventured on that measure, for the profligate master is the slave of the servant who knows his secrets. But not to linger on the rack of curiosity, or trust to fable and fiction, let us listen to the voice of history; and thus she saith—

Undeterred, by Miss Lee's departure, from persisting in his base pursuit, and unconvinced by her proceedings that it would be in vain, her gallant admirer, after she had left the Rectory, learned her brother's address; and when she took up her residence with him, which she did directly her sister's plans were arranged, the Colonel began to arrange his.

Mr. Lee held a very good post under government, and as his private residence was a short distance from town, his sister would have been much alone, had they not had for neighbors the family of an old friend, to one of whose daughters Mr. Lee was engaged. As Miss Lee was one day waiting for the garden-gate to be opened, a gentleman slowly passed on horseback, who was evidently making a note of the house; she felt annoyed, alarmed, for though not quite sure, as she did not see his face, she was almost certain it was Colonel Templeton.

For several days after this she most obstinately kept at home, in spite of the remonstrances of Clara Forbes, who delighted in going to meet Edward Lee on his return from business, but hesitated to do so unaccompanied by Annie.

As, however, nothing further happened to warrant alarm or caution, Miss Lee hoped she had been mistaken, and again made her peace with Clara, by resuming their afternoon walks. They had both set off on one occasion to meet Mr. Lee, but fancying they had time to spare, stopped to make some purchases; and while doing so, he passed on toward his home, and the ladies, when they had concluded their business, walked on.

"I begin to think Edward will not return to dinner to-day," said Miss Lee; "and I am really quite tired, for we have long passed the usual trysting-place."

"Sit here, while I walk to the turnpike, and inquire if they have seen him?"

As Miss Forbes went on for that purpose, a gentleman on horseback passed her, but having no motive for looking after him, she proceeded to make her inquiry, and heard that Mr. Lee had gone through some time ago. Retracing her steps, she was surprised to observe Annie in earnest conversation with a gentleman, but something in the manner of both induced her to hasten forward and address her friend—on doing so, the stranger, throwing the bridle to his servant, walked away, and to Clara's surprise she found her agitated almost to tears. "I will explain all when we reach home," said Miss Lee in answer to her looks; "but where then is Edward?"

"At home, before us, I hope—"

"I hope so too," and in silence they hurried on; but what was Miss Lee's dismay, when she saw Colonel Templeton, for it was he, boldly ring, and when the servant opened the gate, enter, just pausing to announce that the ladies were in sight.

The brief interval which had elapsed between her seeing him and their own arrival at the house, had given Miss Lee time to recover her self-possession and presence of mind; and though the measure she adopted will forever incapacitate her for shining as a heroine of romance, a character, it is true, which she laughed at without mercy, let us hope vulgar, common-sense mortals will think she did right when she whispered to the amazed servant, "Quick, quick, fetch a policeman," and closed the gate herself.

Colonel Templeton politely raised his hat to Clara Forbes, though his look was rather impertinent, and observed, "Miss Lee has not favored me with an introduction."

"Nor has she given you a welcome," replied she, with spirit; "Colonel Templeton, I warn you that my brother is at home, and but little likely to suffer this intrusion quietly."

"With two such fair apologies, I am sure he will not be so ungallant as to pass a severe judgment."

"He will not only pass a severe judgment, but inflict a severe punishment, on any one who is insolent enough to molest these ladies, or intrude on these premises," exclaimed a well-known voice, though the tone was raised, and Miss Lee saw her brother hastening toward them from the side garden.

"Clara, go in, and you, Annie, also," he said, as he strode forward with looks ominous of a coming storm.

"Then I shall give myself the pleasure of accompanying you," said the Colonel, who certainly must have been excited by wine, or even he would have never so far forgotten himself as thus grossly to outrage every gentlemanly feeling.

Miss Lee looked along the road; in the language of the fair Fatima, she was ready to cry out, "Do you see any one coming?" and happily it was something more useful than dust or a flock of

sheep which she described—it was that phenomenon, a policeman *when wanted*—who was hurrying on as fast as his pinched waist and strangling stock would permit, listening to the account of the servant, who gave him to understand, that an offender of no common kind was going to carry off the plate from before their eyes.

In the mean time, the intruder made good his threat. He entered; but just as he was following Miss Lee into the drawing-room, her brother rushed forward and seized him by the collar, not, however, before the riding-whip carried by this brave son of Mars had fallen heavily on the shoulder of Edward. The latter, a tall, powerful young man, roused to fury at the touch, wrenched the whip from the again uplifted hand, and with the thick end gave his adversary so severe a blow as to cause the loss which has been so pathetically lamented; and following up the attack, hurled him with such force and rage toward the door, that had not the policeman broken the fall, it might have had serious results.

"Hilloa!" exclaimed this guardian of peace and property; "a pretty go this is, isn't it?—to enter a gen'man's house in this way, and I at hand—and a regular swell too, I declare," surveying the dress of his prisoner, and discerning his aristocratic look and air.

"Let me go, fellow!" shouted the Colonel as well as he could articulate, and struggling to free himself from the ignominious grasp.

"No, no, my fine chap—not so soft as that;" and then, as Mr. Lee advanced, he looked at him for information.

"The scoundrel! the unmanly ruffian!" was his ejaculation; "drag or kick him out, policeman, and if you ever see him prowling about this place, remember he is a base blackguard, and treat him accordingly."

"You shall hear of this," menaced the Colonel.

"You paltry villain, if I ever meet you, you shall feel something like this," breaking and throwing the whip in his face. "And now, policeman, clear my premises of the fellow; and, I warn you, keep a sharp lookout after him."

Miss Lee stood in the hall, quite silent during this scene, but Clara was almost in hysterics, and under the medical treatment of the cook, who had left her warm regions below to behold the hotter work going on above; but perceiving that the heat of the fracas, or as she termed it, "the row," was over, she disappeared, muttering, as certain odors saluted her olfactory nerves—"Ah, there's them stupid chickens a letting themselves be scorched to a cinder, and them peas a biling as yaller as guineas."

Mr. Lee closed the hall door as quickly as he could, leaving the policeman to manage the Colonel, who being reminded by him that any resistance would oblige him to summon aid, went off with that public servant, muttering imprecations both loud and deep.

"He is gone, dear Clara," said her lover; "and, James, tell cook to put back, if she can, so as to give us time to wash this out of our heads—and then we will sit down to, I hope, our uninterrupted meal. Annie, I half guess the meaning of this, but now I must know all. Why, Clara, you little coward, a pretty aid-de-camp you make—come, girls, you must give me a kiss to set me to rights, and then go up stairs." And they did give him a kiss—each of them did—the first he ever had from Clara, according to his own statement, and this he said should plead for "that fellow," as he called him, if they ever met again; but they never did, though Mr. Lee for some time after their *rencontre* at his own house, kept a little elastic coil in his pocket, ready to do good service. But sober reflection, his dilapidated mouth, and scarred visage, however they might exasperate and tempt the Colonel to revenge, all counseled silence; and in this case he listened to their counsel.

CHAPTER XII.

"Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea
Loves t' have his sails with a lusty wind,
E'en till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
There is no danger to a man that knows
What Life and Death is." CHAPMAN.

RETURN we now to the Priory, which we left bewailing the efforts of its master's bad jockeyship; but whether that comely sufferer felt most irritated at the image of himself reflected from its costly mirrors, or at the friendly condolences of Lady Dallas, who never met him without trying to thrust some eminent dentist down his throat, spite of his diminished masticatory powers, is not known; but this time he certainly did go to Paris, where he remained some weeks.

During his absence the Sinclairs arrived, and were received by Mrs. Templeton with all her usual kindness. Their long exile had, in its results, surpassed their most sanguine expectations; the Craigalan estates were freed from all incumbrances, Lady Sinclair was liberally dowered, and a handsome fortune was ready for Laurette.

Under these circumstances, her mother decided that they should both be presented; Lady Sinclair herself having never gone through that ceremony. But she was desirous of doing so under the chaperonage of a relative, and Lady Westrough was fixed on for having that honor. Who, indeed, more suitable? she was the wife of her mother's first cousin, and though at one time Lady Frances had been shunned by the elder branch of the family, and her children never noticed at all, Lady Sinclair was too reasonable to take offense at this; she felt that, in their circumstances, had Lionel's claims once been admitted before he became lord of Seabrooke, they would most effectually have frustrated every plan for reinstating the Westroughs in their just position. "Therefore," mentally said she, while weighing the question, "let bygones be bygones, and now for Lady Westrough."

But she had never had the most distant acquaintance with this valued or valuable relative; never mind—Lady Westrough she had selected, and Lady Westrough it would be.

The first step was to secure a house in town—it was now quite early spring—time enough between this and the London season—so calls, acquaintance, friendship, were soon established with Mrs. West, one of the most guileless of mortals, who

was won to any one and any thing, through praises of her son, her idolized Reginald—he, in his turn, became the decoy to catch Lord Ernest, who was to catch his sister-in-law, who was to introduce Lady Sinclair.

A profound observer of cause and effect says, first catch your hare, *then* skin it. Her ladyship was also a profound observer, and she did first catch her hare—namely, Mrs. West: fortunately it was not necessary to skin her, so she escaped that process; for Lady Westrough, on learning what was the service required, was glad on such easy terms to establish a friendly feeling between her own family and her husband's relations.

Reginald West, though received everywhere as the adopted son of his uncle, as Lord Ernest chose to be styled, was much more with his mother than with his lordship; for though the latter was not only kind but generous to his young kinsman, there was little congeniality between the tastes and pursuits of the secluded man, whose prospects had been overcast almost before their dawn, and the energetic youth, who looked at life through a glass *couleur de rose*, and whose experience had never led him to think there was any other hue or shade.

From a very early age, Reginald's mind had given promise of unusual power and activity; how could this assimilate with that of the man who lived only in the past, and who thought life and all its gifts was only to be endured, not used—to whom the future offered alike little to hope or to fear?

> "Oh! who can bear to look upon
> A sky without a cloud or sun?"

He was, however, too unselfish to wish that Reginald should purchase his favor by the sacrifice of those associations and pursuits so suited to his age and character, and therefore readily permitted him to follow where his affections most naturally led him. And these led him to seek the society of his pale, failing mother, to whom he was most tenderly attached, and whose style of life, necessitated by a narrow income, pleased his simple and independent tastes; above all, the society by which she was more immediately surrounded, or, as he called it, the choice treasure of the Priory, his favorite Mrs. Templeton, and the rich and rare gems of the Rectory, presented attractions of unusual interest to his intelligent and enthusiastic mind.

Ashley Vernon was especially his beau ideal of worth and talent—they had been together at Eton, whence Ashley, who was intended for the bar, had gone to Cambridge, and there again Reginald was to join him.

"Mother," asked he one evening, after a day spent between the Rectory and the Priory, "what does my uncle intend me to be?"

"What an odd question, my dear boy," she replied; "your uncle has adopted you, and though there is an impropriety, which I am sure we both shrink from, in alluding to the future, at his death you will be his heir, which, as he inherits the whole of his mother's fortune, means that you will be rich—and then, as Lord Westrough has no son—"

"True, mother," he remarked quickly, interrupting her; "I have often thought of this—and I hope, as you say, without meaning any thing wrong or paltry—but only in connection with you and me, I mean with our plans. Now suppose my uncle Ernest should marry—and, after all, he is only my father's cousin—I should then be something I very much dislike, and no way of escaping from it. As to Lord Westrough, I assure you, mother, our fellows at Eton led me a rare life for some time, because I unluckily once alluded to my heirship, though only in joke—they effectually drubbed that vision out of my imagination."

"I am sure, my dear Reginald, you make me feel very uneasy by these strange remarks; on the strength of Lord Ernest's promise, you know, or, indeed, perhaps you do not, that after paying every debt, I purchased an annuity with the small sum remaining—so from me you have nothing to expect; and I fear," continued she, tears starting to her eyes, "it is too late for me to retrench and save up for you."

"Nonsense! how you talk, you dear, miserly mamma; and I can not think how I could be so selfish as to torment you in this way—only Ashley returns next week to Cambridge, and we have been talking of the comfort of having something to turn to and rely on, in case of need—what a croaking, calculating fellow you must think me. But now let us have tea, with some of that delicious cream Mrs. Templeton sent. Mother," he suddenly exclaimed, after a pause, "what a woman she is—do you know I sometimes dream of her, after I have spent an hour or so in her company—I can not express to you the extraordinary feeling that comes over me occasionally—sometimes I fancy little stories about her, in the style of a distressed princess and knight." And his animated and handsome face looked almost fierce with excitement, and any kindred spirit that had noted the broad, noble brow, and the strange expression of the dark-violet eye, that seemed as if, for the moment it looked on another scene than that presented by the comfortable cottage drawing-room, would have said, "On that is enthroned genius—there looks out the spirit of poetry."

This conversation, however, left on his mother's mind a vague suspicion of realities which she had never before contemplated, and though but a suspicion, it was strong enough to induce her to write to Lord Ernest; and without giving her reasons either consistently or in plain language—she was too cautious, or perhaps too much perplexed herself, to do so—she suggested that, as Reginald was fond of literature, and delighted in the exercise of intellect, whether it might not be be as well to turn his attention to some object in life, so as to employ and stimulate A kind reply was returned, but a negative was given to all her wishes. "Reginald," she was told, "would, at a proper age, have some appointment given him; but both army and navy"—his lordship appeared to ignore any other channel for superabundant mind—"both army and navy were unpleasant ideas to him. Besides, he hoped Reginald did not want any thing—if so, he had only to ask; of course, when he went to college, a suitable allowance would be made him; and begging Mrs. West would oblige him by purchasing any orna-

ment she might like, as a token from him, of his good wishes on the lately begun year, he inclosed a small draft;" it was for a hundred pounds, and "remained, hers truly."

Poor Mrs. West read the conclusion with tingling cheeks, right glad that her son was not present. She felt convicted of having, indirectly, asked for the inclosure, though nothing had been further from her thoughts, and yet there was no way of explaining away the fancied imputation; so she acquiesced in his decision; reiterated her thanks on Reginald's account, and in a few words disclaimed the extravagance he must suppose her capable of, when he inclosed so handsome a sum for an ornament.

CHAPTER XIII.

"All is in motion; rings, and plumes, and pearls
Are shining every where." *Doge of Venice.*

"Cecilia," said Lady Grantham, one morning, to her daughter, now nearly twenty, "put aside your purse, I want to have a consultation with you."

"Dear mamma, how delightful," said she, "but I can always listen better when my fingers are busy on work that requires no attention; so begin, for there is nothing I like more than these little confidential chats. I always think they have done me good, and made me feel wiser and older."

"Few young ladies would thank the mother who, at your age, added to their years," she replied, "but I understand what you mean. And now, my treasure, listen. You know that your dear father has always had to struggle against the difficulties of an encumbered estate, bequeathed in that condition to him. It has never been a secret that we are not rich; to my children especially this was made known, in order that they might early learn to submit cheerfully to privations, and to prevent the encouragement of chimerical hopes and wishes. Some people have thought me too ready to look out for the loaves and fishes; but years ago, I lost an only and beloved brother, fighting for his country, while, on the same dreadful occasion, my sister lost her noble young lover, whose memory she has ever since cherished more like his widow than his affianced bride; two years ago, my brave, my beautiful Cecil was offered up on the same altar." Her voice faltered, while the tears fell thick and fast on Cecilia's trembling hands; for she remembered the sorrow which had stricken them all to the earth when this calamity befell; she recalled also the figure of her quiet, secluded aunt Lucy, whom she had never seen out of deep mourning, and could easily imagine all the sorrowful recollections which now filled her mother's heart.

She drew near to that loved mother, and silently kissed her; the caress was fondly returned, and wiping away her tears, Lady Grantham resumed, "Henry is now shortly expected home, and well has he won all he has gained during his long sojourn at Constantinople; and as he is of age, he will, at once, assist your father to free himself from the pressure which has weighed upon him for so many years. It is then our intention to go abroad for six or eight months, and though this will be our first outbreak, we are not going to forget economy. Therefore, assuming that it will be agreeable to you, I have accepted an invitation from your aunt Ellinor, for you to spend that time chiefly with her; not, however, excluding the claims of other friends who may wish to see you; and now, dear, what say you to this?"

"Oh, mamma, I shall be delighted. I always think the Priory one of the most beautiful places I ever saw—and aunt Ellinor is so graceful and kind, I feel as if I could do any thing for her. But, mother," she continued, "let us always speak truly and openly to each other. I can not understand my uncle Lionel. At one time I thought him perfection, and though he is still always very kind, nay, indulgent to me, I confess I have quite changed my opinion of him—dear mamma, we with our small fortune are richer by far than he with his large one, for love and union are with us—while there—but mind," she continued, impressively, "only to you has this ever been breathed, I can not take salt and betray; well, then, for I must say it, I am sure that there is sorrow in that splendid house, such as we have never known, no, not even when dear Cecil fell. And then Helen and Constance separated from their parents, and educated from home, a thing so unusual in their station; why is all this?"

"I can not very well tell you, even if I would, my dearest," said her mother, very gravely. "I do but guess, and if I am right I most warmly approve of your aunt's decision, involving, as it does, so great a sacrifice on her part. But it is of your cousins I wished more particularly to speak. Constance is but a child, though they both look older than they are, for Helen is little more than fourteen."

"Oh, mamma, how beautiful they are!" exclaimed Cecilia, impetuously interrupting Lady Grantham; which do you admire most?"

"Indeed, it would be difficult to say," was the smiling reply. "Helen is more like her mother, I think, in character, as well as appearance; but they are sweet angels, both of them; it is in reference to this beauty I am about to caution you. In the first place, your papa and I have a very decided objection to a marriage between cousins—do not open your really fine eyes so wide—secondly, and were it not so, the rich heiress of Colonel Templeton is no match for the future Lord Grantham; but as I have frequently remarked, that serious and sad mischief is done by a careless remark, an unmeaning joke, or even by ostentatious care; do not, by any of these means, put an idea into Henry's head which would otherwise never have entered it—but what is the matter?" as Cecilia turned her glowing, and evidently indignant countenance, full on her.

"I know," she said, "that I am often called abrupt, or, if you will, rude, because I can not, or will not be false; but what should ever have led you, mamma, to suspect me capable of such vulgar conduct or conversation, I do not know;" and she was really angry.

"Why, you passionate lamb," said Lady Grantham, laughing most merrily, "what a waste of

heroics is this—surely I did not, even by implication, accuse you of vulgarity."

"By warning me against such acts, and forbidding them, you did," she replied, slightly appeased. "There is scarcely any thing I more hate and despise than the very fault you spoke of. Jokes about love and lovers are quite unsuited to a lady; they are left, with their old-fashioned clothes, to their servants."

"Well, my dear, I humbly sue for peace—only in my own vindication I may be allowed to remark, that there are some—and ladies they still are, in spite of it—who do not adopt, or at least do not act on your correct notion—so smooth your ruffled plumes, or I shall think you slightly a shrew—there, take and give the kiss of peace."

"Mamma, you are very good to pardon my pettishness," she replied, sunshine again settling on her polished brow, "and perhaps I am oversensitive on this subject; but what about my uncle's property—does it descend to my aunt and cousins?"

"Only by their father's will, who, I believe, could dispose of it otherwise, as he has no son; but on this point I am not quite clear; and now, to terminate this long conference by something royal and gay, you must speedily decide on your courtdress."

"Oh, here you must help me," replied Cecilia; "you have your own to think about also. It is long since you were there, mamma, is it not?"

"I have never been since I was presented on my marriage, and then I well remember it; I am old enough now to allude to the circumstance, without the risk of being called vain. Lady Blanche Stanly was the same day presented by her aunt, the Dowager Duchess of Isleford, to whose son she was engaged, and it was said that she and I disputed the prize for beauty."

"Ah! I am sure you merited it," eagerly decided her daughter, looking at her mother's still attractive face; "but I thought the Duke was never married."

"He never was—a few months after the town had rung with accounts of the preparations for her marriage, she was buried. Lord Hurstwood never recovered from this blow; and though a man neither liked nor respected, every one felt much for him, she was such a sweet, lovely girl."

"And this was your last visit to Court; I do not wonder you remember it."

"It was, for our finances never permitted of such costly affairs; but your papa now wishes me to present you, and aunt Lucy has generously furnished the sinews of war, so do not let your taste disgrace her."

"It will be white—certainly white," was the prompt reply. "Laurette is to pass the ordeal on the same occasion, and I had a note from her yesterday, touching this all-engrossing affair."

"And I one from Lady Sinclair; if she can not secure the services of her relative, Lady Westrough, she claims my promise. I am also to see her diamonds any day next week at Storr's."

"I hear they are splendid," said Cecilia. "and will set off Lady Sinclair's peculiar style of beauty admirably. I wonder whether Laurette will be entirely in white; she is very fond of colors, to the great annoyance of Constance, who will not wear any thing but white or blue."

"You may be sure Laurette will be dressed in the most becoming style—she knows her complexion will bear a skillful use of colors; but do not let any whim of hers influence you, or induce you to dress like her, unless her choice suits you. You are both likely to be looked at, still you are very different."

"Yes, Laurette, though rather short, is one of the most elegant girls I know."

"Stand up, Cecilia," said her mother; and when she obeyed, and Lady Grantham looked at the elastic, well-proportioned young figure before her, and glanced at the stately carriage of the head and shoulders, the mother's pride as well as admiration was excited, as she imagined the effect such a figure and face were sure to produce.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Now here comes in a scene of sheer wit, without any mixture in the whole world. First, one speaks; then presently t'other's upon him, slap, with a repartee."—*The Rehearsal.*

And the effect which Lady Grantham had predicted, was produced, and the drawing-room was over, and the ladies had gone home, to talk of their friends and their conquests, and to repose on their laurels or their sofas, as best pleased them.

At the club, meanwhile, a group of fashionable critics had clustered, to discuss beauties and dissect characters; to speculate on the forthcoming on-dits, and fabricate genteel scandals for the gulling and gulled journals; to try the strength of their own callow wit, and to kill the time which hung so heavily on hand.

"Well, boys! what think you of the drawing-room?" inquired an Adonis, a veritable antique, cleverly repaired and restored, who was lounging on a divan.

"By the Lord, Harry!" said a fair-haired but gallant guardsman, *point device* in all the pride, pomp, and circumstances of war, "it was splendid—what a lot of girls, and some of them decidedly fine ones, I can tell you," caressing his mustache (gently, for it was false).

"Where do these ancient hens hide their pretty chicks?" inquired another; "one sees nothing of them till the sovereign calls, and then, down they come, fluttering their feathers with a vengeance."

"No matter where they are hid, it is really a refreshing sight when they are shown," remarked Adonis; "such an assemblage of beauty is seen at no other court."

"Why, you did not see them, did you?" innocently asked a black-eyed and *espiègle*-looking man.

"To be sure I did," was the reply; "why, my dear fellow, I was close to you when Lady Grantham passed—you remember she bowed to me."

"Yes, but I thought you had not your spectacles on."

A roar followed this honeyed remark, in which the object of the sneer faintly joined.

"But, *àpropos* of Lady Grantham, who was the queenly-looking girl she presented?"

"Her daughter, the Honorable Cecilia Grantham."

"And 'pon honor," said the Guardsman, "I never saw such lilies and roses in my life as that girl's complexion was composed of. I was close behind her; and, marble and snow! such shoulders!"

"Mortimer wanted to touch them, to be sure they were not wax," interrupted the owner of the dark eyes.

"By Jove! Sidney, you are too bad," exclaimed the brave blond.

"Oh, I was told you threw yourself into a regular attitude, and were heard to whisper, rather loud by the way—

"'Excellently done, if nature did't all,
'Tis beauty truly blent, whose red and white
Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on.'"

"Yes," said another, "and some fellow who had never read the original went about telling every body what a poetic genius Morti has."

"Laugh as you like, you can not make me unsay my assertion; if she is a Grantham, she comes of a good stock; my lady has her wits about her, and has, I dare say, taught the lesson to her daughter."

"Hear! hear!" was the rejoinder; "he is making a bargain; he brings money, she sense; each takes what the other wants;" and again there was a laugh, in which Adonis joined, but more heartily than before. And, rising to leave the room, he sententiously remarked—

"Lady Grantham is both a good wife and an excellent mother; and, what is of much more importance, she is but little changed since I met her nearly ten years ago, and I can tell you it is a capital thing to belong to a family that wears so well;" and having uttered this sentiment, with as much gravity as if it had been worth remembering, he carefully adjusted his hat on his "best substitute for your own hair," and affecting a slow pace, to conceal his want of agility, departed.

"What an artificial old fellow Chilvers is," said one.

"How do you mean—bodily or mentally?" asked Mr. Sidney.

"Oh, both. Do you know that nothing will induce him to go to the Zoological Gardens—guess why—you can not? Give it up? Why, for fear the elephant should roar out, 'Give me my ivories!'" A laugh, and cries of "Too bad!"

"And that reminds me of Templeton," said Sidney; "what is that story about his accident? I have been so long abroad I am quite behind-hand with the choice bits of news. I met him some time ago at Versailles, and was at once struck with his changed appearance; he looked also really ill; but when I asked about it, he gave me a fabulous version. I know he did, by the look of the servant, who was near enough to hear all. Mind you look at a confidential servant, if he is by, when you suspect his master is cramming you; some one afterward told me he was horsewhipped by a young fellow, whose wife he was trying to carry off."

"No," said the fair Mortimer, "it was a sister; but this happened ages ago, just after you left England. I had it all from the policeman who saw the whole transaction; my fellow traced it up from the waiter of the hotel where the Colonel was first nursed, as I wanted to learn the particulars for a reason I had; and the next time this marauding soldier troubles his head about my steeplechases, and tells my old aunt of them, I will cast this in his teeth, I was going to say; but I will expose him, as sure as my name is Mortimer."

"Good heavens! Mortimer, you are excited; he will faint—fetch the salts!" cried Sidney.

"Cease your confounded banter," said Mortimer, still looking hot and angry; "but seriously, I never hear of that heartless profligate, Templeton, without envying the man who disfigured him. We are none of us too good, though Heaven forgive our odious folly, some not quite so bad as we boast of being; but do you know, some years ago, this base fellow misled a poor girl, his children's governess; and had it not been for my sister, Lady Wingrove, she would have been destitute in her utmost need. As it was, she and her child died."

"Poor thing!" was repeated, and "Brave Lady Wingrove!" while every hat was raised in honor of her ladyship; but the mood was too good to last.

"But I say, Morti, you who were in the very garden of beauty, tell us who was that magnificent Sultana, quite a blaze of diamonds?"

"Why, the sister of this very Templeton—Lady Sinclair, the wife of Sir Archibald of that ilk; when I asked her name, I expected to hear she was the Queen of Golconda—they are enormously rich, and that dark-eyed girl in white with her, was her daughter."

"Well, gentlemen," said the Honorable Sidney Staples, who was reported to have spent already two splendid fortunes, and who was often abroad when looked for in England—"well, gentlemen, you seem to have collected and catalogued your spoil, do not fall out while sharing it;" and humming "If she be not so to me, what care I how kind she be!" he sauntered away.

CHAPTER XV.

"Il y a dans quelques femmes, une grandeur artificielle, attachée au mouvement des yeux, à un air de tête. . . Il y a dans quelques autres une grandeur simple, naturelle."—BRUYÈRE.

CECILIA and Laurette were now both at the Priory; the latter having expressed her wish to defer her return to Scotland till she had taken leave of her numerous and kind English friends, and the Granthams having at length started on their long-talked-of continental visit.

Mrs. Templeton, who was always fond of the society of young people, on this occasion laid aside her habits of seclusion, accepted the invitations of her neighbors, and threw open her own house in return. She was also busy, and interested in the study of two characters so dissimilar as those of her young relatives; nor was the analysis the less attractive because it so often puzzled her.

Laurette, though not beautiful, was extremely elegant and fascinating; sometimes Mrs. Templeton fancied she reminded her of her husband; but she hastily banished the idea, as cruelly unjust to the young girl; and on those occasions she would

studiously endeavor to explain away the conduct that did not appear straightforward and true. Laurette was clever and accomplished, but she was not original; she talked well on most subjects, or, rather, she made the hearer fancy she did; for, when remembered and examined, what she said was more the echo of your own sentiments than any thing new, or even additional.

In order to understand her better, Mrs. Templeton compared her with Cecilia; she found that if she asked the opinion of the latter, it was given at once. Laurette tried to extract that of the inquirer, while with the utmost tact she avoided all subjects that might involve her in discussion. Cecilia attacked them all, evidently desirous of arriving at the truth. Laurette was a most skillful flatterer, so nicely apportioning the dose that it was inhaled rather than swallowed; rarely did she avow a dislike, though she would most ingeniously hint a defect or insinuate a deformity.

Cecilia never flattered; she often praised, and openly expressed both love and admiration. Too kind to censure individuals, she made it a rule to avoid personalities; but abstract qualities, which excited her disapprobation, she treated without either mercy or quarter.

But Laurette was the popular candidate.

Lady Dallas quoted her as an oracle; Mrs. Forrester cited her as a high-bred and well-bred girl; while Mrs. West, whose son had received great attention from the Sinclairs during their residence in London, only wished Heaven had made her such a daughter.

Still, after much wavering, Mrs. Templeton, though owning that Laurette was charming, found herself involuntarily seeking Cecilia, when she wanted the help of truth and openness.

Caroline Vernon, though considerably younger than either of Mrs. Templeton's nieces, was always received as a welcome addition, and often came accompanied by Fanny Loftus, who had lately recovered from a severe illness, and whose rare worth rendered her a great favorite with the Rector and his wife. Lady Dallas would have added, and with Charles Vernon also.

This spinster party, as Laurette called it, was occasionally diversified by the arrival of Henry Grantham, between whom and Hubert Forrester a mutual good liking arose. Henry, though young in years, being hardly three-and-twenty, had seen a great deal of life; nearly four years had been passed at Constantinople, where his first lesson in diplomacy had been learned; and he had learned it so well that he expected before long to be sent on a duty of some trust and responsibility

Hubert was a handsome, gay youth, who had just entered at Oxford; he was the idol of his parents, the favorite of fortune, and rather the pet of Mrs. Templeton, who, without any exaggerated opinion of his talents or attainments, liked his cheerful light-heartedness, which to her had a peculiar charm; and as she looked at the youthful group, occasionally increased by reinforcements from other families, she thought of the time when her own girls would stand in their young beauty by her side, and wondered how it would be then.

It was during this visit that Cecilia first became aware of some points in Laurette's character which, to her upright and rather haughty mind, were especially unpleasant. Till the appearance of Hubert Forrester, so gracious had Laurette's manner been to Henry, who was evidently fascinated by her elegance and accomplishments, that Cecilia, though little addicted to castle-building in the air, had, perhaps, ventured to erect one small cottage, in which her brother and her friend might pass their honeymoon; when the arrival of another convinced her the cottage was *en espagne*, and built only of cards. At first, she thought her anxiety about Henry had made her discover what was not—it seemed so unlikely that Laurette should condescend even to coquette with Hubert, so unequal to her in acquirement or intellect, not to mention his being, at least, two years younger. But further observation convinced her that Laurette really did admire Hubert, or that she was playing him off against Henry; in either case Cecilia felt indignant. She was, however, relieved from all fear on her brother's account—perhaps his eyes were open, as well as hers—perhaps he had never cared more for Laurette than as an agreeable companion, and her friend; at any rate, though his manner toward her was altered, he was as gay as ever.

"My dear Mrs. Templeton, I am so glad to find you at home and alone," said Lady Dallas; "I do so wish to speak to you."

"I hope nothing unpleasant has happened," politely inquired Mrs. Templeton, expecting nothing worse than one of her domestic grievances; either the lady's maid had eloped with the butler, or the butler had eloped with the plate. For though Lady Dallas no longer envied Mrs. Templeton, or thought of sending Sir William to take lessons of the Colonel, and was in many respects much improved, she still cherished a talent for making discoveries, and for letting all the world benefit by her acuteness.

"Oh, no; only as a friend and looker-on, perhaps I see more than you do, who are one of the players. It is about your young ladies and their squires."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Templeton, in a freezing tone; and then reflecting that this was an opportunity she ought not to lose, for impressing her visitor with her own feelings on what she promptly divined was her object, she proceeded more graciously; "I hope the squires have not been birds'-nesting, and the young ladies purloining fruits and flowers."

"Not exactly that," said Lady Dallas, trying to look intelligent and arch; "but the young ladies may be purloining hearts, and the squires trying to do the same."

"Do you mean that either of my nieces are carrying on a flirtation?" asked Mrs. Templeton; "for though the word is one I dislike, I must use it to express conduct I despise."

"Oh! nothing so naughty as that," was the reply. "You have put the case in too strong a light."

"Then place it exactly as you mean me to see it," said Mrs. Templeton, perceiving, by her ladyship's manner, that her grave reception of the badinage had its effect; "but let me first inform you, that so much do I disapprove of any conduct by which young ladies lay themselves open to censure, however innocently or thoughtlessly, that

if they are convicted they leave me directly, and Hubert and Henry will be forbidden my house till they know better. If, therefore, there is talk of this, I must act at once."

"Now, my dear Mrs. Templeton," cried her ladyship, rather afraid of the spirit she had evoked, "what a rigid censor you are; there is only a little harmless love-making."

"Marriage is the only proper termination, or rather result, of any love-making; and I apprehend the parents of those under discussion would at once forbid the banns—but even this supposition is impertinent and affronting. May I ask who is your informant?"

"The truth is—no one—and my remark to you was half in jest; I had no idea you would take it up so warmly, and merely meant to put you on your guard."

"I thank you truly for any friendly intentions; and you will much increase the obligation by avoiding all mention of this topic, even in jest—especially to the high contracting parties themselves," said she with a smile; and rather alarmed lest she had already done mischief, Lady Dallas readily made the promise—and kept it.

Nearly a year before this time, Lord Hurstwood, who had, for a very long period, scarcely ever left his own spacious grounds, died. His son was abroad when this event happened; and duties, which he could neither delegate nor resign, had prevented his return. It was now rumored that Hurstwood was preparing to receive its new lord, the Lara of the neighborhood, as Cecilia said; and while she openly expressed a wish that he would arrive during her visit, Laurette said nothing, but became a little, a very little, more distant in her behavior toward the "Squire."

But fate, or her aunt, had decreed that Cecilia should not be there when my lord came; she was invited by Aunt Lucy to accompany her to Brighton, and Laurette accepted an invitation to Lady Westrough's.

It was not, however, on Lord Hurstwood's account that Mrs. Templeton had dismissed her nieces and broken up her youthful coterie; for though he was a courtier, a man of the world, and one of whom report had whispered various scandals—there would have been no such imperative reason for clearing the place of all that was young and attractive—the cause was closer at hand—the danger nearer.

Colonel Templeton had written to his steward, announcing his approaching return; and his wife had heard from Lady Grantham that he would be accompanied by some friends—and as these were not of the kind or character she would willingly have introduced to her daughter, she had arranged so as to prevent it—hence Cecilia's departure. To Henry, her ladyship had written with her accustomed frankness; expressing his father's dislike to his having any acquaintance with the persons his uncle would bring with him. Wondering to what kind of association she was now to be exposed—since the mere mention of it had banished all the innocent and happy spirits which had lately surrounded her, Mrs. Templeton once more found herself alone—alone at that beautiful Priory, which reposed in all the quiet and touching loveliness of mid-autumn, when its master and his associates broke upon its stillness.

They arrived; and to Mrs. Templeton's eyes, this absence of a few months had produced in her husband's appearance the wear of years; there was an expression over the whole countenance difficult to define, but plainly and painfully felt. His habits, also, were less like those of a gentleman—his language was not only rude, but coarse—his foreign guests and their cigars were met almost everywhere; and though there were still some rooms free from its vulgar and, we were going to say, its profaning effects, it was enough that this disgusting innovation was permitted. Late and noisy revels were not uncommon; while billiards, and still more ruinous amusements, were stimulants alternating with tipsy carousals. All order and sobriety were set at naught by a crew, half-swindler, half gambler.

"Thank God, my children are safe from this den, at least for the present; and may the same mercy prevent its recurrence when they do return," thought Mrs. Templeton, one night, when the sounds of revelry rose more discordantly than usual—and she almost shuddered when she remembered, that in the course of two years, perhaps less, her gentle Helen would be called upon to realize life.

However, before Christmas, the house was cleared; and, as Mrs. Dawson declared, underwent a thorough purification.

During almost the whole time that these orgies were going on, all intercourse with their neighbors had been suspended. A very stately and sumptuous entertainment had, soon after the Colonel's return, been given, but not one guest had offered any invitation in return—on the contrary, this Comus crew had, as by magic, made the place desolate. The Forresters left at a season quite unusual for them; Sir William Dallas openly declared he would not introduce his pretty wife to such a set—and as Lord Hurstwood, whom Colonel Templeton had met abroad, and whom he seemed desirous to propitiate, held aloof, though by no means of the straight-laced school, it is probable the Colonel did not care to brave such a hornet's nest. Whatever the cause, before Christmas they all left in his company—but he soon returned.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Will fortune never come with both hands full?"
Henry IV.

"No rose without thorns."

FREQUENT and long, as well as stormy, were the conferences now held with Mr. Johnson, the agent, on whom, hitherto, the chief management of the estate had devolved.

Johnson had held this office under the late Mr. Ashley, by whom his judgment and integrity had been so highly esteemed, that he was named with respect in his will, and strongly recommended to his successor; nor had his conduct, in any instance, shown that this opinion was ill-founded.

But he was now old, and lately much of an invalid; his son, a clever young man, who had for

some time assisted him in all the more fatiguing details of his office, and who seemed to inherit his honesty as well as knowledge of business, was now his deputy on most occasions, and was generally considered secure of his father's situation, whenever the latter died or resigned.

When Colonel Templeton took possession of this property, he found it in the most flourishing condition; most of the tenants held long leases; some had within a few years expired, and been renewed; and though, on several occasions, the Colonel had evinced a desire to drive a hard, or, as he would have said, a good bargain, Johnson had convinced him that a long lease, and a lower rent regularly paid, were better than a high rent and uncertain occupation.

It happened, at this juncture, that several leases had fallen in, and Johnson, as usual, was desirous of acting as umpire between the landlord, who demanded a much higher rent on account of increased value of land, and the farmer, who asked to have his lease renewed on former terms.

But now, for the first time, the Colonel was obstinate and unguidable; the consequence was, that two excellent tenants left.

Johnson was vexed and mortified—indeed, through the whole affair, the Colonel had treated him so cavalierly, not to say rudely, that he took it greatly to heart; so deep an impression did this, and several other instances of diminished confidence and unanimity, make on the worthy man, that he never quite recovered his usual spirits; this, added to increasing age and illness, soon unfitted him for exertion, and before the end of the year he died.

Young Robert, his son, applied to be continued in the office, but was coolly told that a person from London was already engaged. On the young man this blow fell heavily and unexpectedly—what was to be done? he was married to a niece of Mrs. Dawson's, an active, industrious woman, and had three children.

"Can I do any thing for them, Dawson?" asked Mrs. Templeton, when that worthy creature, with tears in her eyes, told her of the circumstance. "I do not offer to speak to the Colonel in his behalf, for if he has engaged another person it will be useless, besides"—she paused, for she knew that, "besides," her entreaty for any one would be unheeded.

"You are always very good, madam," replied Mrs. Dawson; "the only thing I can ask of you is to write to the Honorable Mr. Grantham, who, when he was here last autumn, saw a good deal of Robert, and asked him about farming, and such like; perhaps, among his friends, if he would condescend to remember the poor fellow, something might be found to turn up."

"I will do it immediately, as well as to Sir Archibald Sinclair and Lord Grantham;" and so she did, and to her great satisfaction received a letter from her brother, or rather his amanuensis, saying, that if Johnson did not require too high a salary for their means, Cecil would be really thankful to have an honest man on his property, as he knew nothing about its management himself, and did not think favorably of the agent at present engaged. And this being settled to the wish of all parties, by the time his late father's accounts were prepared and passed, which even the Colonel could not do without expressing his satisfaction, Robert's new employer was ready for him.

In speaking of the Priory and its lands, it was said that the first Mr. Ashley had endeavored as much as possible to bring the property into a compact form, so that the building itself should form a kind of center; and this he had done, not by extensive purchases, but by judicious exchanges of the distant for the near. One piece of the property, however, formed an exception, and was never exchanged; it was on the side toward the sea, and is perhaps best described as a kind of "chine," as similar places are termed in the Isle of Wight, only that here the height was of solid rock, it being the commencement of a small range, if that word be not too ambitious.

Tradition called this the Hermitage, a name which many things justified, for till the reign of the late Mr. Ashley's grandmother, it consisted of little more than two rather large, but sheltered, excavations; the view from the roof of these was perhaps as fine as from any part of the estate, and offers had frequently been made for its purchase. But Mrs. Ashley was so attached to the spot, that though a strip of ground now belonging to Sir William Dallas separated it from the Priory demesne, it was, by her wish, kept in the family, and built on.

The ancient excavations served as excellent cellarage to a stone house built in strict external accordance with the old architecture of the Priory, but within, containing rooms the snuggest, and most comfortable. Here there were no "rich windows to exclude the light, and passages that lead to nothing," for every passage led to some small, but cosy nook; and the stone-set casements let in a glorious view of the deep and dark-blue ocean, and its sparkle of ever-restless waves; while, on the only side which admitted of it, was a window, giving rather a tantalizing view of the Priory and church steeple, which, however, by ascending about a dozen roughly cut, but safe steps, burst on the sight, with a most advantageous effect.

This place, though apparently far superior to what his station demanded, had always been inhabited by Johnson; but then the agent was a favorite, had become almost a friend, and had also married a young person, who had been brought up as a companion by the mother of Horace.

Determining to secure a permanent residence on the property for his faithful and respected superintendent, and yet not wishing to alienate this favorite spot of ground, or rather rock, Mr. Ashley granted Johnson a lease of the hermitage for ninety-nine years, at a nominal rent.

By this family, celebrated for their flower-loving tastes, it may be almost superfluous to add, that a garden, with a patch of meadow, was attached to the hermitage; and here Johnson had lived from early manhood to old age, and here Robert was born.

Colonel Templeton, though in most things a clever man, and certainly, in all matters where self was concerned, both shrewd and calculating, was by no means conversant with the dry details

of business as they related to landed property; but with Johnson continually at his elbow to prompt him, this had been of little consequence, except that it had prevented him from discovering his need and his deficiency. Frequently, when transacting affairs with his employer, Johnson was astonished to perceive that he never fully understood the real position he occupied with respect to the Seabrooke property, both as regarded his responsibilities and his privileges; so that he had often found it difficult to show him what he might, and what he might not do. Rich prey this, to fall into the hands of the spoiler!

And now that the village had wondered and concerned itself about young Johnson's dismissal, till it was tired, all stood on the tiptoe of expectation and curiosity to see the new agent; and after various false alarms, and cries of "he comes"—he did come, but so quietly, that those on the lookout felt themselves aggrieved, swindled, defrauded. "Scandalous, after all the excitement and flutter of expectations, to sneak in so silently"—and then, when he was seen, it was no great sight—and this is true—for there certainly was nothing in his appearance either to attract or repel; he looked like a man who had once been a gentleman, or nearly so—a sort of narrow escape. His manner was self-possessed, neither vulgar nor rude, sometimes, though rarely, there was a tinge of arrogance and presumption; his language indicated a man of education, while his voice gave tokens of refinement. But much of this seeming incongruity was explained, when he, as if by accident, alluded to a military career and college education.

Mrs. Templeton was present when both these antecedents were glanced at—she made no remark, it was not her custom; but she remembered this, and subsequently named it to the Rector, now Dr. Vernon—who ascertained that, as regarded the university, the statement was correct; though a few circumstances connected with his college life, which the Doctor at the same time learned, was by the agent either forgotten, or not thought worthy of being mentioned. But a surprise awaited the Colonel and his family, and, indeed, many others, though the last were not concerned in the event. Mrs Templeton was the first who was informed, and this by Mrs. Dawson, that Johnson had let the Hermitage furnished, to a gentleman who had already been spending a few weeks there before his father's death. Dawson added, that the late agent had consulted her about the propriety of consenting to the residence of a lodger, and fully intended to have named it to the Colonel, but the vexatious differences between them, and his illness, had almost banished the matter from his mind; that immediately after his death the negotiation was renewed, for hiring the Hermitage as it stood, for a term, and that Robert was too glad of this opportunity to increase his income, to think of hesitating.

Knowing her husband's feelings as regarded any intrusion on his property, though the Hermitage was at the extremity, and on one side separated from it, Mrs Templeton was certain that fierce and loud would be the explosion of his anger. Nor was she mistaken. Directly he heard of the Hermitage being thus tenanted, he sent Mr. Cooper, the new agent, to ascertain the facts, which being simply what his principal already knew, namely, that the Hermitage was let, he returned with little to impart, except that the lodger was a Mr. Morton, and that he had paid a quarter's rent in advance.

Then went the Colonel himself, in a towering rage, breathing threats of expulsion, razing to the ground, and sundry warlike denunciations of learned length; but he found there only a middle-aged negro, and a respectable female servant, by whom he was told that their master would be down next week, and from whom he received his address at a London hotel.

Next week, again went Mr. Cooper; perhaps, in his zeal for the Colonel, he slightly forgot himself, an obliviousness to which, in one sense, he was never prone—for one of the village gossips happening, by chance—busy-bodies always happen by chance to be where they are not wanted—happening to be going by the Hermitage during the interview, which took place in the garden, heard words of threatening import in a strange voice, and remarks which were any thing but complimentary to Mr. Cooper, which when the Colonel heard of, he waxed wroth, and swore, as the simile says, like any trooper.

The matter, however, for the present was left in peace; first, by the departure of the intruder, who left only his sable hostage—next, by a strict investigation of Robert's rights—and lastly by a curt, but determined note, from a respectable lawyer in town, addressed to the Colonel; which, while it by no means stopped the Colonel's oaths, stopped his agent's visit.

But lo! compensation is in store for the vexed and excited Seabrookians—and this celestial and even-handed visitant arrives in the shape of a comely dame, aged about five-and-thirty, and her charming daughter of sweet sixteen—and oh! crowning joy! her juvenile son, some years younger. Sister, niece, and nephew to the thrice-blessed and sweet-voiced Mr. Cooper; and rejoicing in the name of Mrs. Mordaunt—pardon the omission, one the lady was never guilty of—Mrs. Captain Mordaunt—it was so on her elegantly embossed cards—Miss Juliet, and Master Augustus.

This delightful trio had come purposely to superintend the domestic economy of Mr. Cooper's Dulce Domum, to see after his creature comforts, and to help him to gather up the crumbs which fell from the Colonel's table. And well worth the gathering were these said crumbs. Hampers of wine from the cobwebby cripts; geese from the larder, and ducks from the pond; fruit, which Saunders sent accompanied with many a Gaelic sigh, and strange sounding words, which fell on the ear like a Celtic imprecation; flowers over which he muttered incantations in Glasgow classics, which, had he known how, would have turned them to thorns and thistles—but, alas! curses, like chickens come home to roost, and the sorely vexed gardener—in the main, a pious Presbyterian—was often heard, after these outpourings in unknown tongues, to groan from the fullness of an overloaded conscience, in good broad Scotch, "the gude forgie' us," or "the gude save us, sirs!"

But Saunders was not the only one who sometimes forgot good manners; for whispers began to arise in the course of a few months, and they rose and rose till they might be heard in almost every house in the village—that, if the Priory sent its good things to the agent's, it also sent the master to look after them. He was almost as frequently seen consulting Cooper down at his house, as the latter was attending him at the Priory. Some of the matrons of the place said, the Colonel came to look at his image in the youthful Augustus; others, that it was to partake of the delicacies his mother, that "neat-handed Phyllis," prepared; while a third set, who dealt in prophecies and second-sight, shook their heads; not the memorable Burleigh shake, for they spoke out—and, in a friendly way, very friendly indeed, advised Miss Juliet's mamma to look sharp after that innocent maiden.

However, Mrs. Captain Mordaunt proved her right to that warlike epithet by her clever military tactics; she despised them all, and their insinuations to boot—she braved them all—and her good-looking face outfaced them all—she snapped the fingers of her mind at every one of them; and had they been deeply read in the legitimate drama, and politely inquired, "Do you bite your thumb at us?" trust her for the reply—it would have been ready,—"I do bite my thumb!"

It was rather a singular coincidence, but one that was fatal to the efficacy and popularity of Dr. Vernon's sermon, albeit he preached as faithfully and as eloquently as was his custom, that the very first Sunday Mrs Captain appeared at church, leaning on her fond brother's arm, and followed by the two pledges of her departed and martial lord, the occupant of the Hermitage made his first appearance in public also. Some, I am sorry to say, every man jack of them women, actually half rose, to look at him. But he entered the Rectory pew, and was lost to their longing gaze by the envious curtains.

Never mind, fair daughters of Eve, if knowledge at one entrance is shut out, let it pour in at high-service pressure at another; and true to their inquiring nature, they did; for while Mrs. Templeton, Lady Dallas, or even any stranger visiting these families, might have escaped notice, sharp and minute was their criticism on the fair Mrs. Captain.

"Good heavens! she has two, four, actually five flounces!" "And how many breadths?" "I could not well make out; but, never mind, it sets out beautifully behind." "Is it whalebone or buckram?" "That is of no consequence, it is exactly like the last fashion picture." Such was the oracular fiat pronounced by that learned judge, the village dressmaker. And her mantelet, trimmed with real lace! And the tasty bonnet and its becoming ornaments so redolent of Paris—and the youthful Juliet, and her pink ribbons—and the elegant simplicity of the little dandy sailor son. Well, well; though some of the village dames looked as if they thought it the reverse of "well, well."

But what *can* keep the people so long in the church? usually the organist may shuffle over, or omit, the last half of his playing out; but today, what are they waiting for? However, he closes the organ and dismisses the exhausted bellows-blower—and by that time the congregation become aware of the aggravating fact, that the Rectory pew is empty! Yes, there is the beadle undrawing the curtains—"stupid old dawdle, not to have done it before!" and the stranger has gone into the vestry.

And how provoked were all these loiterers the next day, when Mr. Morton was seen quietly walking through the village with the Rector, who appeared to be pointing out to him various views and sites of picturesque beauty or interest.

And the black servant who had been a sort of *bête noir* to the ignorant rustics; and even among the tradespeople had excited a nine-days' wonder, proved to be a very common-place, matter-of-fact person, who spoke quite enough English to be pumped for information, but who said little that repaid the trouble; for all he told was, that his master was a widower, was rich, had traveled a great deal, and that his son, Master Victor, was at school in Germany.

Received, as he was, in a most friendly manner by the Rector, several of the neighboring gentry left their cards at the Hermitage—but though this attention was returned, and Mr. Morton frankly expressed his wish to be on social terms with those who had thus honored him, he smilingly alluded to his limited garçon-like quarters, as a reason for not accepting hospitalities which he could not return—but he owned, that when his son came to England, he should covet for him all the advantages their society offered.

It was well known that Colonel Templeton had rudely opposed his occupancy of the Hermitage; but as he remained, as Cooper never ventured to couple his name with any remark of an injurious nature, and, especially as the Colonel himself was far from being popular, Mr. Morton was allowed to visit or not as he pleased. And this liberty was the more readily accorded, as subsequent acquaintance proved him to be, in every respect, both the gentleman and the scholar. He was one who had seen life in many strange lands, and whose conversation was enriched by that knowledge which they, who have traveled and thought, alone can possess.

About a year after his domestication at the Hermitage, his son returned from one of the then little known continental colleges: he was another, and not less interesting study to the English country gentlemen; and apparently not to them alone—for as the handsome youth sauntered along the village high street, singing snatches of strange airs to words equally strange, many a pretty lass peeped over the little curtain, or ran to the door to look at him and his foreign dress—the blouse and leather belt, the lay-down collar, and the jet-black locks, displayed a little ostentatiously from beneath the small gray cap, that seemed scarcely to touch the well-shaped head—while the boys and men gaped and grinned as, by the skillful use of his Alpenstock, he flew over hedge and ditch, and cleared at one bound the rapid and silvery Brooke.

"He's a rare one," said the butcher's jolly wife, who had just taken his orders to supply his dogs regularly.

"He's an impudent young dog himself," replied her neighbor, the village haberdasher,

shaking her head and laughing; "he came to choose a 'kerchief for his neck, and when Betsy turned to find a choice, what does my young gentleman do, but clear the counter at one spring—and who but he, rummaging among the ribbons and tapes."

"He looked very handsome though, mother, in that crimson one he took, and made me tie properly for him."

"Yes, yes, and took a kiss in return," remarked the old lady; "you shall keep to your sewing while the young hermit, as he calls himself, remains here."

However, as all he did was done so openly and frankly, and seemed so entirely the result of exuberant spirits and happy youth—for many a good looking matron had to complain of young saucebox, as well as the daughters—Victor was a universal favorite; all welcomed him with a smile, and no one thought there could be much to blame in one who was so often the companion of the Doctor, and the guest of Mrs. West.

It happened, one day, shortly after the arrival of young Morton, that Mrs. Templeton, having been to Sea-View Cottage, was returning through the grounds. She had walked on, for about a quarter of a mile, lost in deep thought—for the inroads that illness was slowly but surely making on Mrs. West had, during this visit, been painfully evident—when shew as roused from her revery, by hearing the words of a German song, which recalled to mind days long past; a remarkably sweet voice sang this in snatches, leaving off abruptly, to whistle to the birds; the sound of approaching steps, also, caused her to look back; when, within about twenty paces, she saw one of the handsomest youths she had ever beheld; but as he is already known to us, in two words we introduce Victor Morton to Mrs. Templeton.

Respectfully doffing his cap, and revealing by the act the fine head, and its glossy ornaments, he approached her, saying, "I fear I am unconsciously trespassing; but I am almost a stranger, which I hope will secure my pardon."

"You are within the precincts of the Priory private grounds," replied Mrs. Templeton, "but never mind that, we shall soon see some one who will guide you out, and meanwhile you are very safe with me."

"That I am quite sure of," he returned, bowing, and glancing at her gentle dark eyes. "My name is Victor Morton."

Pleased with his manner, though startled to think that the son of one who had already incurred her husband's displeasure, should be found intruding on his strictly kept property, she said, very decidedly, though she smiled kindly,

"You do not seem one I should consider a dangerous trespasser, yet, as Colonel Templeton is rather particular, I shall at once warn you out. Do you know Sea-View Cottage?"

"I spend half my leisure time there."

"Look then, between these oaks, there is the roof of the house; keep it in view, and you will find the gate; and as you visit Mrs. West, we shall be sure to meet again."

"I am glad of that," was the frank remark. She smiled, and shaking hands with him, they parted.

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Victor, rushing into a room where Mr. Morton sat composedly reading, "I have seen such a woman!"

"I hope, not the horrible 'White Lady,' who finds her way into so many of your German legends."

"Oh! no, quite the reverse," he replied.

"A black one, then? perhaps Juba's departed wife."

"Nothing like her, I fancy," said Victor, greatly amused at the difference between Mrs. Templeton and what he supposed the defunct Mrs. Juba might have been; "no, but I have seen Mrs. Templeton."

"So you did, at church."

"Hardly; and besides, that was very different from looking at her, and talking, and shaking hands with her, as I have done to-day; but you do seem surprised at last: the truth is, I wandered into the private grounds without knowing it. I met her, and we have made assignations without end, at Mrs. West's; now, father, what do you think of that?"

"I think, my dear boy, that you will find yourself in some scrape with your wandering habits; well for you not to have met the Colonel."

"Mrs. Templeton hinted as much; is he then so formidable?"

"I do not find him so, though I fully expected it, after his useless opposition to my residence here; still, you had better keep off his grounds till invited."

What might have been the temptation to disregard this warning, had Victor remained at Seabrooke, it is impossible to tell. But shortly after this rencounter he and his father left, and did not return for some time.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Look upon this face;
Examine every feature and proportion.
And you with me must grant this rare piece finished.
Nature, despairing ever to make the like,
Brake suddenly the mold in which 'twas fashioned"
MASSINGER.

Ever since Johnson's death, affairs at the Priory had gone a little crooked, and spite of the more frequent attendance of Cooper at the house, and the many conferences in the village, where, doubtless, the wisdom and experience of Mrs. Captain were of great use to the Colonel, scarcely a day passed without something happening which ruffled the serenity of that patient martyr.

Money, which had hitherto been always ready to meet every expense, suddenly became scarce; and it was remarkable how this invariably happened after any London or continental visit, so that even during Johnson's management he had hinted to Mrs. Dawson his fears that his master lost large sums at play; apprehensions which were confirmed by the conduct of the foreigners who had accompanied him to Seabrooke. Still, so ample was the real income, that these difficulties had been but temporary.

But it was different under the new agent's reign; the halcyon days of plenty seemed coming to a close, so frequent were the lowering and

stormy clouds when payments were required; and as Mrs. Templeton was once driving about the property, she was surprised to see a number of trees marked, and a man busy doing the same thing to others. "What is this for?" she asked, and was told that Mr. Cooper had advised the Colonel to thin the woods. The last felling of importance had taken place under the direction of Johnson, only three years previously, and she remembered he had then said, a long time must elapse before cutting to any extent would be again proper; and on noticing more carefully those marked, she thought the greater part looked much too young.

Another lease also fell in, of one of the best farms on the estate, and again there was a dispute about increased rent—that demanded was plainly declared extortionate and unfair; words arose—Cooper interfered, was insulted and threatened, and the Colonel was compelled to listen to some very unpleasant truths before several of the servants, who had been summoned by their furious master to eject the daring offender.

The woods were, however, thinned, under the artistic superintendence of Cooper; money was ready, and again there was a lull.

The letter-bag, one morning, unfortunately, was the means of destroying this calm; it seemed to be a very Pandora's box of annoyances – so much so, that Mrs. Templeton, astonished and half terrified at her husband's manner, and at an ejaculation of surprise, almost of horror, which burst from his lips, inquired if he had received any ill news; a large packet containing various papers lay before him, while his trembling hands seemed scarcely able to hold any of them; his face was as pale as ashes, and perceiving his wife was approaching, he hoarsely desired her to remain quiet; by a powerful effort shook off his emotion, and collecting the contents of this packet, without another word withdrew to the library, whence he did not emerge till nearly dinner-time. His manner then was so extraordinary as to make her furtively glance at him; and though he scarcely tasted any thing, he drank glass after glass of wine, and she did not again see him till toward noon the next day, when he announced his intention of going at once to London, and gave Cooper various instructions, in lieu of a prolonged absence.

Henry Grantham at this time married, and chose for his bride a lady who, in every respect, was agreeable to his parents. Cecilia accompanied the newly-married pair on a short visit to Seabrooke, after which they all went to Italy, whither he was sent on public business. Laurette was at Craigalan, but had promised to travel south when Helen and Constance came home. Charles Vernon was engaged to Fanny Loftus, and Ashley had just begun his legal education in London; while Reginald hovered about, ready, so he said, for any mischief, because he had nothing to do; therefore his kind friend Ashley invented a sort of literary penance in expiation of this speech; and to prevent the prophecy from becoming true, put him, in jest, through a course of reading, to which the other applied in sober earnest.

Lady Dallas, thanks to a sweet temper, which never took offense at the truths that were uttered in kindness, had listened not only to the hints of Mrs. Vernon, but to her plainly-spoken advice, and had looked at her own character so courageously as to have recognized its many faults and weaknesses. Some she corrected—some she tried to correct—some she feared were incurable; but the result was, that to a very great extent, she entered cordially into the pursuits of her kind husband—found by comparing him with others—or *one* other—how excellent he was; and instead of gossiping about imaginary or trifling grievances, looked at the bright side of every thing and talked of it accordingly.

And so the sun went down, with a promise of rising in full splendor by the time that Mrs. Templeton's idols came home, to be placed on the pedestals her love had prepared for them.

And it was coming; it drew near—that happy, happy period, when she was to reap the reward of her patiently-endured sacrifice, and welcome Helen and Constance home—for they were to return together—such had been the reiterated request of Constance, that her mother had yielded.

How happy their lives had hitherto been! how careful had their worshiping mother shown herself, to surround them with all that was wise, healthy, and holy! how she had, without pity, analyzed her own character, tried to trace each fault, each weakness, to its cause, so as to banish it and its baneful influences from her children; and, to a great extent, how successful had her plans been—understood and improved upon as they were by Mrs Loftus.

Helen, who in appearance strongly resembled her mother—like her, also, though very gentle, possessed strong affections; she loved her doll, Gretchen, her bird, or Constance, and above all, her beautiful mother, with an intensity which was positively distressing, when loss or separation came; she had now, by her frequent and long absence from the latter, learned to bear these better, to anticipate them cheerfully, and, when they came, to meet them bravely.

Constance, beautiful as one of Raphael's angels, was like her father; she had the Templeton eye, with its haughty glance when offended; and the brow, so noble-looking in repose, could, like his, almost startle by its stern and determined contraction, when opposed; but her wilfullness was softened by her loving nature—her quickness to resent was tempered by her ready candor to excuse, and her generosity to forgive.

Both the sisters possessed minds of no vulgar stamp. Colonel Templeton, having an idea that *his* daughters, *his* heiresses, must marry into noble families, was carried by vaulting ambition a little farther, and beheld them the wives of ambassadors or diplomatists high placed in foreign courts—therefore his only injunction had been, "make them modern polyglots, elegantly bound;" and as linguists, they both, especially Helen, excelled.

But neither was a female Crichton—they were both well informed and well educated—natural enough to think with pleasure of balls, parties, or dress—and ready to accept any share of admiration, the world, in its goodness, might bestow.

Neither were they such novices to that world as girls in their station too commonly are. Independently of their occasional long visits home, when, if they did not see much society, what they did mix in was good, they were often at Lady Grant-

ham's, where Reginald West and the two Vernons were frequent guests; and, as Constance reported, they had spent one whole and very gay month with Lady Sinclair during her stay in town; so that we hope it is proved that our pets are not exactly of the bread-and-butter school.

Mrs. Loftus had, for some years, by the successful termination of the lawsuit in her favor, been in circumstances which rendered her independent of pupils; but she did so love these sweet sisters that she never would part with them till they were claimed by their mother.

Caroline Vernon, who, wishing to share some of the advantages of being near town, had spent nearly a year with them, returned also, accompanied by Fanny Loftus, who was to be married so soon as Charles had every thing prepared to receive her as his bride.

The Priory was so extensive in its internal arrangements as always to have room for any number of guests likely, in reason, to accept its hospitalities; and a charming set of rooms, terminating at the angle of the conservatory which completed Mrs. Templeton's own apartments, was fitted up for her daughters.

Though the happiest visits the girls paid to the Priory were those when their father was absent, Mrs. Templeton knew too well what was right, to think or even to wish to estrange them from him; but so little interest did the Colonel show, that more than once, when his daughters had been summoned home for the express purpose of being with him, he would go away at an hour's notice, and perhaps not return till they had departed.

But when they did meet, he was invariably kind to them—generally indulgent and generous—he would praise their beauty, and predict that they would be duchesses; but here all stopped.

To Helen this conduct was painful—she would look sad and weep—to Constance it seemed contemptuous, and her eyes would sparkle and her fair brow contract, till, catching sight of the gentle, beautiful mother, she would rush to her, press her in her arms, and stamp her small foot or clench her little hand as if in defiance of some assailant, invisible to all eyes but her own.

And where is Gretchen, that brave, true-hearted German nurse? It had originally been arranged, when the children left home, that she should remain with her "Lieblinge," her darlings, for a short time only; but that short time had extended to within the two last years of their residence with Mrs. Loftus; and then she married one of her own countrymen, a watchmaker, who, with her savings, and the help of her attached mistress, was soon placed in easy and prosperous circumstances.

But curiosity is still unsatisfied; "What now, thou peeper and pryer into what does not concern thee?" "Where is Lord Hurstwood, do pray tell us?" He is at St. Petersburgh, where matters of state claim his attention and presence. His father, a selfish man, who disliked to have a son at hand to chronicle all his luxurious indulgences, or murmur at his ceaseless extravagance, at a very early age had, with Brutus-like fortitude, laid that son on the altar of his country—a species of patriotism not so uncommon as the careless observer thinks; he had banished him to foreign parts; had made him secretary, *attaché, chargé-d-affaires*, or any thing—that paid! He had exiled him, and made him an alien to suit his own purpose, and he died at a great age, without being soothed in his last moments by the voice of any one he loved; and he was buried without any one who loved him weeping over his coffin; for, as already related, his son did not return till some time after his death.

Strong and conflicting were the opinions pronounced upon him by his fair neighbors. Mrs. Vernon, with her accustomed freedom, called him too Chesterfieldian to please her; but that was equivocal, and might signify too elegant in manner, or too lax in principle. Mrs. Forrester was delighted with his aristocratic air and noble assurance, another ambiguous term. Mrs. Templeton thought his manner very pleasing and his conversation interesting, but she rather disliked the expression of his face, though that face was really fine and dignified; while Lady Dallar, to whom he had paid great attention, wondered how it was that such a man had remained so long unmarried.

But their liege lords said nothing, beyond hoping that, when he came again, if he meant to remain, he would bring a Lady Hurstwood with him.

And now the day dawns which is to bring to the mother's loving embrace her wished-for treasures, Mrs. Vernon having undertaken to escort them with Caroline. She and Mrs. Dawson, who almost idolized her lady, walked through their rooms, to give the finishing touches to what, the previous day, had been pronounced perfect.

A light tap—"come in," and Ruth, a young person who had been in Mrs. Dawson's training as their maid, entered with a basket of flowers.

"Saunders, my lady, sent these for the young ladies."

"Thank you, Ruth, and tell Saunders I am obliged to him for remembering their love of bouquets. Can you think of any thing else, Dawson?" she inquired.

"Really, madam, that seems impossible," was the reply; "nothing can be more elegant and comfortable; their dressing-rooms are exactly alike, and the favorite color everywhere; and then this beautiful bed-room and the French beds so pretty; and how pleased they will be to see your sweet face—pardon my boldness—looking at them directly they open their innocent eyes—" This was said in allusion to a copy of Mrs. Templeton's portrait, belonging to Lord Grantham, and which had been taken at his request before she married. This copy occupied the pier between the windows of her daughters' bed-room.

And now, Dawson having left her, again she looked round, and preparing to arrange the flowers in the luxuriously furnished sitting-room, she paused before a half-length portrait of Colonel Templeton. The original, a splendid full-length, size of life, was painted for the uncle who brought him up, a short time before his death, and when his nephew, about five-and-twenty, was in all the pride of his remarkable beauty. It now hung in the dining-room of the Priory.

She looked intently at the gay, smiling face—long and intently, till her gaze became hard and stern—she looked at it, as if, in imagination, she had summoned that handsome delinquent before,

the bar of justice, to answer for the desolation he had wrought, and to listen to the recapitulation of her wrongs. She told of the love she had given, freely, unreservedly—said how it had been insulted, flung back, and destroyed; she numbered up the weary, lonely, sorrowful years she had passed; recalled the indignity and cruelty with which she had been treated; then she sank on her knees, and fervently prayed that her children, her innocent girls, might be saved from the consequences of her great mistake!

Mrs. Templeton rarely wept; but now tears fell fast, and when she rose, she was calmer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Well did Antiquitie a god thee deeme,
That over mortal minds has so great might,
To order them as best to thee doth seeme,
And all their actions to direct aright."

SPENSER.

"Oh, mamma! and are these indeed our rooms?" exclaimed Helen; look, Constance, at these lovely hangings—blue and white muslin—our colors—what a dear mamma you are!"

"And here, Helen, is a portrait of papa—how handsome he is!—and oh! Nelly, Nelly, look at the blessed angel that is ever watching us, even while we sleep—it is the very type of her love and care for us," continued Constance; and she rushed toward her mother, the old look of defiance in her countenance, and the attitude so suggestive of protection—though both seemed at this moment quite uncalled for.

"Dear mamma!" said Helen, kissing her cheek, "that is worth all the rest."

"Why, girls, you are as beautiful as Houris," said their father, when he met them, for the first time since their return, at dinner; "though, hang me! if I am quite sure which is Helen and which Constance."

"I am Constance," said she, advancing before the more timid Helen; "you will know me, papa, because I am like you, and Helen is so very beautiful."

"Not much difference as regards the witchery," he said, playfully tapping her cheek; "but I see, Helen has dark eyes, like her mother."

"And that is what makes her so beautiful," she replied, unconsciously increasing the resemblance to himself, by the flash and the frown—it was but for a second—still it was enough—he never afterward mistook them.

The first time the sisters left their home after this return, was to officiate as bridesmaids at Fanny's wedding; and a very splendid affair that was.

"Mamma," said Caroline, a few days after their return, "I sadly want your advice."

"Not another wedding," sighed the weary matron—to herself, of course. "What is it, my dear?" she asked aloud; "if I can not advise you, your dear father can."

"But it is a secret, and not for papa's ear."

"Mine is wide open, so begin," said Mrs. Vernon.

"I can not go so direct to my mark as I generally do—for it is not my secret—nor am I sure it is any one's," was the enigmatical rejoinder.

"Now, Carry, you are quite trying, and have no idea how my nerves are suffering—but seriously, my dear, have you any thing to reveal?"

"Yes," said Caroline, desperately; "mamma, I am afraid Mr. West is in love, and," speaking very fast, and looking very flushed, "I believe Helen is also!"

"Caroline!"

"Yes, mamma," nodding her head; "you may well be surprised; I was at first, and felt as if something had stopped my breath—of course you are the only one to whom I have mentioned it."

"You are a dear, good girl, and a great comfort to me," said her mother fondly; "I sometimes think, when I look around me, that I have more than my share of earthly blessings."

"But though I felt bewildered at first," resumed Caroline, too much interested in her discovery to attend to any thing else, "when I came more quietly to reflect on the matter, I laughed at my folly, for thinking there was any thing either alarming or uncommon in it. Fanny is not yet twenty, and she was engaged two years ago to Charles—Helen is nearly eighteen, and Mr. West—I shall no longer venture even to think of him as Reginald—is, I believe, twenty-two; so there is nothing so extraordinary in it, is there?"

"Not exactly extraordinary, my love," answered her mother; "still, like you, the idea makes me feel breathless; and yet—if it should be true—I think we need not dread any opposition. Reginald, for such he must still be to me, is heir not only to the title, but he is the adopted son of Lord Ernest West, who succeeded to the whole of his mother's large property—besides being distantly connected with the Templeton family."

"I am so glad I took courage and mentioned this," said Caroline; "I hesitated, because I fancied it might seem treacherous to read the looks of my friends, and then invent a history of their meaning."

"But I did not know they had very often met—how is this?" remarked Mrs. Vernon.

"They have been a great deal together at Lord Grantham's, where you know Helen and Constance often went, and where Ashley and Mr. West are great favorites."

"True, I quite forgot that," was the reply; while Mrs. Vernon was secretly thankful that her young barrister had not been studying the beauties of nature in Helen's face instead of the beauties of Blackstone in Russia leather.

After a pause, as her mother was too busy with this idea to speak, Caroline asked suddenly—

"Mamma, do you like Mr. West?"

"Much, my dear—his respectful love for his mother, his honorable sentiments and conduct whenever I have had an opportunity of observing him, have quite won my esteem."

"Ashley thinks he is very clever, and has often said it was a pity that he had no better or higher object in life than to wait for government patronage and his uncle's wealth. But then Ashley has such lofty and noble opinions—oh! there is not his equal," she continued, enthusiastically; "I have often looked around when a large party of us boys and girls have met, and I always came to

the same conclusion, that Ashley was the handsomest and grandest of the whole set."

"You think him better-looking than Mr. West?" asked the proud mother, glancing at the animated and glowing brunette, the gentle image of this beloved brother, and anticipating with certainty and pleasure the reply.

"Decidedly—though, if Ashley were not my brother, perhaps I should hesitate."

Her mother laughed at this "most exquisite reason," and said, "Some would prefer Hubert Forrester or young Mr. Morton."

"Oh!" was the reply, with a slight gesture of contempt; "they are mere lads"—they were both, however, nearly twenty. "What Mr. Victor may be when he abandons his apologies for mustaches, cuts his hair like a Christian, and dresses like an English gentleman, I pretend not to know."

"You are unmerciful, Carry, and forget that it is our national prejudice which remarks these peculiarities; and, to be candid, I think them very becoming to him."

"Perhaps they are; and as he ranks so high in dear papa's estimation, there must be some sense under those waving masses, dark as the raven's wing. What a contrast to Hubert he is, both in appearance and character; for though my former playmate is as amiable as ever, he never will have the energy and decision of his new friend. But, mamma, what use do you mean to make of my state secret?" inquired Caroline.

"I shall feel bound to tell you directly I have determined; but before doing any thing which can not be undone, I must see the parties together."

"You *have*, dear mamma, for it was at the wedding that I made my remarks."

"True, child, but I was thinking only of Charles," was the mother's characteristic reply.

"I had a vague fear that if my conjecture proved true it would in some way interfere with dear Mrs. Templeton's pleasure at the return of Helen and Constance; and that is too sad to be quietly anticipated."

"Indeed it is, my love," said Mrs. Vernon; "therefore we will not dwell on the supposition."

"I never think of Mrs. Templeton without a kind of hushed feeling; such as we have in the presence of great suffering or sorrow."

"And no wonder," said her mother, very gravely; "it is the shadow of the skeleton, which so few houses are without, that produces this effect; happy, happy those, where, as with ourselves, it remains buried or almost unknown; and praised be His name who has thus blessed us!"

"Then, mamma, do you mean to say that, at the Priory, it is not so?"

"Alas! my child, I do; there it is visible to the eye of experience in all its hideous, undraped deformity—and startling with its perpetual presence—it is this which casts so sad a cloud over the face of our dear friend; it is this which is heard so often in the touching tones of her voice, which arrests the smile on her lips, and banishes the light of joy from her eyes. Caroline, when she married, she omitted to assure herself that truth and honor were among her husband's possessions. You are old enough, dear child, and discreet enough to hear of these things. And, oh! God grant that when you do love, it may be one you must also respect; or you had better be wedded to your grave!"

An opportunity was, shortly after this conversation, offered to Mrs. Vernon for making her intended observations, as the Colonel gave a large party in honor of his daughters' return. Constance, who was not quite sure that she was to share all Helen's privileges, looked upon this party as a kind of test, and therefore, more earnestly than usual, expressed her hope that she might be present. This happened one morning during breakfast, and while her father was with them, when he, much more promptly than was his custom, replied, "Certainly;" and on her referring to her mother for her sanction, the reply again was, "Certainly, if your papa wishes it."

"And I know he does; do you not, dear papa?" said she, caressingly.

"Do not try and make a fool of me, Constance," was the reply; but though the words were rough, not so the tone; and Constance, who was not easily daunted, replying, "No easy matter to do that," jumped up and kissed his forehead. To her surprise, he fondly returned it, and stroked her hair, saying, "A true Templeton—but mind, I govern."

"Oh! not in all things," was her gay retort.

"Does he, mamma?"

"Of course he does, my love," was the gentle reply.

"And do you not try, Con., my beauty, to dispute my wishes; for, by Jove! if you do, you will be beaten."

"Oh! fie! a gentleman and a soldier, and talk of beating a lady!" she merrily observed; when, looking at her mother, and then at her father, she was suddenly reminded of something which again brought back the look and attitude already more than once mentioned.

"Why, you beautiful imp," said the Colonel, infinitely amused at her boldness; "what do you mean by assuming that striking attitude? You only want a sword and shield to look the very image of a young amazon."

"Really, papa," she replied, laughing and blushing, "I can not explain it. I think," and she immediately became very grave, "I think it is something mysterious and supernatural. A long, very long time ago, when I was quite a wee thing, I had a very remarkable dream."

"Dear Constance," interrupted Helen, "what nonsense you are telling papa."

"Not such nonsense as you think, Nelly; but of that both papa and mamma shall judge, if they will lend me their ears."

"Oh, go on, pray!" said her father, eating his breakfast and glancing at the paper; "it can hardly be more strange or wonderful than to hear a cheerful voice here."

Scoffer! who had banished the cheerful voice, and trampled on the happy heart?

"Proceed, my love," said her mother, making an effort to appear insensible to the sneer.

"It is this," continued Constance, closing her beautiful eyes, as if better to see with those of the mind. "I dreamed that I was playing in some grand place—very grand indeed—and there was some one exceedingly beautiful, singing—and so sweetly—that I put away my doll, and stood at the side of this angel, who seems to have reminded me of mamma; but all at once, I can not ex-

plain how—you know how inconsistent dreams are—instead of music there were horrible sounds, and a fierce animal, in red, like flames, flew at the angel, and brandished some weapon to kill her, when, in a moment, I seemed to feel that I had wings, and I darted at this monster, and it disappeared."

There was a dead silence, as if they waited to hear more; and when Constance opened her eyes, she saw Helen with downcast looks and burning cheeks, the very picture of dismay; while Mrs. Templeton, with a calm expression, was collecting a few scattered notes.

Constance gazed with wonder at her sister, and was on the point of making some remark, for her father's face was completely screened by his paper, but a hoarse voice broke the uncomfortable silence by saying, "There, that will do—enough of this stuff;" and again the meal proceeded in quiet, for Constance felt there had been something *mal-à-propos* in her relation.

The version—or vision—which Constance had just given, though quite correct as to *her* impression, was only a kind of allegory of a fact—one that was neither mysterious nor supernatural. When a very little child, she was in the grand drawing-room with her mother, who was playing and singing to amuse her, when the Colonel, dressed in hunting costume, entered, and after some violent words—no matter for what—probably his own vile nature inciting him, had, in his unmanly fury, raised his whip, when Constance shrieked and rushed between them. Whether the unexpected appearance of the child, or the courage of the act, made him ashamed of his own cowardly movement, it matters not; but, as she now spoke, the whole scene was before him; that gentle, unresisting wife, and the brave little figure which flew to her protection. Well did he remember it all.

But would he, could he have struck her? he—the man who had sworn solemnly to protect and cherish her? Poor thing! poor thing! God only knows what she had suffered!

* * * * * * * *

"I fear you are not well, dear friend," said Mrs. Templeton, addressing Mrs. Vernon, when the ladies assembled after dinner in the drawing-room.

"My head is not quite comfortable," she replied, with more truth than can usually be said of these convenient head attacks—so often the excuse and alias for ill-temper—but in this case Mrs. Vernon had seen quite enough, when added to Caroline's information, to make her feel anxious—for, reason as she would about the suitableness of the match, she was not easy, and felt that it would be a great relief if she might impart her thoughts to Mrs. Templeton—but all was at present too vague, resting, as her impression did, upon those uncertain things—looks, smiles, and blushes; so that, when she examined her evidence, it amounted absolutely to nothing.

"How handsome they all look," said she to Lady Dallas, whose good temper was ever ready to echo praise.

"Yes, all of them," she replied, with pointed and kind emphasis; "that rich, half Spanish face," indicating Caroline, "contrasts charmingly with the brown curls and blue eyes of its neighbor."

"We require a Paris to assign the apple," said Mrs. Forrester, who was looking in the same direction.

"And, behold! Mr. West very aptly represents him," was the smiling reply of Lady Dallas, for several of the younger gentlemen had soon followed the ladies; "he seems to have no doubt as to which goddess deserves it;" and she pointed to Reginald and Helen, who were conversing at an open window.

"It is a divided allegiance then," pursued Mrs. Forrester, "for his looks are often cast toward the drive leading from Sea-View Cottage. I know he is anxious to see his mother's little carriage. Ah! there it is, I can tell by his smile, and they are going to meet her;" for Mrs. West, whose health had lately visibly declined, now appeared in society only for a short time, and was drawn up in her hand-chaise to the terrace.

"How stately he looks, now he is helping her out—and how gentle—if my sons resemble him," exclaimed Lady Dallas, "I shall not care how soon I grow old; need I?" appealing to Mrs. Forrester.

"Certainly not," she replied; "old age should be the repose and reward of the affectionate parent."

"I have a fancy," remarked Mrs. Vernon, "while acknowledging that every age has its blessings, though every one is not permitted to taste of them all—I fancy that age especially has them in rich abundance—of course, supposing a well-spent, though, perhaps, sorely tried, youth; to age, the past is a book, the contents of which have been thoroughly learned—whose lessons, uttered to the ear of experience, teach nothing so forcibly as the goodness of that providence which doth all things well—while the present, instead of being busied in schemes for the future, which may all end in disappointment, is used in humbly but calmly resting on those promises which fail not."

"Thanks, dear friend," said Mrs. Templeton, the only one whose disciplined feelings enabled her to reply; and then followed a brief silence, which was broken by her saying in a cheerful tone, "But do look at Mrs. West and her escort; Ashley and Hubert will certainly dispute her with Reginald—we shall have lances shivered before long."

"I fear there is sorrow for Reginald written on that fading face," remarked Mrs. Forrester, who had a singular regard for Mrs. West, quite irrespective of her connections.

"And so do I," replied Lady Dallas—she was not quite cured of all marplot habits, or she would have resisted the temptation to add, "but I hope he will find consolation in the fair one now by his side."

"Ah! indeed!" said Mrs. Forrester, now first roused to observe; "I confess you are more clear-sighted than I—but it is what Mrs. Templeton must expect."

"What must she expect?" inquired she, approaching, having left the group for a few minutes to welcome Mrs. West.

"Oh!" said Lady Dallas, "only what mothers, who have beautiful daughters, are generally prepared for—to lose them."

Mrs. Templeton turned pale, and following the

direction of her ladyship's eye, saw at once what she meant; but she made no remark.

When her company had gone, and she was alone, she took courage to examine the foundations on which this new and unexpected terror rested—yes, terror—for in her idea, happiness and marriage were by no means either synonymous terms or inseparably connected. Hitherto she had blindly, or at least but partially, looked at the future in reference to her daughters; she must now open her eyes and see it as it really was—with all its possible accidents and perils—with all its certain trials, its insecure and fleeting joys—she asked herself if she had selfishly speculated on retaining her blooming girls by her side; of making them sharers in her dismal and hopeless lot; of desiring them to be dwellers with her, under that shroud-like canopy which excluded both peace and rest? She shuddered as she looked at this gloomy picture; and "oh no!" she exclaimed, "not for this have I watched and prayed so long; the same love that enabled me to send them forth from me before, must give me strength again to bid them depart; and though this separation will not have the hope of reunion, which then consoled me, it will have the hope of securing their happiness."

She then calmly passed in review all she remembered of Reginald's conduct from his youth—his devotion to his mother—his respect and gratitude to his uncle—the successful struggle he had made in yielding his own wishes to those of this relative—his gentle, yet fearless and energetic character—and she felt, that to such a man she could give one of her treasures, as sure as we may be of any thing on earth, that he would value and cherish the gift; and that the respect which such qualities as his were certain to excite in a kindred spirit, was the best guarantee for the continuance of the love which for the first time she suspected Helen felt; and she smiled to observe that, already, she had become so familiar with the idea, that she was hoping it might be true, for of her husband's consent she did not doubt; and thus satisfied on a matter of such deep importance, she retired to rest, after having commended all her dear ones to the care of that Being who never slumbereth nor sleepeth.

CHAPTER XIX.

"There is no life on earth, but being in love!
There are no studies no delights, no business,
No intercourse, or trade of sense, or soul,
But what is love!
B. JONSON.

"WHY, what a sleepless fellow you must be," was Ashley Vernon's morning salutation to Reginald, as the latter hailed his friend from his bed-room window.

"On the contrary, it is because I have slept so well, that I can afford to snuff the early air, and brush off this morning dew. I have come on a twofold errand; first to have a talk with you, and next to change these books," pointing to two of goodly size which he carried.

"What! have you devoured them already? You are more voracious than old Chronos—but you have been at your usual tricks, skimming them."

"If I have," replied Reginald, laughing, "I have all the cream safe at home, in my old common-place book, and some of these days, perhaps, I may churn it, and try to make it into something solid. But I must not stand here alarming your peaceful family—Ah! good-morning, Caroline; if I were a stranger I should infallibly perpetrate a compliment—quote Milton, and talk of Eve—but being the friend of many years, I shall merely say you look quite beautiful."

"And I thank you for remarking so common an occurrence," she replied, gayly, "as I fear it is often left quite unnoticed, till I go to the looking-glass. But what is Ashley loitering at the window for? of course you have come for some breakfast—and how is your dear mother? I thought she seemed quite in spirits last evening."

"My mother I have not seen this morning,—my hours are too early for an invalid; but, like you, I noticed how gay she was. I remember the time when a visit to the Priory used to depress instead of cheer the spirits; but somehow the case is altered now."

"Ah!" said Ashley, thrusting his handsome head out of the window, "now play the hypocrite, and pretend to be ignorant of the reason—but do not expect me to imitate your duplicity—it is because there are angels there now, whose visitings heretofore were short and far between."

Reginald colored crimson, which Ashley, who was still looking at him, observed, and quietly smiled—"I guess what he has come here to talk to me about, with those legal quartos under his arm—I suppose they will open of their own accord at the chapters on matrimony, wives, and marriage settlements"—then, after a thoughtful pause, he added, still to himself, "well, he is a true-hearted, noble fellow, and may be safely trusted with that gentle girl's happiness."

"A penalty, Ashley," said his father, after the usual greetings, as he entered when breakfast was began.

"Here it is, papa," said Caroline; "ready for him in the form of a cold cup of coffee; he has been pursuing his studies so assiduously before his glass, that Time fled by all unheeded."

"Oh! I leave serious literature to Reginald, while I pursue only the beautiful and ornamental," retorted Ashley; "look, sir," addressing his father, and calling his attention to the thick quartos, "at what he has been demolishing."

"Ah, indeed," replied Dr. Vernon; "points your taste that way? why, Reginald, you had better enter with Ashley, and read for the bar."

"There is nothing I should more gladly do, my dear Doctor; but you see I am not my own master. My indulgent uncle leaves me scarcely any thing to desire—certainly nothing that money can procure. I have, at times, hinted my wish to do something for myself; but he silences me by inquiring what he has omitted to do for me. Still, I am not sure, were there not another reason which now prevents me, if I should not venture to urge my wishes more strongly; though, when I have this appointment he talks of, it will perhaps make me busy enough."

"Ask him to give it you at once, my dear young friend," replied the Doctor; "emolument

is, to you, of no consequence, but employment is."

"I feel all that very deeply, but I could not now accept any post that carried me from England; my dear mother's health is so delicate"—and a look of intense sorrow came over his brilliant and animated countenance—no one could contradict him, all felt that there was but too much cause for apprehension, when every week made the ravages of illness more and more apparent.

"Now, what have you to say to me?" inquired Ashley, when they were alone; "but to spare you embarrassment, let me guess—it is about Helen—am I right?"

"You are, but how did you make this discovery?" asked Reginald, in a tone of surprise.

"Only by the same tokens which rendered it tolerably evident to all who had eyes."

"Good heavens! you do not mean to say any indiscretion on my part—"

"As to indiscretions," interrupted Ashley, "we will not allude to them. Why, my dear fellow, I heard Lady Dallas remark on it, with her usual tact, to Mrs. Forrester; and to crown all, in the hearing of Mrs. Templeton!"

"Lady Dallas, of all people! how unlucky!" replied Reginald, looking very thoughtful; I must go at once to the Priory and see Mrs. Templeton; but do you really think she remarked any thing? I thought I was so guarded—"

"What she remarked or heard, I know no more, for certain, than what she thought; but disregarding Lady Dallas and her troublesome sharp-sight, what was your intention when you came here this morning?" inquired Ashley.

"To tell you the whole of what has been my thought and wish for a long, long time—and to consult you upon what was best to be done."

"And Mrs. West?"

"Oh! my dear mother heard all last night—we then settled that I ought, at once, to see Lord Ernest, of whose consent I have no doubt, and my mother wished to know your opinion before I set off."

"It coincides with yours; on no account must you go near the Priory till you go armed with your uncle's approbation. And, Reginald, let me make one remark: bring that consent in writing, it is more respectful, and on every account desirable. In short, you must make it rather a matter of importance."

"I then start without delay—yet there is a great temptation to stay. I heard them all arrange to meet here this morning, and—"

"You will do no such thing," said Ashley; "away with you immediately; you a lover! and delay procuring what must enable you to win the prize!—you forget the sooner you go, the sooner you return."

"You are right; but, Ashley, my tried, kind friend—" and Reginald laid his hand affectionately on young Vernon's shoulder, and looked full in his fine face—

"What now?" asked Ashley, with one of his smiles, so frank, so gentle.

"Am I a thoughtless, selfish old fellow, in coming thus to you?" he hesitated, and again fixed a searching gaze on Ashley.

"Be at rest, Reginald," replied the friend, so rightly named tried and kind; "you have no cause for fear or suspicion," and he met his glance steadily. "If I were a clergyman, I would now, at once if it might be, perform the marriage ceremony for you; but not being such, I shall be delighted to give your lovely choice to you whenever you need my services; does this declaration satisfy thee, thou doubter, or art thou going to quarrel, because I do not acknowledge thy lady-love to be peerless?"

"I am satisfied," was the reply, as he warmly shook Ashley's hand; "quite satisfied, quite happy," and he felt as if relieved from the weight of a dozen milestones; "but when I remember that I have loved Helen for years—yes, years—for it began with my deep reverence for her mother, when I was a boy at Eton; I wonder that you do not the same—but now adieu. I shall not write, but bring my tidings with me."

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"And, pray, where is that loitering Mr, West, as Caroline has set the fashion of calling him, who for so many years has been Reginald to us all?" asked Constance, as they sat round the Rectory luncheon table.

"I expect he is many miles on his way to Old Court," answered Ashley.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Caroline, glancing at Helen's face, and trying to divert attention from her glowing cheeks and downcast eyes; "he said nothing of this during breakfast."

"I hope Lord Ernest is not ill," said Constance, who seemed influenced by the very spirit of inquiry; "Mrs. West says he is a sad valetudinarian."

"Lord Ernest's life has been one that claims our sincerest sympathy," said Mrs. Vernon; "it has the remembrance of one dreadful loss thrown over it—a loss which to some natures is at once decisive in casting a gloom on all subsequent events."

"And yet," said Helen, "there are many who have trials greater even than his—though that is very terrible—but they do not, on that account, seclude themselves from the world; on the contrary, they mingle in it, and resolutely perform the duties it claims from us all—from the sorrowful as well as from the happy."

"Perhaps," said Caroline, "their circumstances will not allow of inactivity; sometimes the duties are so clamorous, they will *not* be neglected."

"All duties are clamorous," replied her mother, "if we did not persist in closing our ears to their importunity; and though all can not say, 'at your peril neglect us,' depend upon it, if they *are* neglected, they will be revenged."

"Still," said Constance, "we must make allowance for difference of character, for bodily health, for early discipline—do you not think so?"

"*We* may, but the neglected duty will not—at least, so I believe," said Ashley.

"How do you mean?" asked Helen, raising her gentle eyes to his earnest ones.

"I mean, that, in speaking of the vengeance, as my mother rightly calls it, of these ill-used duties, we do not consider, that punishment is as often administered by witholding blessings as by inflicting penalties. Without the impropriety of being personal, let us imagine a man who has neglected some duty—what shall it be?"

"His duty to a dear, self-denying mother," exclaimed Helen, with unusual vehemence.

"Or been treacherous to his friend," suggested Caroline.

"Or to his sister," said Constance with a smile at Helen.

"Very well; in either case he would lose the delight which invariably attends the performance of these duties; while, I may add, he would gain the troubled conscience which most vexatiously refuses to be comforted."

"Yes, yes, I see," said Constance, shaking her beautiful head, and looking very serious; "but, as Ellen says, it must be very dreadful to lose one we especially love, must it not?"

The remark was not addressed to any one in particular, but Ashley spoke.

"It must indeed!" was his grave reply.

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Mr. Morton and his son were so uncertain in their movements, and the business of the former so often carried him from the Hermitage, that the Paul Prys of the village had long ceased to trouble themselves about their proceedings; especially as these were often kind, always harmless, and wholly devoid of that *soupçon* of secrecy or mystery which is necessary to keep curiosity alive.

Colonel Templeton frequently met Victor, during some of the rambles in which the latter indulged; but, as he had hitherto always been alone, there was no excuse for accosting one whose air and manner gave no encouragement to freedom. One day, however, the Colonel was riding in company with Sir William Dallas, when they met Victor, and as the Baronet stopped to speak to him, he and the Colonel exchanged glances; and to the surprise of Sir William, who fancied there was a standing feud between the tenant of the Hermitage and the master of it, he said, "Who is that? is it Mr. Morton's son?" and before the rather slow Sir William could reply, Victor bowed and said very gravely, "I am Victor Morton."

"The son of the gentleman at the Hermitage?"

"The same."

"Then, by George!" said the Colonel. "he has as handsome an heir as any man need desire;" and quite regardless of the young man's cold looks or evident anger, at being treated with so little deference, he said—"Harkye, young sir, give my compliments, Colonel Templeton's compliments to your father, and say I shall be glad to see you whenever he will let you come."

A silent, but rather haughty bow was the only notice Victor took of this patronizing invitation, while, as he turned away, he muttered, "The consent of two must be obtained before I come." But on naming this rencounter to his father, the unexpected reply was, "Well, if he should meet you again, and repeat the invitation, accept it, by all means, if you like."

And they did meet, and the invitation was renewed, for Colonel Templeton was much too careless, and too great a lover of ease, to trouble himself about what never interfered with him or his plans. The original cause of the quarrel had lost its prominence.

It was, therefore, much to Mrs. Templeton's amazement, that they one morning entered the luncheon-room together.

"I have brought a stranger," said the Colonel; "give him a welcome."

"Not quite a stranger," she replied, shaking hands with Victor; "we have met at Sea-View Cottage, where Mr. Victor so often supplies Reginald's place. And as to the welcome, that, I hope, he is sure of."

There was a charm about Victor's manners which all felt, without being quite able to explain in what it consisted. It arose from the freshness and originality of his feelings and opinions, from his frank and prompt, but not intrusive confidence —from the absence of all affectation or studied arts. Quite unconscious that he differed from most other youths of his age, in having a range of ideas peculiar to his foreign residence and education, he was as much more interesting than the made-to-order lads of a mere classical academy, as he was superior to the duelling, smoking, beer-quaffing abominations who now infest every German university town.

Colonel Templeton seemed strangely fascinated with his new acquaintance, and as he himself could still be a most agreeable companion, Victor Morton thought himself in elysium, as he sat chatting with his charming hostess.

"What a glorious place this is!" he exclaimed looking on the noble expanse of lawn and park which gently sloped on one side toward the sparkling brook, and on the other was belted by some majestic trees which threw their deep and refreshing shade over the graceful deer that were seen here and there through the tall stems. "Look at the sun on those gigantic oaks, it has turned them into gold for catching its rays, Why, it is a 'Herzogthum' in itself!" and his looks still lingered on the varied beauties of the scene.

"Yes! here I reign supreme!" laughed the gratified owner.

"That of course you do," was the quiet reply; and he looked at the noble features and commanding figure before him; and then he added, as if *à propos* to the remark, "And there you are, reminding your vassals of you, when not present," pointing to his portrait.

As they left the table, Victor approached it nearer, for the purpose of examining it more accurately. "It is still very like you," said he; and then, in a simple, *naive* manner continued, "you must have been very handsome."

"You are quite a courtier," returned the Colonel; "the next time you come, I will show you a few choice specimens of painting, as you appear a lover of art: and do not let it be long before I have the pleasure of seeing you."

"And do you, Madam, echo the Colonel's kind invitation to come again?" asked Victor, respectfully appealing to Mrs. Templeton; "for, without it, I must resist the temptation." And as she quickly set him at rest about her sanction, with a volubility which seemed part of a sensitive and impulsive nature, he turned to Colonel Templeton and said, "Will you be so kind as to give me at once the card which will admit me to Hurstwood Hall? I have heard so much of some foreign paintings which are there, that I am anxious of seeing them."

And the Colonel, who was in excellent temper, really pleased with his young guest, gave him a note to the housekeeper, which would procure him admittance at any time.

These visits were frequently repeated; but Victor found that one of his golden idols had a more than usual alloy of base metal in its composition—which was always evident when it was brought into contact with the other—in plain language, Victor discovered that the Colonel did not treat his wife well—and, as he remarked to himself, "and such a wife!" This notable discovery he imparted to his father, at which, though he showed no surprise. Mr. Morton expressed great disquiet, while Victor declared he was more indignant than he could well express, muttering something about "ceasing his visits to the Priory."

"I must sincerely commend your warmth of feeling, my dear boy," said Mr. Morton; "but the only use you can make of this discovery is to avoid in yourself the indulgence of tempers and passions which you condemn, for you must not be Quixotic enough to make a feud of another's wrongs. I believe that to be always unwise—generally injurious to the one with whom we sympathize; and I should on many accounts be sorry that you ceased to visit the Priory. I think it does you good to be with so charming a person as Mrs. Templeton, irrespective of the advantage you derive from the society you often meet there; and I am truly sorry that we shall be leaving England before the Miss Templetons return from this wedding, which has prevented you from becoming much acquainted with them."

"And so am I, for I suspect that before our return, one, at least, will have been carried off."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Miss Templeton, and a noble fellow he is who wins, if I do no mistake."

"Mr. West or Mr. Hubert?" asked his father.

Oh! not Hubert, he is a handsome, generous, spoilt only son," said Victor, laughing at this description of himself; "but no—no—he is not for Miss Templeton."

A very few days after this conversation, Victor went to the Priory, to pay his farewell respects previous to his leaving England; and addressing Mrs. Templeton, he alluded to the pleasure his visits there had afforded him, and expressed a hope, that on his return he should not find himself forgotten.

"No fear of that, my fine fellow," said the Colonel, who was always kind and friendly to Victor, even while offending him by his conduct to Mrs. Templeton; "and pray where are you going now?"

"For a few weeks to Germany; I expect afterward to meet my father in Spain."

"In Spain!" repeated the Colonel, with an evident change of countenance.

"Yes, have you any friends there? pray tell me. I should like to know them, and give them news of you and your family."

"Oh! no, I know no one there; but to what part of Spain shall you go?"

"I can not exactly say. We shall go most likely to various parts; perhaps you do not know that my father was a merchant, and has correspondents almost everywhere. One of my sisters, my half-sister, is named Inez, after some Spanish lady."

"Inez! my God!" exclaimed the Colonel, with a start that made his wife look at him with surprise.

"Yes," replied Victor, as if in apology, "the name does sound romantic and odd here, but there it is common enough."

"True, true," muttered the Colonel; but for all that the name seemed still odd to him.

"I am gazing my farewell to this sweet place," said Victor, as he turned from the window; and then looking intently at the Colonel, who stood by his portrait, he asked abruptly, "Were you ever in Spain, sir?"

"No!" boldly replied he; but catching the astonished look of Mrs. Templeton, he quickly added, "Oh! yes, with my regiment, years ago.

"Oh!" remarked Victor, "as long ago as that. And you have not been at Seville since?"

"No—yes—no, certainly," were the stammered and contradictory answers.

"It is very odd," said the youth, as if musing on something not quite clear; "but about two, say three years ago, I saw a gentleman so very like you at Constantina, which is only a few leagues from Seville; the resemblance was remarkable."

"That is extremely probable," said the Colonel, speaking quietly, but as if with difficulty; "I am not the only one like myself. And were you living there at that time?"

"Oh, no, we were merely on a visit to an old friend; my father has a talent for finding and leaving friends everywhere; but I remember that Englishman well—for he was English—though his name I never rightly heard; but old Dolores, one of the servants, drew my attention to him, by sending a very doubtful blessing after him."

Seville! Constantina, Inez, Dolores! why did these names wake a host of recollections in the Colonel's mind? Why was it as if a nest of adders had been suddenly roused to fury in his heart?

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Reginald lost no time, after having taken leave of his mother, in reaching Old Court, the name of the estate which Lord Ernest inherited from his mother; it was a charming but secluded place, situated on the borders of Wales, but its quiet and seclusion rendered it all the more valuable to her son, an amiable and kind man, but strong neither in mind or body

Reginald thought his uncle looking unusually ill; and remarked that a nervous restlessness had taken the place of his accustomed apathy and inertness. He, however, listened to Reginald's statement of his case with great kindness; promptly gave his consent, and talked of the arrangements he should make; but expressed a wish that there should be no haste, remarking that both parties were very young.

Reginald thought that the man who was old enough to woo should be considered old enough to wed; but on the other point he satisfied his uncle that there could not be any hurry, for he said his mother's health required both care and change of residence, and that directly this matter, regarding his settlement for life, which was so important to his happiness, should be concluded, he meant

to accompany her to Harrowgate, a place strongly recommended by her medical attendant.

He hinted at the propriety of Lord Ernest writing to Colonel Templeton; but this his uncle so decidedly declined doing, and appeared so startled at the mere idea of such an effort, that Reginald could not make up his mind again to allude to it, though he well remembered that Ashley had thought it both important and desirable.

When he retired for the night, accompanied by the old butler, to whom he announced his intention of returning to Seabrooke the next day, that worthy man, who had known Reginald from a boy, smilingly hoped he was not taking a liberty in wishing him joy, for, he added, his Lordship had condescended to inform him of the cause of Mr. Reginald's short visit.

"Thank you, Roberts, thank you, old friend," replied Reginald, "but the battle is not gained, the prize not won yet; to have secured my uncle's consent is but the first, and, perhaps, the easiest step, and you will oblige me by not repeating any information you may receive; for a rejected suitor cuts but a sorry figure."

"Under favor, Mr. Reginald, you can never be either a sorry figure or a rejected suitor," said Robert, looking at the handsome young man before him; and adding, with a smile, "young ladies have eyes. But, sir, did you know that Mrs. Melville is here?"

"No; where is she? But I really have not time to call on her at present; and, indeed I do not see the necessity for her knowing that I have been here, as my affairs can not concern her."

"She will not learn that or any thing else from me," replied Robert, significantly; "but she has been here, on and off, for the last year, and I wonder, sir, you did not know of it. She has taken a cottage near Oswestry, and she and Miss are very much here."

"Well, Roberts, I understand what you mean; but she must see that that is a hopeless scheme, and I suppose she is now legacy hunting. I fear she will always be poor, but a few hundreds given her can not harm any one, and may settle her for life."

"Very true, sir, but I hope you will soon be here again. I think my Lord wants you, and to my mind he is far from being well or comfortable."

"I am truly sorry to have made the same remarks on his health," said Reginald; "you may depend upon my return as soon as possible; and now good-night, Roberts; my uncle has my permission to tell you any good news relating to me." He recalled these last words, the next morning, as he slowly rode from Old Court to meet the mail. "And will there be good news to tell?" asked Reginald. "What if Helen should not love me?" and he felt that the bare thought made him shiver and turn faint; "what if I have been an egregious coxcomb, and have taken it for granted that I have nothing to do but to ask and receive—yet Heaven knows that is not my presumptuous notion, and Helen must know it also. She must have seen how I have waited and watched for every trifling indication that I was not disliked; and she must surely pardon me if I have hoped and prayed that I might be loved, though even she does not yet know for how many years she has shared my love with my dear mother. If I have mistaken what is kindness and gentleness to all for a feeling that is more exclusive, God forgive me; but if so, life has but little brightness left for me." And as he felt more and more the necessity of ascertaining his fate, he urged on his horse, as if by so doing he could hasten the arrival of the mail; it, however, gave him time more calmly to anticipate the future, and he resolved, instead of encouraging gloomy apprehensions, to brace up his courage, and meet in a manly spirit what might be in reserve for him.

And are we to imagine that Reginald's manner, which drew upon him the sharp eyes of Lady Dallas, and caused Mrs. Templeton such deep thought, was unnoticed by Helen? by no means; though to her it was nothing so uncommon as to excite any thing but feelings of pleasure. If Helen had been asked by any one but *the* one, do you love Reginald West? it is probable she would readily and frankly have answered in the affirmative; and it was not till she heard at the Rectory of his second visit to Old Court, so immediately after their last meeting, that she became conscious there had been more than usual tenderness in his tone and manner, and that from his eloquent eyess he had received fair, speakless messages, which she now, for the first time, though without either astonishment or apprehension, read to mean love! But when a thousand circumstances, light as air, came thronging into her memory, combined with this unexpected absence, Helen began to think more seriously of the influences the last few months had left. During that time, almost every day had brought her and Reginald together; till, following up the examination, she found the days that had not, had never, to her, been so happy. She now saw this state of affairs could not last, and she understood immediately why he had gone to Old Court. And then she asked herself the solemn question, did she love Reginald enough to become his wife—to trust him with her happiness—to share his fate? and her heart emphatically replied that she did.

Happy Helen! to her all seemed now settled, and she could peacefully await his return; for not a doubt of his love darkened the brightness of her trusting affection. And as to distrusting his worth, there was treachery to him in the mere surmise. Oh, no! he would speedily return, and then their happiness would be shared by those they both so truly loved.

"Mother, dear mother, congratulate me," cried Reginald, kissing with extreme tenderness the pale face that was raised on his appearance, after his journey, for he had preferred being his own messenger; "so far all is well; my uncle is most kind, and though I must not say he was enraptured at my request, he promises all I can desire."

"Heaven be praised for that," replied Mrs. West; "and now, dear Reginald, what is the next step? for though it has been very difficult to do so, having seen so much of them all, and received hourly kindness from them, I have faithfully kept your secret."

"I shall go at once to the Priory and learn my fate from the Colonel and Mrs. Templeton, and

then, oh! they must, they will consent; then, see Helen, the most important, though the last."

"Then go, my son, and may your affection to your mother be rewarded by your winning the love of that dear girl."

Reginald set off at once, far too much excited to rest till he knew his fate; and he had very nearly reached the last terrace walk, when through the shrubbery he saw a lady's dress fluttering. Though he had decided on first speaking to the Colonel, various impressions which he had received, and many well-known facts he had heard of his character, now made him hesitate about the wisdom of paying him this mark of respect; and resolving to see who this was, and, if Helen, ascertain her sentiments at once, he followed the fluttering drapery, and saw that it did belong to her.

His heart beat and his face flushed as, quickening his pace, he approached, and, as calmly as he could, greeted her; but something in his manner was contagious. She visibly changed countenance, while her agitation deprived her of all self-command, or assuredly her first words would not have been, "I thought you were at Old Court?"

"I have been there, and have but now returned; and oh! Helen," he continued, in a tone of touching entreaty, "if my errand here, at this moment, be but as successful as my mission there was, what will there be left for me to desire? Helen!" he said, gently taking her hand, "I went there to tell my uncle that I love you; he was pleased to hear it, and gave me his blessing. I now come to tell you that I love you—though how deeply, you may, perhaps, never know. Helen! dearest Helen! what will you do?"

"Do the same," she whispered, lifting her loving eyes fearlessly to his beaming face.

And what was his reply? Why, a rapturous kiss on the now drooping lids, and another on the sweet mouth, while he softly said, "Helen! my wife?"

"Yes!" she answered; then, after a pause, which neither cared to break, she said, "But, Reginald, my father!"

"I shall see and speak to him forthwith, and Mrs. Templeton also. I leave you for a short time for that purpose."

And proudly did the young lover traverse the terrace and seek the Colonel, whom he fortunately found at home.

Colonel Templeton expressed much surprise at the object which had led to the interview, for he owned he had never once thought of such a result; he, however, very readily gave his consent, provided Lord Ernest performed his promise with respect to settlements, of which his nephew had not the least doubt; and, in his present flow of good temper, he wished Reginald joy, but he never once asked whether Helen was likely to ratify the contract, nor did he allude to his wife, and under these circumstances, Reginald did not think it necessary to inform him that his daughter's consent had been already obtained. All the Colonel said, was, "There, now go and see where they all are, and then return to me, and let us talk over the matter quietly."

Helen, after Reginald left her, crossed the flower-garden more like a somnambulist than any waking, thinking being. She mechanically ascended the stairs, till, on reaching the corridor, the voice of Constance was heard accompanying the piano, by which Helen knew she was not with her mother.

Quietly passing their own rooms, she stopped at the door of Mrs. Templeton's boudoir, and, tapping, entered. She glided rather than walked toward her mother, who looked at her very anxiously, attracted by her strange manner; then, falling on her knees, she took her hand, saying, "Mamma, give me your blessing."

"Helen! what means this, my love?"

"Reginald loves me, dear mother, and I love him, oh! so much, so much, and so long!" and a flood of tears relieved both herself and Mrs. Templeton, who had begun to feel alarmed, as she had no idea of Reginald's return and visit to the Priory.

"My dear child! my precious Helen! what is it all? tell me, tell your mother!"

"Oh! send for Reginald," she replied; "he is with papa—he will tell you."

"Remain here quietly till I return," said her mother, leading her to the sofa, and then proceeding to Constance, she, in few words, told her suspicions; and before the latter could well recover from her astonishment, they heard the door of the library open and close, when Mrs. Templeton begged her to seek Reginald, and bring him to her boudoir.

"Now, Helen," she said, as she returned and seated herself by her daughter, "Reginald will soon be here. Shall I see him alone, or will you be present?"

"I will be present, and Constance, too—all I love best, come together. Ah! dear Constance," as her sister entered, leaning on Reginald's arm, which she quitted to embrace and caress Helen, while he, approaching her, said, "Helen, your father consents. Dear Mrs. Templeton, will you take me for your son? Constance, may I be your brother?"

"Oh! Reginald, how happy I am!" she replied, though her tears seemed to contradict her words; and perceiving that her mother looked pale, and, as if struggling for words, she said to her, "Dearest mamma! you hear he does not ask you to give him Helen, but to accept him. Will you not, dearest, and let me henceforth have a brother to pet and love?"

"Very readily, indeed, do I accept you, my dear Reginald, as my son, and may we all, as long as we live, remember this hour with gratitude. But, Constance, we must now seek your father and thank him;" and both having affectionately shaken hands with Reginald and congratulated him, they left the two most deeply interested in this case, and turned toward the stair head. But Constance, gently putting her arm round her mother, led her into her own pretty dressing-room, and placing her in an easy chair, she drew a footstool close to it, and sat at her mother's feet in perfect silence.

After a few minutes thus spent, Mrs. Templeton asked, "Constance, what is it?"

"Mamma, I do not think I shall advise you to seek papa; he ought, on this occasion at least, to have sought you; so let me rule this once."

"Be it so," was the assenting reply; for, in

truth, when Mrs. Templeton proposed seeking her husband, it was a mere excuse for leaving the room, as she correctly anticipated, that though they might both consent to this marriage, their reasons for so doing would, if examined, be found widely dissimilar. She knew that even on this interesting occasion, as in all other matters, there would not, there could not, be the least sympathy between them; and, therefore, yielding, very readily, to the wish of Constance, they sat and discussed, what to Constance was a most unexpected event, for more than an hour; when Helen entered to say that Reginald wished her to go with him to see his mother.

"Dear Helen!" said Constance, smiling and embracing her, "this will make no difference with our love; it will be as great and as strong as ever:" but there was a tone, a very faint tone, of sadness in her voice.

"Quite, sweet sister! my heart is very large, and has plenty of room when love knocks and introduces a guest. Reginald usurps no one's place, dearest mamma!" and she threw her arms fondly round her mother, who silently pressed her to her heart in a long, loving caress.

Ah! how happy was this first walk taken together by Reginald and his Helen! How delightful the idea that the cherished one by his side loved him—was his—about to be his wife—that he was now taking her to his mother, and with her would receive that mother's blessing.

And how solemn! how fervent! how loving was that blessing, as pronounced by the mother, on him who to her had ever been the first of earthly gifts; on him who had so richly repaid her love; and then, when she turned to that fair girl he had now brought with him, scarcely less tender was the prayer for her—for her who was henceforth to be the light and joy of her son's existence. She knew full well that, as regarded herself, the place that now knew her would soon know her no more; and earnestly did she entreat that they might be both blessed, when they went out and when they came in, and that love from on high might sanctify their union, and be theirs till the end!

CHAPTER XX.

"————How the innocent
As in a gentle slumber, pass away!"
MASSINGER.

"WHEN all the bustle and excitement previous to this wedding, and the wedding itself, are over," said Dr. Vernon, a few months after the engagement had been made public, "I think I shall take the opportunity of having some needful repairs done to the church and the Rectory; my diocesan has given me six months' leave of absence. I shall procure a substitute; and as the school-rooms have lately been put to rights, service can be performed in them."

"But the time for the marriage is not yet fixed," observed Ashley, who had been one of the earliest and warmest in his congratulations to his friend; "and I can not help wishing that Lord Ernest were a little brisker in his movements."

"Hear the gentleman of the long robe condemning delay," cried Caroline, with a laugh; "why, I thought delay was the motto of your profession?"

"Prejudice, my dear sister, or, properly speaking, vulgar ignorance, alone says that," replied Ashley; "the injustice of some, the falsehood of others, the unreasonable expectations of a third, in short, all the follies and vices acting on a litigious spirit, array themselves against speed and progress, and then accuse the law and the lawyers. Who and what make lawsuits? the fraud or avarice of clients, not lawyers; and I will no more suffer them to be abused, because some are knaves, than I would permit the clergy to be branded as hypocritical and grasping, because there may be found Tartuffes and Harpagons among *them*."

"Well said, Ashley," exclaimed the Doctor; "and I thank you; for there is no profession or trade either which has not its dishonorable members; and if these formed the majority, they would soon destroy it altogether. But while the good and bad are mixed, though the former ever preponderate, let us be merciful, and, above all, by our conduct try to honor that profession to which we respectively belong."

"I see I am expected to cry *culpa mia*," said Caroline, taking her brother's arm; "and I do most humbly; but this does not hasten Lord Ernest, nor accelerate the preparations for the wedding. I really believe, if dear Mrs. West had her way, it would take place at once; but that, of course, can not be."

"I fear, my dear father," said Ashley, "that Reginald will have to mourn before he rejoices. Lady Dallas, who has recently spent a few days near Harrowgate, speaks of Mrs. West's case as quite hopeless, though she says that Reginald seems strangely blind to the rapid and alarming change."

"Our affections are most deceitful guides," remarked Mrs. Vernon; "sometimes we see, or fancy we see, virtues and excellences which have no existence; at other times, we appear to be bereft of all sense, and can neither see nor hear what the heart shrinks from acknowledging, though it is most glaringly the truth."

* * * * * * *

"Have you heard the report that Lord Hurstwood has returned from St. Petersburgh, loaded with honors?" asked Hubert Forrester of Lady Dallas.

"No! when and where did you hear of it?"

"I called at the Priory this morning to ask after Mrs. West, about whom my mother is much distressed. I there saw Miss Sinclair, who had received the news from one of her correspondents."

"Did she say whether he is expected at the Hall?" inquired her ladyship.

"She said it seemed doubtful; the report is, that he intends to visit his Irish estates first, and the same report goes on to say, he means to repose on his honors, and marry."

"How very odd of him never to have married before;" and thinking of her daughters, Lady Dallas said, "pray how old is he?"

"About seven or eight years younger than the Colonel; perhaps forty-three or five, perhaps not

so much," answered Hubert, to whom he seemed quite an ancient.

"Oh! not so very old, after all," said the speculating mamma; and she quickly did a little bit of mental arithmetic to this effect: take fourteen—the age of the eldest daughter—from forty-three, we will say three, for the sake of the argument—how many remains? answer, twenty-nine. There is no disputing figures, they are so obstinate, so always the same; and do the sum as she would, the answer was, twenty-nine! so she decided that there *was* a difference in age—his lordship was too old; and, turning to Hubert, she asked, what had been the reply to his inquiries after Mrs. West?

"She is very bad—no hope—I only saw Miss Sinclair," he said.

A few days after this conversation, the rumor respecting Lord Hurstwood was confirmed by his appearance, but only for a very brief period.

"Mrs. West's health, I understand, will prevent any party being given at the Priory in honor of his Lordship's return," said Lady Dallas to Mrs. Forrester; "but Sir William has an invitation to a large dinner party, of gentlemen only, at the Hall."

"So has Mr. Forrester and Hubert. Miss Sinclair told me yesterday that the last accounts of Mrs. West, though rather better, are still very distressing; this is a sad interruption to prospects which seemed so bright and happy."

"Of course all talk of the wedding is now stopped; but, in the event of her death, will it be postponed for the whole term of mourning?" inquired Lady Dallas.

"I apprehend not; but my informant is always either Miss Sinclair or Constance, for poor Helen is sadly depressed; and Constance told me that Mrs. West had exacted a promise from her son that the ceremony should take place quietly, as soon after her death as was at all consistent; for he is now quite aware that recovery is hopeless."

Poor Reginald! at length the blow fell—the silver cord was broken—and, one sad and true mourner sat in the darkened rooms of that silent house, feeling all the bitterness of desolation; and for a time he refused to be comforted.

Ashley Vernon—that true friend—left all, and went to him. Helen wrote to him, and her letters at this time were his chief consolation. Mrs. Templeton, Constance, all the kind hearts at the Rectory gave him the full tribute of their sympathy; but while weeping with him for his great loss, his old friend, Dr. Vernon, reminded him that he was not to sorrow as one without hope, and recalled to his memory the many blessings still left to him; one loan, it is true, had been reclaimed, but how many were still left!

CHAPTER XXI.

"When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions." *Hamlet.*

Sea-View Cottage, which, before Mrs. West's death had been occupied by the gentleman who was to supply Dr. Vernon's place during his absence, was now engaged by him for several months; for as it was clear that, at present, there could not be any wedding, the Rector had decided on taking his departure; and preparations were made, about a month after the death of Mrs. West, for the whole family to leave.

They meant first to visit Charles, and then to see other friends, who put forth claims of many years' standing; and as their absence would be for six months, they hoped, on their return, to find that peace had again settled on the hearts that had been so recently and severely pained.

Reginald had paid a hurried and unsatisfactory visit to Old Court, and on leaving it, his uncle insisted so strenuously on his taking a check for a thousand pounds, in order, as he said, to pay any debts—though Mrs. West had never exceeded her income, and Reginald's allowance was really munificent—that he felt quite embarrassed at this new proof of his uncle's generosity.

A fortnight at the Priory did much to restore his over-tried spirit, and then Ashley and he went to make a Highland tour, including Craigalan, to which place they had been most cordially invited. All these arrangements were sad contrasts to the gayety which had been anticipated; but amid the sorrow and desolation which he so keenly felt, Reginald had the inexpressible comfort to find, that Helen, she whom he had chosen as his partner through life—his partner in woe as in weal—was fitted for that duty; it was her sweet voice that spoke of submission, of resignation; it was her assurance that his she was and ever would be, that made his heart open to happiness, and sustained him in his deep distress.

Constance was at first vehement in her expressions of grief; but when she looked at the calm face of her mother, and fancied that it looked sadder and paler than usual, she shuddered, and the thought flashed across her mind, that the destroying angel might lay its icy cold hand on that loved head, and thus rebuke her rebellious spirit; therefore she no more let it be seen that she needed consolation, but administered it to those who had been more sorely tried than herself.

Colonel Templeton had been so indifferent about his daughter's marriage, though when it was alluded to he always expressed his satisfaction, that his insensibility now was nothing remarkable; but the silence and sorrow impressed on all around seemed sometimes to annoy him; and then he went to consult Cooper—almost his shadow—or shut himself up with letters which seemed greatly to interest him—or went to town, where he had business with Mr. Sloper, his lawyer.

Cecilia Grantham, who was still in Italy, wrote to say, that gay or sad, in black or white, Helen's bridesmaid she must and would be, and desired to have timely information of her services being required, so as to settle for her departure.

Laurette, who had been visiting the Westroughs, remained in England for the same purpose, as it was understood Mrs. West's wishes would be respected as to hastening the marriage; but as she had no taste for any thing dismal, she availed herself of Mrs. Forrester's invitation, and made Forest Hill her head-quarters, in preference to the Priory. This arrangement answered a double purpose—first, there was no reason why she should eschew society, because Mrs. West had died; and

secondly, she should be in the same house with Hubert Forrester; whom, though younger than herself, and who had hitherto been strangely insensible to the fair Laurette's many attractions, she had resolved to win. That his parents would approve of the match she did not the least doubt; for, in every respect, she came up to the standard they had established as necessary to their daughter-in-law—rich, well-born; connected in Scotland with names of historical note; in England, all her relatives, if not among the nobility, were not far removed from that desirable pale—what more could they look for? She also knew that her manners were such as pleased the proud, fastidious Mrs Forrester—dignified, quiet, elegant—with just as much of accomplishment as prevented her from ever being overlooked—and quite as much information as enabled her always to command attention.

Mr. Forrester had more than once alluded to hereditary friendships; and was pointed in that nicely-balanced manner which, while it avoided marked neglect of any one, showed, toward her, particular attention.

But what said Hubert? who, all unknown to his parents, was the autocrat to whose will—and to whose whims also—they bowed? At present he evinced the most amazing indifference to her society and her talents. Certainly, while she was at the Priory he rode over there every day, but this he continued to do when she left.

But Laurette had not read one of our most clever female writers* in vain; "Propinquity, propinquity, my dear Laurette," said she.

Hubert Forrester was, in truth, a very dangerous young man as companion to any young lady who had a heart to bestow; and this Laurette was not peculiar in discovering. That well-dressed damsel, about whom we have been unpardonably silent, the lovely, modest, retiring, blushing Juliet Mordaunt, on this point entirely coincided in opinion with the haughty, aristocratic Laurette Sinclair; only she had in her artless way improved on her rival's plan. She had not pined in thought—no green and yellow melancholy disputed the place of the lilies and roses on her fair cheeks, and she *did* tell her love, as plainly as "nods and looks, and wreathed smiles" could—and, will it be believed? but believed or not it is still a truth, that the handsome young heir of all the Forresters, and all the Hargraves to boot, carried on a desperate flirtation with this gentle Juliet. He was at the pretty little residence of Mr. Cooper at early morn, and again at dewy eve; he called there to leave flowers—ah! beware of the thorns! and he called again to fetch flowers—beware lest he carry away all the heartsease, and leave only rue! But as her matronly and prudent mother was cognizant of all this, why make it our business—we will not.

* * * * * * * * *

A few days after Ashley and his sorrowful friend had started for Scotland, and about six weeks after Mrs. West's funeral, a letter arrived at the cottage for Reginald, which the young clergyman sent up immediately to the Priory. It was directed to be forwarded; but having already been more than twice re-addressed, the original post-mark was not very legible. Again it was sent on to Craigalan, with Helen's daily dispatch; but here it awaited the travelers two days, their progress not having been so easy as they had expected.

On their arrival, after receiving a most cordial welcome from the Sinclairs, Reginald seized his letters, the precious ones from Helen claiming precedence—yet, with a lover's jealousy, receiving this homage in private; to him it seemed profanation to open them while any eye might detect the feelings her sentiments of love and truth excited. Having read and carefully laid these aside, the traveled letter had its turn; but no sooner had Reginald made himself acquainted with the contents than, rushing toward Ashley's room, he burst in, with a face as pale as ashes, and, in a voice trembling with anguish, exclaimed—

"All is lost—read that fatal letter, which has been so deplorably delayed."

Ashley did so, and as he read, and comprehended the importance of the tidings it conveyed, he rang the bell repeatedly.

"Post-horses directly—detain our carriage—four horses as quickly as possible," he said.—"Reginald, remain here, while I apprise our host of this news, and of the necessity for our immediate departure."

But Reginald seemed stunned, and Sir Archibald, whose dismay was little less than that expressed by his two young friends, hastily entering, said—

"Command my whole establishment; a carriage-and-four shall be immediately at your service;" and, taking Ashley aside, he whispered, pointing to Reginald, "He must be roused, Mr. Vernon, or he will destroy the faint hope that still remains."

"I see the necessity for exertion," replied Ashley, with a face full of commiseration; and, taking Reginald's hand, he said:

"For Helen's sake, if not your own, rouse yourself, dear Reginald."

"Yes, any thing for Helen's sake—but no longer my Helen—lost, lost to me forever," exclaimed the wretched lover, in tones of agony. "Yet why should I struggle against my fate? Leave me—let me die—since all I love are taken from me;" and he buried his face in his hands.

"You must struggle, because it is *not* your fate yet," cried Ashley, roused to double energy in this trying emergency. "I tell you, Reginald, it is not too late. Heaven grant that this may be true," he added, in a lower tone, to himself. "Look up, my dear friend, and listen to me; we can reach Old Court in four days, and this warning, in spite of these vexatious delays, may yet have arrived in time. One effort, my dear fellow, and then on without stopping."

"You will allow me to accompany you one stage," said Sir Archibald, kindly. And he did so, and was glad to perceive that the excitement and hurry had slightly influenced Reginald, who began to catch hope from his companions, and was now as eager to push on as Ashley was.

But Sir Archibald showed that his hope was, in reality, very faint indeed, for, as he pressed Ashley's hand at parting, he said:

"Look after all the English papers, and keep them from Mr. West until you have scanned their contents."

* Miss Edgeworth.

But, alas! at Carlisle, Ashley had just left the room to hasten fresh horses, when the landlord, who was not every day honored with guests who traveled in a carriage-and-four, officiously handed Reginald the paper, which he received with much apathy, and, merely glancing at it, laid it down, when a paragraph, headed "Marriage in High Life," arrested his attention. He read one line, and fainted.

"Poor young gentleman!" said the landlady; "he is over-tired; he requires rest instead of four horses." And if he really did need rest, he had it, in one sense, abundantly; for when he next became conscious of any thing but chaos within chaos, of a sort of maddening whirl from which there was no escape, he saw the kind face of Mrs. Vernon by his bedside, but every thing else was quite strange. Happily, she perceived the faint expression of recognition in his heavy eyes, and said:

"Do not speak, dear Reginald; you are among friends, and are much better." She need hardly have prohibited speech, for he was much too feeble to make an effort; and, sighing heavily, he again closed his eyes, and thinking it was very pleasant to die, fell into the first gentle sleep since his illness.

"God be praised!" said Mrs. Vernon, an hour after this, as she still sat watching him; "he is surely much better, at least out of danger, doctor"—as a neat little man glided in—"he has recognized me, I am sure, and we may now hope—may we not?"

"Yes, I think we may," as he removed his eyes from the wan and worn face lying so death-like there; "I trust we may; but the nervous system has received a dreadful shock—I should say that this has been hovering over him for some time."

"I believe you are quite right," replied Mrs. Vernon, thinking that with doctors, as with confessors, there should be no secrets; "this gentleman was engaged to be married, when his mother, whom he fondly loved, died; and some news, which may change the whole of his prospects in a most disastrous way, was suddenly communicated to him, when quite exhausted with fatigue and anxiety."

"Ah! I perceive; a series of adverse circumstances, with love, of course, helping to aggravate them. Well, my dear madam, patience and ease will do wonders. I expect these will now be chiefly in demand; and with such a nurse as you, and such a friend as Mr. Ashley Vernon, they will not fail; and I think I may venture to say, in a few weeks he can be safely moved to the Parsonage."

CHAPTER XXII.

"L'usage ordinaire de la finesse, est la marque d'un petit prit; et il arrive, presque toujours que celui qui s'en sert, ur se couvrir en un endroit, se découvre en un autre."—A ROCHEFOUCAULD.

MRS. MELVILLE, of whom incidental mention as been made, many years ago was a young lady ho lived by her wits, giving that word, not the intellectual definition of Sydney Smith, but using it to imply the exercise of a quality which is composed of intense selfishness, great meanness, and profound cunning. It is useless for any one to remind us that she was poor—for poverty no more justifies conduct such as hers, than it does lying, swindling, or stealing. The trouble she took to cajole, wheedle, and dupe some foolish but untractable victim was much greater than if she had worked hard for a living; while the real intellect which was wasted and degraded in bringing her schemes to perfection would, if honestly exerted, have secured for her a respectable position in society, and gained her the esteem of her associates. Talk of the humiliations of poverty, its toils and its privations! Talk of the watching and disappointment to which talent is often doomed! Why, they are as nothing compared with the self-imposed labor, the self-imposed abasement of a cringing parasite! At length, in an evil hour for the family of her patroness, Rachel Tod was introduced to Miss Dormer, the lady to whom Lord Ernest West was engaged.

Here her talent for intrigue found its proper sphere. She speedily embroiled the lovers, and though a reconciliation took place, the feeble health of Miss Dormer, which, during the estrangement, had suffered greatly, evinced symptoms of decline, which, after many alternations and much patient endurance, terminated in her death.

What had been Miss Tod's object in thus risking the loss of one who was a mere puppet in her hands? Surely it would have been more to her advantage had she, by kindness and sincerity, established a claim to the friendship of one who was so easily influenced through her affections, and of whose generosity she had received so many substantial proofs? As if Miss Dormer's friendship, or the patronage of Lady Ernest West could have satisfied the newly-roused ambition of Rachel Tod! No; she played for a higher stake; she played for Lord Ernest himself, whose vacillating and feeble character was as clearly written on all his acts, to her keen eye, as if he had been one of those preposterous figures who go about incased in advertisements; for even so did he advertise his weakness, his timidity, his irresolution to her.

But before this notable plan was, or could be, perfected—for hesitation and obstinacy are often companions, and Lord Ernest was not easily to be persuaded or even advised—Captain Dormer returned from his cruise, and being good-looking, wealthy, and heir to a baronetcy, appeared to Rachel a much more promising speculation than the dreamy, sentimental, and by no means handsome, Lord; in short, she made a mistake, which people engaged in schemes should never think of committing—she fell in love with the Captain, really and *bona fide* in love! How could she be so simple! while he only amused himself with her, and read her as plainly as she read Lord Ernest. She therefore entered, *con amore*, into a sentimental flirtation with the gay sailor, and well for her that she escaped undamaged; but Captain Dormer was expecting his bride-elect from Malta, and was, on this account, more than usually careful of his character; hers was, of course, no concern of his; let her look after it; and so she heard of his engagement and received her own dismissal at the same time.

But death and legacy-hunting are as inseparable in the minds and expectations of this order of dependents as extreme unction and a bequest are in the mind of a Jesuit; and what with presents of jewelry, advances in money, keepsakes, and other little windfalls, she left the Dormers in deep mourning, but with colors flying.

Lord Ernest went abroad, or perhaps, after all, he would not have escaped; for obstinate though he be, a weak-minded man has no chance with a resolute woman; but he was still kept in view, probably on the same principle that induces a thrifty housewife to put aside odds and ends, with the prudent remark, "they may come in handy at some time."

People may relate anecdotes of the dexterity with which pickpockets exercise their trade; they may tell of schools or universities in which pupils graduate till they become first-class men, and senior wranglers in the science or mystery of abstracting and adding; but this is vulgar, bungling work after all; for the police *are* sometimes sad marplots to these nimble-fingered gentry, and magistrates *do* sometimes pass a just sentence; but there is a skill which shows itself by never coming into collision with these humdrum castigators of petty larceny—the skill of stealing a ring from your finger, a bracelet from your arm, a chain from your neck, and leaving a strong impression on your mind that somehow you have been persuaded into giving it; and this is the legerdemain which these lady professors practice.

M. Robin, come and take a lesson! M. Houdin, learn how to make a dress, a shawl, or any other elegant trifle, find its way from your neighbor's wardrobe into that of Madame; and so we may go on, *usque ad nauseam*, and still find exposure and contempt useless, for "the creature's at her dirty work again;" and to it she kept, and persuaded young Mr. Melville, the grandson of her then patroness, to elope with her. But the old lady was revenged; unknown to Mrs. Melville, she possessed the power of thwarting her project, and she exercised it to the full extent. She settled a moderate income on her grandson, which was to cease at his death, and the rest of her large property was distributed among distant relations, with some of whom she had quarreled, and others she had never seen

Thus baffled in her matrimonial speculation, she paid the full penalty—namely, limited means—which, with a husband and child, her utmost ingenuity could not increase by a successful course of visits; and tied to a disappointed man, who upbraided her as the cause of his changed prospects, she may almost be pardoned, if his death, which happened when her daughter was about twelve years old, did not leave her quite disconsolate. It is true, their only ostensible means of living died with him; but even this loss could be endured. She was once more free—once more at liberty to exercise those talents which for so many years had been hidden under a bushel.

She now appeared in the interesting character of a widow, left with a daughter, both wholly unprovided for, and in this character she went from house to house, collecting all sorts of things from all sorts of persons, till she had fairly wearied them; when she fixed upon Lord Ernest as the one who was now to have the chief honor and merit of being her tool—henceforth he would be to her the great nugget—her California—her Australian gold-field.

She first tried the power of her still remaining good looks on him, but in vain; Lord Ernest's life and manner plainly said, "Man delights not me, nor woman either." She then insinuated that he must want some sympathizing friend, one into whose patient ear he could freely pour all his sorrows; and having succeeded in making him unspeakably miserable by her perpetual reference to his past trials, she hoped she had become necessary to his present and future comfort; but she was disappointed and mortified, though not daunted, by finding that he thought his old servant, Roberts, understood what was needful in that respect better than any other person.

Baffled in one plan, her indefatigable industry looked out for something else on which to exercise itself, and propitious fortune sent Reginald—yes, he was the very one she would have chosen for a son-in-law from thousands—the very husband she would have selected from a crowd for her dear Ernesta.

But her dear Ernesta not being very talented—in truth, being very stupid—sadly annoyed and irritated her strong-minded mother—for what can be more aggravating to one who has applied all the energies of a comprehensive and powerful intellect to some grand measure, than to be perpetually hindered by another who is silly enough to have affections and feelings—who is influenced by little touches of nature and truth, always so dreadfully in the way when some extraordinary manœuver is to be executed? Such was the vexatious opposition she now had to overcome; for it happened before the Reginald scheme had been started, that Mrs. Melville, in one of her rash and unusual fits of despair—when the funds were very low indeed—had permitted her daughter to encourage the admiration and attention of a very young man of respectable family and moderate fortune; in short, Mrs. Melville not only let them fall in love, but actually sanctioned it, so far as to have herself been propitious to the young man's suit.

And will it be credited that now, when Ernesta was to change her manner to this hitherto favored admirer, she was both perverse and rebellious? Well might poor Mrs. Melville quote the old song: "Oh, what a plague is an obstinate daughter!" for Ernesta declared that it was useless to direct her attention to Reginald's superiority; she never could, never would acknowledge it; she was insensible to the distinction, "He's but a General, damsel, I'm a King;" and the quarrel threatened to become serious; when Reginald at once, by the indifference of his manner, cooled the anger of Mrs. Melville toward her daughter, but drew it on himself.

Ever kind and courteous, and believing that the society of so old a friend as Mrs. Melville represented herself, would be good for his hypochondriacal uncle, pitying also the destitute state of one who told a harrowing tale of fraud and ill-usage, he prompted Lord Ernest to fre-

quent liberalities, and encouraged her visits to Old Court; but as to being smitten by the charms of the silly Ernesta, alias Charlotte, that would have been impossible.

Now with regard to this alias also thereby hangs a tale, for this led to another cause of just anger which Mrs. Melville felt toward her daughter. During Mr. Melville's lifetime the girl had been called Charlotte—by him frequently Lotte—but lately, to her surprise, she found she had another name, one which she had received to mark the long-standing friendship between her mother and Lord Ernest; she was now, therefore, to be called Ernesta; but, like Glendower's spirits, she often did not come when she was called—oh! she was so stupid, that girl! poor thing! she was only foolish, fat, and fair—very good-natured—rather addicted to sweeties and cakes, and had a sentimental habit of crying when bullied by her mother; and then she presented the unsentimental aspect of a heavy-looking blonde, with red eyes and fiery nose.

Lucky was it for her indolent character that her mother had such a superabundance of energy and determination! "Once more unto the breach, one more," was her cry, and the attack was against the gentle, resistless Lord Ernest. Is there no pity? none. No quarter? none; and Reginald's announced engagement sharpened both her resentment and her weapons. It was now or never; and so skillfully did she commence the war, that wounded, feeble, and wearied as was Lord Ernest, she gained the day. She called his attention to Ernesta's changed looks, evident enough, for she was weeping for her dismissed swain—the girl's stupid inattention to her recent baptismal change her mother ascribed to deep feeling at the sound of a name which reminded her of another; she reproached him for having destroyed the peace of her artless child—appealed to his honor—poured in tears—blew up sighs—threw down the impediments which his Lordship's indifference and indolence cast in her way, and seated her guileless Ernesta on the throne of Old Court! But, oh! the sleepless nights and the weary days it all cost! for, suspecting that Roberts was especially inimical to her measures, she had to be much on her guard, besides having to coax and flatter—to snub and threaten that perverse Ernesta. Many a slap and box on the ear did the lady elect receive from her mother's vigorous hand; but even the effects of these were made serviceable to her plans—and tears, which disfigured the pretty but unmeaning face—the result of recent cuffs—were ascribed to the distress of mind her sensitive Ernesta endured while smarting under the taunts of old friends and acquaintance; for, Mrs. Melville having successfully maneuvered for an invitation to Old Court, had then asserted that the acceptance of his hospitalities had caused the finger of scorn to be pointed at her beloved child.

Wearied and worn out—perplexed yet hesitating—still only half convinced that he was bound in honor to repair, by marriage, the mischief caused by Ernesta's affectionate and susceptible nature—he consented to make her his wife.

He never was quite so weak as to believe himself in love, or so vain as to think Ernesta dangerously in love with him; but he pitied the fancy to which she had yielded. He still intended to do every thing as generously as ever for Reginald; and he forgot that in acknowledging the preposterous claims now made upon him, he was rendering that difficult perhaps impossible. He never thought how cruelly and flagrantly he was violating the sanctity of a promise—imperiling the happiness of others. He was, at present, alive only to the necessity of freeing himself from importunities which had become almost intolerable, and which he was too indolent and timid to break from by energetic measures; and so, with a vague idea of full compensation in some way or another to Reginald, he permitted this arch schemer to triumph, and became, at sixty years of age, the husband of a foolish girl not quite twenty.

Throughout the whole of this transaction Mrs. Melville was conscious that she ran a risk—but, in excuse, it must be alleged that it seemed inevitable. Delay she knew was, to her, not only danger, but ruin; and not doubting her ability to rectify the omission, she left it for the present.

But there had been no settlement for Ernesta of any kind, scarcely a promise of any—and time would not stand still while Mrs. Melville flattered and argued this out of Lord Ernest; this, then, was the risk, and here she felt was the danger.

So well, so secretly, and so briskly had she followed up her advantages, that Roberts knew nothing of the precise direction her maneuvers had taken. It was only a few days before the one fixed for the marriage, that he heard of it. His habitual respect for his lordship could not prevent his expression of astonishment, faintly tinged with disapprobation—he even ventured to inquire if Mr. Reginald knew? and hearing, as he expected, that he did not, suggested the propriety of informing him—to which, and much to his surprise, Lord Ernest made no objection. Perhaps, poor man! he thought Reginald might yet save him.

Therefore it was that the letter had been dispatched by old Roberts, which would have brought Reginald immediately, had it reached him; and this letter it was which caused the hurried departure from Craigalan—still, as we know, Reginald came not. And when the small bridal train returned from the village church, where the ceremony had been unostentatiously performed—Mrs. West's recent death furnishing a reason—Roberts felt, as he told the housekeeper, as if he had received his death-blow.

Not once afterward did Lord Ernest allude to the event, destined to have such effects; and when Roberts mentioned Mr. Reginald, and expressed his wonder at his absence or silence, or ventured a conjecture as to his future prospects, he received no reply. The old housekeeper, in speaking of her master, said he seemed dazed; and certainly, if ever an elderly gentleman had reason, she said, to be dazed at his own state, it was Lord Ernest!

And now was to begin another reign; for, when silly daughters marry, strong-minded mothers-in-law rule, and this she did, in one sense, with less interuption or aid than she quite liked—for, except that Lord Ernest, on her giv-

ing indications of intending a complete change in the ministry, very peremptorily, and in the presence of Roberts and the housekeeper, forbade the least interference with their long-established duties and services—no one helped her; and the prohibition was something like tying a man by the feet firmly to a rock, and then bidding him run; for as the authority of Roberts extended over one half the household, and the housekeeper over the other, meddle where she would, Mrs. Melville found she infringed on their prerogative.

Lord Ernest, who seemed to think that he was now exonerated from all further trouble, sunk into a kind of apathetic indolence. Though urged by Mrs. Melville, he refused to write to Reginald—so she did—for him. And a pretty specimen of English blarney that letter was! It arrived while Reginald was in all the horrors of fever and delirium, and was opened by Ashley, who took no further notice of it than to write to Roberts for more correct information, and briefly alluding to the then state of Reginald, and promising to let the attached old man have good tidings, if such were mercifully permitted.

His lordship was equally refractory regarding his brother, with whom he had declined to communicate; again was her eloquent pen in requisition, this time not without a result—for Lord Westrough kept no measures with her—there was no blarney, either English or Irish, in her reply; so she burnt the letter, and put his Lordship's name among a few others, to be remembered—when convenient.

But, oh! climax of perverseness! Lord Ernest refused to summon his solicitor! well, never mind, it is only one effort more, and she made it—only one letter more, and she wrote it; but this time she had better have left it alone; for after a short interview with his client, witnessed only by Roberts and the doctor, who had for years been almost a daily visitor, the lawyer left without replying to her anxious inquiries as to what instructions he had received, or noticing her indirect attempts to learn whether will or settlement was in contemplation. Rather a balk this! and a nice life it was for her young ladyship also—who was snubbed by her mother, neglected by her husband, and waited on by the servants with secret contempt. Of what use was her title? there was no one to be dazzled by it, scarce y any one to call her by it—of what use the large and magnificent house?—she occupied no more room now than in her mother's cheerful little cottage; as to the carriages and horses always at her command, young, strong, active—what did she care for them? and what comparison was there between the solemn grandeur of a solitary drive, or accompanied only by her mother, and the delightful rambles, she still remembered, when at early morn the earth was fresh and gay—when the birds got up a concert in every leafy copse, and where the voice of one she really loved whispered soft nonsense in her charmed ear?

CHAPTER XXIII.

"He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
With spattered boots, strapp'd waist, and frozen locks,
News from all nations lumbering at his back;
. . Perhaps to thousands messengers of grief."
COWPER.

CONSTANCE, who was always fond of being busy, or, as Helen said, of being invested with a little brief authority, had voted herself permanent chairwoman at the breakfast-table, where she and the letter-bag were always found waiting for the other members of the family, Since her engagement and Reginald's absence, Helen also made her appearance with the arrival of the post, eagerly listening for her father's step—for the opening of the bag, when he was at home, was a prerogative which he rather jealously guarded.

"Papa is late this morning," observed Helen, wistfully glancing at the bag.

"I think," remarked Constance, seeing her sister's impatience, "I shall propose to papa that we have two bags now, one for mamma and ourselves, which we may open without his aid; it is really too tantalizing, thus to have unknown wealth in our hands, without being able to look at and enjoy it."

Constance had an additional motive in suggesting this arrangement. Some weeks ago, Colonel Templeton, in turning the key with great impetuosity, and rather a trembling hand, the result no less of impatience than of the last evening's wine, which he had not slept off, broke the key, and in trying to extract the piece left in, the lock was injured.

This Mr. Cooper undertook to have carefully repaired; and after it came back, the first time Constance distributed the contents, which her father often permitted, on handing a letter to her mother, which bore the Grantham post-mark, she fancied the seal looked less clearly defined than those made by her quick but skillful aunt always were. On another occasion, a letter to herself, from Mrs. Charles Vernon, seemed so evidently to have been tampered with, that she determined to keep watch on these matters; for it brought the indignant flush to her very brow, when she thought that information of strictly a family nature should be published, to satisfy the impertinent curiosity of persons from whom she instinctively shrank; especially was she roused at the mere idea, that Reginald's letters to her sister should be profaned by the vulgar prying of the she-captain and her bold daughter, or furnish matter of conversation to those who were wholly unable to appreciate the dignity and purity of natures such as Reginald's—this alone would have been sufficient motive for the request, and she resolved no longer to delay making it.

"Papa," she said, when he appeared, and very deliberately turned the key, "I think I shall set up a little private affair on my own account; that bag," she continued, with a serio-comic expression, "has been inflicting tortures for the last half-hour—the famous bags which Ulysses had are nothing in comparison. I fancy I have heard the gentle voice of Mrs. Charles Vernon crying, like Sterne's starling, 'I can't get out,' while an Italian remonstrance from Cecilia says, '*voi che entrate qui, lasciate ogni speranza.*'"

"What are you driving at, Constance; what whim now?" he inquired; and she knew, by the tone, that the moment was propitious; so at once replied:

"I wish you, dear papa, to let me drive over to Seabrooke and purchase a letter-bag, which will be consecrated to female friendship and poetry—to sentimental effusions and accounts of the fashions—to harmless tittle-tattle and stray pieces of news—in short, that will relieve your grave and business-like dispatches from a degrading partnership with our frivolous missives. Only fancy the indignation your lawyer's bulky bill must feel, at being kept for a needless hour in company with a flimsy account for ribbons, lace, and muslins."

"Very well—just as you like—only no tricks, no clandestine doings."

"Never fear me, papa," she replied, her haughty and beautiful eyes fearlessly meeting his; "when I do that, I give you leave to lock me up in the bag with my correspondence, as a punishment;" but her tone was grave, though her words were not.

"Depend upon my doing that, or something like it, with your leave or without," said her father, laughing; for this girl had a strange and unusual power over him—unconsciously to himself, he wished for her good opinion—in her presence he would make an effort to check his unmanly outbreaks when any thing annoyed him, more especially as any conduct of this kind shown toward Mrs. Templeton called forth the expression of her displeasure, by those looks which were too true and eloquent to be mistaken. He was, on her account, more indulgent and generous to them all, for he saw that Constance would not allow of any thing like a demonstration of partiality; and while Mrs. Templeton and Helen were too timid to ask, and especially to remonstrate, Constance did both—often with success, and without in the least infringing on the respect due to the Colonel as her father.

The very same day she ordered a letter-bag, not from Seabrooke, but from London, which was to have a Bramah lock, and when it arrived she herself carried it down to the post-office, and consigned the duplicate key to the master, with an injunction that it should never, except by an order signed by Mrs. Templeton or her daughters, quit his possession. "And I hope," she said, having an object to gain by the remark, "that Robin comes himself in good time to meet the mail."

"Why, yes, miss, he always do; but once or twice Master Cooper's lad have come early like, to fetch Colonel's bag, being as how he was going up direct to the Priory; shall I give him this, miss, if so be he comes first?"

"Certainly," she replied, aloud. "So, so," she said to herself, "I was not wrong in my suspicions, but I think, as regard *our* letters, I have caught them; and now, if Master Cooper's lad be coming up early like," and she laughed merrily at the idea, "we shall have the benefit of his speed."

She told Mrs. Templeton of her little device, and greatly amused her by imagining the sufferings that her counterplot would inflict on a curiosity which further and careful examination of several envelopes proved, had not let itself burst in ignorance.

We must now, however, take a short walk into the village—but as it is to perform an act of justice, and will not take long, it may be easily pardoned.

There is a gentleman—we have Hamlet's authority for thus calling him—who is represented as being perpetually in mourning; and an ancient and kind remonstrance is current against painting him blacker than he is. Let such clemency be awarded to Cooper, for it is very unfair toward his delicacy of feelings, to suspect *him* of reading the correspondence of the Priory ladies—why should he?—what would he gain by doing so? nothing—therefore he did not. He read, or fancied he read, all the Colonel's letters, and that sufficied for him.

But not so easily satisfied were the inquiring minds of his sister, we mean Mrs. Captain and the fair Juliet—hence, but with his full connivance, the manufacture of a third key.

"Ah! ah! what is the meaning of this?" asked Mrs. Captain, the day after Constance had established a private bag; "and pray what is this for? two bags for the Priory, and different locks. I wonder what next! but Mrs. Templeton is at the bottom of this scheme;" she had an especial spite against the mistress of the Priory; "but I shall find a way of settling this, and many other accounts with her, one of these days, see if I don't."

"I rather think," interposed Cooper, who, upon the whole, was disposed to defend Mrs. Templeton, whose uncomplaining gentle character had touched him—even him—"I rather think that the lovely Constance is the plotter here."

"I hate that girl even worse than Helen," exclaimed the free and easy Juliet; "and if I catch Hubert Forrester so often accidentally, as he pretends, meeting my young miss at Sea-View Cottage, I'll make him repent it."

"Mind your own conduct, and escape the need of repentance yourself," said Cooper, with a half threat, half sneer; "I can not think what you and your mother mean by running after that young chap, who is only amusing himself at your cost; you had better bait your trap for that scampering foreign fellow, young Morton; he is much more likely to bite than the other."

"I am not so sure of that as you seem to be; but suppose I set my trap for both," was the impudent retort.

"Yes," said Augustus, who was the pest of the whole village, from his sly and mischievous propensities, and who had listened to this conversation from between the folds of the curtain—"yes, only remember that between two stools—" but, before he could finish his elegant proverb, his sister flew at him, and administered in rapid succession sundry cuffs, which were so unmeekly taken, and with so little disposition to offer the other cheek, that, like some of Homer's heroes, the two parties closed in angry fight, and Mrs. Captain, all her warlike tendencies roused at the sight, gave Juliet such a blow on the back of her neck, that the offended ivory showed black-and-blue tokens of anger for several succeeding days. In the midst of this scene, which he viewed with the most philosophical indifference, Cooper and the bags disappeared, as they had already been delayed suspiciously long. But his boy was no

longer so early a riser as to precede Robin at the post-office!

One morning Helen, who was deputy key-keeper to Constance, unlocked their bag, and withdrew that letter so dear to her—so dear on account of the writer—that directly it was forced from its envelope, it was pressed again and again to her lips—so sacred in her eyes that in solitude only could it be read and fully enjoyed—so she walked out on the broad terrace, and casting her eyes on the glorious prospect which met them everywhere, "this bridal of the earth and sky," she opened her letter, and eagerly read words of love and confidence, which filled her heart with thankfulness. She there learned how truly she was loved and prized—she there found how much she had it in her power to soothe and comfort—and already her affectionate heart suggested a reply, in which all her love was to be told; and Reginald was to be made still happier, by learning that long ago he had, in her thoughts, symbolized all that was noble and true.

Alas! alas! how we plan and decide for our whole future existence, when, if even the great destroyer be not by our side, events almost as powerful are hastening to change the whole course of our future destiny! That letter, which Helen read, with her speaking and lovely countenance telling of happiness, was the first sent after the travelers had reached Scotland; and at the very moment she put it reverently, fondly, within the folds of her muslin dress, Reginald was journeying with wild haste toward Old Court; but she was spared the knowledge for a brief period only.

"Helen, dear, have you heard from Reginald?" inquired her mother.

"Oh, yes, mamma, and here are a few lines from Ashley addressed to you; but it is evident they are really meant for us all," folding down the postscript, and handing the letter to Mrs. Templeton.

"Ashley is the prince of friends," cried Constance, reading over her mother's shoulder; "he says they are already better for their journey, and on the eve of starting for Craigalan."

"Ashley is one of the kindest and best I ever knew," said Mrs. Templeton, who had had repeated opportunities of understanding the superiority of his character in her constant and intimate intercourse with his family.

"That he is," warmly echoed Constance, "and I sincerely hope he will find a wife who will value him as he deserves.

Her mother glanced at the animated face, but it said nothing that the tongue had not.

"Ah! now there is papa, and the tea and coffee are ready to the moment. Here is a lovely morning, papa," she said; "I give you good-day, and claim your promise of a ride. I hope you have not business there," indicating the letters, "which will rush out and detain you prisoner."

"I do not expect so formidable an arrest," he replied, carelessly opening the bag, and taking out the contents very slowly. "So we will go to Hurstwood, and perhaps Helen will like to accompany us."

"With great pleasure, papa," she quickly replied, excessively gratified at this unwonted mark of attention; "it is just the day for seeing Hurstwood Avenue to perfection."

"Here, dear papa," said Constance, handing him a cup, "taste this coffee before you begin your feast on the news;" but, as he tasted, he undid his papers, and reading a summary of public matters, he pushed away his cup, saying, "Now, Constance, for some of your excellent tea;" when casting his eyes on a paragraph, he struck the table so fiercely as to break a saucer that was near him; and while every one in breathless terror turned their looks toward him, he rudely threw the paper to his wife, and looking thunder at poor Helen, who trembled she scarcely knew why, with a fearful oath, he said, "Read that, madam, and see what your fine favorite is come to;" then, from extreme rage being unable to articulate more, he sat down with clenched hands, every feature swollen and distorted by intense passion.

Helen hastily rose, but not before Mrs. Templeton, having read the fatal lines, had gasped out, "Oh, God, my child!" and following the direction of her mother's eye, she read, or rather devoured, the adjoining paragraph: "Marriage in High Life.—On Thursday last, privately, at the parish church, near Old Court, Lord Ernest West, second son of the late Lord Westrough, and brother of the present Marquis, to Charlotte Ernesta, only child of the late Stephen Melville, Esq., of Canterbury."

But the Colonel by this time had recovered his voice, and while Helen, feeling that some dreadful blow was about to fall, but not comprehending its full weight, clung to Constance, he exclaimed, "A pretty beggar this, to come and ask for one of my daughters—a fellow who has not a shilling—a needy upstart—but"—he continued, as if collecting his energies for some awful denunciation, when Mrs. Templeton, pale as her dress, said, "Stop, Lionel, oh, stop!"

"Stop?" he almost shouted; but Helen, who had at last understood all—all that involved, not the present only, but the future—with a deep sob, fell into her sister's arms, fainting.

"Mamma, help me, help!" cried Constance; and they placed her near the window: "hold her while I fetch water." The father rose and left the room, banging the door violently; they sprinkled her pale face, they opened her collar, and Constance drew away the letter—the last, last happy letter that her sister was ever to receive—for she read all that was to happen in her father's gloomy brow, in his muttered threats; and her heart ached as she anticipated what awaited Helen.

But this was not the time for dwelling on these glimpses of the future; and flying for Dawson, in preference to summoning their own young attendant, by her aid Helen was partially recovered, and laid on her bed, and a messenger dispatched for Mr. Curtis, the doctor. Having waited till he came, and gave his directions, some hours afterward Constance determined to have an interview with her father. She knew that he was alone, for she had seen Cooper canter toward the village, she, therefore, knocked at the library door, and, receiving permission, entered.

The Colonel lifted his head and prepared to speak, but she quickly stopped him by saying, "I thought, papa, you would like to know how poor, dear Helen is, so I have come to say she is asleep. Mr. Curtis wishes her to be kept quiet,

and means to call again this evening. This is a very sad circumstance," she continued, gently, and determining most carefully to feel her way, lest any indiscreet step should injure, where she was so anxious and resolved to serve.

"Sad affair, Constance!" exclaimed her father; "it is an infamous piece of trickery—a most dishonorable cheat; but I have, at any rate, given *my* opinion;" and he pointed to two letters, addressed respectively to Lord Ernest and to Reginald.

Oh! how she longed to withdraw the latter. Oh! how she wished she might plead for gentleness and forbearance toward one so sinned against. But prudence said, "Silence;" patience said, "Wait and see." She knew that Reginald would be so crushed beneath this load of accumulated sorrow and disgrace, that this addition, ungenerous and cruel as it might be, would add but little to his burden; therefore, almost to her father's surprise, she said, alluding to Lord Ernest, by pointing to his name, and without remarking the letter to Reginald, "About him there can be but one opinion; henceforth his name is another word for dishonor; but, oh, papa! how cruel, how base, thus to have played with the happiness of others, and to have destroyed it!"

"Constance," said he, much more gently than she could have ventured to hope for, "you are a sensible girl, and I do not mind talking to you. I confess, when I first saw you enter, I wished you away, for I expected you had come to pester me with sentiment and whimperings, which I detest; but I see your good sense tells you that there must at once be an end to this matter."

"I fear, indeed, there must; for even if *you* were disposed to waive all considerations, and forget changed situations, I do not see how Reginald could accept your generosity. Poor Reginald!—dear Helen!—they were so happy, and their prospects seemed so bright and fair! I hope, however, papa," she added, "that you fully acquit *him* of any thing base and false;" and her face kindled, ready for the defense.

"Well, I do not know that I did quite take that view of the matter," said the Colonel, sliding his hand, as if without being conscious, toward the letter directed to Scotland;" but you say truly, he could have nothing to do with this disgraceful proceeding, which injures him materially; besides, it really is not like him; so, upon second thoughts, I shall not send my letter just yet."

Constance felt how gladly she could have thanked and kissed him for saying this; but lest it should seem as if she took it for a concession, which might annoy her father, she again listened to her friend—prudence.

"I am sure mamma and Helen would be much relieved and gratified by a little message from you," she said, and the tears stood in her eyes. "May I say you are very sorry for this sad trouble?"

"Do as you will," for he did not feel comfortable while the joyous beauty of her face was banished; "but, mind, I shall not like to dine alone. I hate weeping and sighing, so say what you will."

"Thank you, dear papa," said she, very gratefully; and, stooping down, she removed his still redundant locks, and kissed his forehead. It was one of her little ways, which strangely affected and pleased her father—so much so, that he often returned the innocent caress. He did it on this occasion.

But Constance did not hasten with eager steps to give this message, though she knew that, scant as it was, it would be welcome; she turned toward the garden, and there, with nothing but nature and her own heart, she held earnest, serious communion.

Constance had long been aware of the state of affairs at home; unlike Helen, who had been gradually concentrating her attention on what related to Reginald, she, "fancy free," had watched events, and carefully drawn her own conclusions. She saw that her mother was unhappy—she slowly discovered that her father's conduct was the cause; and if, at one time, inexperience and loving enthusiasm had allowed her to dream of being the means by which asperities might be smoothed and difficulties removed, subsequent knowledge had awakened her. And now, here was this new, this dreadful trial. How would Helen bear it? and if she sorrowed and refused consolation, oh! how that would add to the burden of her idolized mother. Therefore, Constance felt that to prevent this must be her endeavor—this must be the motive for exertion on her part. She saw that now was the time to prove the sincerity of her love, and solemnly did she devote herself to the task.

It was truly a beautiful thing to see how these young girls ever remembered their mother—in their joys, to share them with her—in their sorrows, hitherto little more than those of childhood, to hide them from her.

After a long and sorrowful vigil spent by Helen's bedside, who had been restless and feverish, though she occasionally dozed, toward the hour of dinner Constance prevailed on her mother to seek rest, if not sleep—promising soon to follow her example; and scarcely had Mrs. Templeton left, when Helen opened her heavy and swollen eyelids. "Constance," said she, and she raised her sad, pale face.

"I am here, dearest, but lie down."

"I will presently," replied Helen; "but I have been awake ever since you prevailed on dear mamma to go, and I have been thinking;" and tears, quiet tears, flowed freely down her cheeks.

Constance, in her heart, thanked God for this proof that Helen was more composed, and said, "But you had better try and sleep again, darling, had you not? Thinking will not suit your poor head just now, will it?"

"No," replied Helen, "nor uncertainty either; and now, dear, you must tell me all that terrible history, that struck me as if for death. I shall be better when it is all clear to me."

And Constance began, and faithfully told her all—not omitting the interview with her father; and, perceiving that Helen was calm and attentive, she told her all she had thought of in the garden.

"I am thankful, very thankful, that papa does justice to one who so truly merits it. Constance, did you take a letter from me?"

"Yes, dearest, here it is." Helen took it, and, kissing it, placed it on her pillow.

"All you have said is wise and good; all your counsel I will try to act up to. Our mother must

not grieve, when, by an exertion on our part, we can prevent it. Now leave me—I shall like to be alone for a few hours."

And Constance, darkening the room which the fond mother had made so beautiful for her beloved ones, went to speak peace to her who was scarcely ever absent from her thoughts. Truly was she a ministering angel, that fair girl; for the tidings she brought to Mrs. Templeton were such as she had never ventured to hope for. That Helen should unselfishly determine to wrestle with her grief, was, perhaps, not so strange to one who knew so well what affection could do; but that her husband should so far have yielded to a better influence and to better feelings, as actually to withdraw a letter written while his heart was full of anger and disappointment, because convinced that it would be unjust to send it, that did astonish her.

"And it is to you, my brave pet, we entirely owe this desirable result; it is from the exercise of your good sense so much of this comes," said her mother, fondly embracing Constance; "and richly, this day, have you recompensed me for many and many a lonely year, passed while my children were the joy and delight of a stranger's home."

"Dear mamma, but you felt, you knew that our love was ever with you," said Constance. "Oh, how often we used to laugh, and say, 'How mamma's face must burn, we have been talking so long of her.'"

And then the conversation took another direction, and they spoke of the event which had in one moment dashed aside the hopes of two loving hearts; and Constance learned from her mother many particulars of Lord Ernest and of the Westrough family, till then unknown to her. Thus talking, they passed the time till shortly before dinner, when they were surprised by the entrance of Helen, looking wan and languid, but evidently not so overcome as they had naturally expected she would have been.

She held a folded letter in her hand. "I have come, mamma and Constance," she said, "to convince you that I am not going to increase the painful consequences of this day's sad news, by giving way to any feelings I can possibly overcome. I have thought much and deeply during the last two hours, and the result is in this letter. If papa will permit it to go, I think it will be better for all. Constance, you may tell him the substance of it, which is this. That I have set Reginald—" she faltered at the name, but, as if in punishment for her weakness, repeated it—"I have set Reginald free; but I have not asked to be set free in return—that would be useless; I do not wish it; and to him," she resumed, with kindling looks, "it is, I know, only useful as making him feel that he can go where he likes—do as he likes, without the least restraint, but such as his never-ending love for me may make pleasant to him. I love him, oh, mother! I love him more than ever; so I tell him, but I give him up for a time; and whenever he can claim me, and I know he will some day, then, if I live, I am ready to be his—his wife; but this once I must be permitted to speak my own words, and to utter my own feelings; after this I shall, perhaps, never ask more than one other favor—it will be to have the reply. Can you manage this for me, dear Constance?"

"That I will, dearest sister, in such a cause I can not fail;" and Helen, who had nobly made this effort, looked faint and exhausted, excused herself from appearing at dinner; but Constance prevailed on Mrs. Templeton to descend, remembering that her father had rather made a point of their being present.

The meal passed in more than usual silence; still it was not so formidable as Mrs. Templeton had apprehended; and when the dessert was placed, and the servants dismissed, at a signal from her daughter she rose and walked out, as if to fetch some flowers.

"Papa," began Constance, "you were so very kind this morning, that I venture to prefer a petition, which arises partly out of the conversation we then held, and which I repeated to Helen—who at once saw your reasons"—not quite exact, dear Constance, but let it pass—"so, papa, she has decided to set Reginald free."

"Set him free!" loudly began the Colonel.

"Pray, papa, let me finish before you condemn; but, very naturally, she wishes her letter to go at once"—she did not think it necessary to say, unread—"and this is the favor."

"Oh! if that is all, send it—but remember, it must be the only one; but send it, it will save me the trouble of writing another letter myself;" thus giving her to understand that the offensive communication would be suppressed.

"Thanks—a thousand thanks," she said aloud; and very fervently to herself, she added, "and thanks, indeed, tenfold, that that terrible epistle has been destroyed."

So Helen's letter went, and she was, to all pearance, wonderfully calm.

"But the face may be ting'd with a warm, sunny smile
Though the cold heart to ruin runs darkly the while."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"They grew in beauty side by side,
They fill'd one house with glee."
MRS. HEMANS.

THE news, of course, quickly spread through the house, and thence equally, of course, over the village, that Mr. West was a ruined man—that his prospects were blighted, and his marriage with Miss Templeton broken off!

By the more intimate friends of both parties the news was listened to with the kindest expressions of condolence; and while truly sympathizing with Reginald on this blow to his love and his hopes, every one felt that his affliction would be rendered more poignant by the reflections which must be cast on Lord Ernest's want of honor and justice.

"What a dreadful disappointment for him," said Lady Dallas, her eyes actually overflowing, as her kindness pictured his distress.

"Sad, indeed," replied Mrs. Forrester. "I little thought I could so soon refer to the loss of my dear friend, his mother, with such resigna-

tion; but I now see she is spared this, and is, indeed, taken from the evil to come."

"Of course," remarked Laurette, "Mr. West must see the propriety—indeed, the necessity, of writing to free Helen—and painful as it may be, I hope that he will take the lead."

"I am quite sure that Reginald will do all that is honorable, though his heart should break in the effort," said Mrs. Forrester, decidedly; "and like you, my dear Laurette, I hope he will do so promptly."

But several days passed without any letter, and those whose friendship gave them a claim to information, looked disappointed and anxious. At last, letters came from Lady Sinclair to the Priory, and to her daughter; to the latter she gave a detailed account of all she knew, expressing her strong desire to learn more, and especially all the particulars Laurette could send respecting the Templetons, about whom she and Sir Archibald were most anxious

Her Ladyship's letter to the Priory was by the same post which also brought a few lines from Ashley Vernon, cautiously informing them of Reginald's illness, and promising daily reports. Then it was that poor Helen felt there might be a trial in store for her too dreadful even to be thought of.

Outwardly calm as she had been for the last few days, who may tell all the agony of that bruised young heart—resigned as she had seemed—who knew through what an ordeal, in silence and in tears, she had passed, before she had attained it—and now—oh! it was too bitter a sorrow to be possible! Was she never, never again to hear that loved voice? never again to see that dear face? must he, indeed, pass away, and she not have the sad consolation of watching by his side? Poor Helen! poor girl! and her heart was heavy with its sorrow.

Neither her mother, nor Constance, during this agonizing suspense, attempted to comfort her; they could not bid her hope; they felt that she needed that support which nothing earthly can give; and oh! the prolonged agony, when, day after day, letters came from Ashley, from his mother and sister, all repeating the same fearful tale—Reginald lingering between life and death. Helen at last gave way; it seemed as if she had no longer either hope, or care, or object in life.

At last, blessed tidings! are they true? there is hope! and when the next day they were confirmed, and a letter, such a letter! came to Helen from Dr. Vernon, though she still wept, they were no longer the tears of despair.

One morning, about a week after this news, which daily became more and more certain, when Colonel Templeton came down to breakfast, he was astonished to see the two letter-bags lying on the table before his chair, and the little key, which Constance rather ostentatiously carried attached to her watch-chain, on the top of that belonging to her.

"What is this for?" he inquired of Constance, who was the only other occupant of the room.

"When you gave me leave to have that bag, papa," replied she, "we all little thought of the cloud that was gathering over our heads. I then laughingly promised you never to let it be the medium of any thing clandestine; to myself I solemnly said, it shall never be the means of weakening my father's confidence in me; till this morning, I never knew the strength of temptation, or the extent of my own weakness;" she rose, and opening the bag, drew forth a letter addressed to Helen. The writing was much changed, evidently formed by a feeble hand, for the characters were uneven and tremulous; but still, post-mark, seal, all proclaimed that it was from Reginald.

"This," proceeded Constance gravely, and firmly retaining the letter, "will either be given to Helen or destroyed!" she did not add, "no one else shall read it, nor shall it be insultingly returned;" but that was evident in her tone and look. "Papa, which is it to be?"

He looked up at the young ingenuous face, a slight expression of entreaty was mixed with a tolerably large portion of decision, and gave even more than usual dignity to the perfect features.

"Constance," said he, after a pause, during which he had steadily looked at her, "you are a brave girl, and what is more, you are a noble one. There," he continued, pushing away both bag and key, "henceforth it is yours, and yours only; so never fear losing my confidence: I must be a demon to distrust you. But why are *you* always sent on these matters? Why does not Helen come forward herself? Upon my soul, I am sorry for this affair, I am indeed; and she ought to be quite sure that it is so."

"Helen is not very strong or very well, and she has been sadly tried," said Constance; "besides, I think she is—" she hesitated to say, "afraid of you"—but he did—"you think, you know, she is afraid of me—say it at once;" and he half strangled a sigh.

"Helen never was strong as I, papa; but I still feel quite sure that on all important occasions she has strength of mind and principle which will carry her safely through, where I might, perhaps, fail; and I am sure she will be very grateful for your indulgence," looking at the letter, "as well as for your expressions of sympathy; but are there no means by which?"—she colored and stopped, for her father's brow grew dark.

"Constance, I tell you there are none; you do not know exactly how I am circumstanced; perhaps—well—some day I may let you see how I am hampered—but never mind that now. I must look at my own dispatches."

He did so, and held a letter which he had read more than once, for a few minutes in his hand, as if undecided what to do; at length, he threw it over to Constance, saying, with some emotion, "Upon my life this is too bad—by heavens! he is too fine a fellow to be thus sacrificed to this imbecile old rascal; read it, read it."

As she had suspected, the letter was from Reginald, written directly he could hold a pen; it was, of course, short, but the tears fell fast down the face of Constance as she read the quiet resignation with which he yielded to his fate—no word of reproach or complaint. On the contrary, he thanked Colonel Templeton for his forbearance in

not having upbraided him for being the cause, though the innocent one, of the distress which, he was too candid to conceal, he was sure had fallen on Helen. He also accepted the Colonel's silence as an assurance, which was very precious to him, that he cast no shadow of doubt on the integrity and honor of his, Reginald's, conduct.

Glancing at her father, to read his consent to her retaining this letter, she secured it in her bag, and then seeing that he was at leisure, she said, "I was thinking, papa, that if Helen and mamma could go away for a short time—if you will let me take care of you, I will do my best to make you comfortable—their absence, under all the circumstances, might be a good plan."

"The very thing, though it never struck me till you proposed it—but you must all march off together. I shall take that opportunity of running up to town. At present, however, none of us can leave, for Lord Hurstwood is expected; and as we could not receive him when he was last here, we must now have a grand affair in his honor. Afterward, you shall all go to the Granthams, your mother says they have long wanted you; will that do, you dictatorial, hectoring little puss?"

"Very well, indeed, papa, and now I shall leave you."

Armed with letters, which, while they wounded, would bring healing and peace, Constance hastened to Helen, who was breakfasting with her mother; and having dismissed her, to read and weep, as she was sure to do, over such letters, Constance astonished her mother with an account of all she had done in reference to their intended visit. It was precisely the plan Mrs. Templeton most desired. To escape for a time from all the recollections of the Priory—even from friendly sympathies, much as she valued these last, would have been a boon gratefully accepted—but when she found that she was again to visit the scenes of her early days—that beautiful Grantham, which had been the paradise of her youth, and from which she had been exiled ever since her marriage—it seemed almost too happy to be true.

With her brother and his wife she had always maintained the most friendly correspondence; and though they kindled with indignation when they thought how her happiness had been wrecked—the system from which she had never departed, effectually prevented all interference—therefore, externally, all looked well; for Colonel Templeton was always included in the many and pressing entreaties to visit them—Grantham, after many years of alienation, having again come into his lordship's possession.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Sweet when the winter of disease is past,
And the glad spring of health returns at last;
On a loved cheek, long bloomless, to behold
Its first faint tint, the trembling rose unfold."

DR. BROWN.

In the mean time, terrible were the days, the weeks of suspense, which harassed Reginald's devoted friends in the north. Though his medical attendant was correct in saying all danger was over, and, at last, gave permission to remove him to Charles Vernon's comfortable parsonage, only they who have watched the alternations of returning health, the hopes which a breath of air may dash to the ground, the appearance of amendment which some unknown cause proves to have been false, only they who have gone through this, can understand what anxiety there was, and how difficult it was not occasionally to despair.

At length, symptoms of decided and permanent amendment appeared, and again he was welcomed by them, almost as one from the tomb. But though health gradually returned, where were the hopes which had rendered life one long blessing? they had departed like the singing-birds of the season—and would come no more!

Directly he was able to read his letters, he asked for them. Ashley had previously seen all that had arrived, those, of course, excepted, which had come from the Priory. Two, one from Mrs. Templeton, and another from Constance, Reginald put into Ashley's hands for him to read; and as he received them back, he said, "Terrible enough to be separated from such hearts as those, what, then, must it be?"—but he could not proceed, and pointed with a look of despair at Helen's.

Lord Westrough wrote to him very kindly, and in another letter to Ashley, expressed his hope that when Reginald was sufficiently recovered, he would prevail on him to spend some time at their house near town, politely adding, that if Ashley would accompany his friend, it would increase the pleasure. His Lordship also hinted, that he would use all his influence to procure him some appointment, when he ascertained what would best suit him. But at the word appointment, Ashley, who was happily alone, almost uttered a very strong expression—very strong, indeed—let us hope that the recording angel was as merciful to him as to Uncle Toby, in similar circumstances.

Mr. Morton also wrote to Dr. Vernon, expressing an earnest and friendly desire to learn the exact state of Reginald's affairs, so far as the latter would honor him by his confidence, frankly placing any sum of money at his immediate disposal, which could help to carry out his intentions, when he was able to form any.

But after the letter from Mrs. Melville, which Ashley told Reginald he had destroyed, there was no information from that quarter, except a brief note of respectful inquiry from old Roberts, who wrote evidently in great anxiety and alarm on Reginald's account, and whose hints and insinuations were so extraordinary, that some interference appeared needed; at any rate, it seemed desirable to ascertain what foundation these strange allusions rested on.

"Will you object to my visiting Old Court?" asked Ashley of Reginald, when they had one day been talking of the singular event which had had so wide and fatal an influence. "I am not sure that you are justified in thus keeping aloof. Lord Westrough will not move, and it really seems to me a mistake thus tamely to permit this artful woman to triumph."

"So far as I am concerned," replied Reginald, "I very decidedly object to any step being taken, lest my motives should be misconstrued. A gulf

is open between me and Old Court, but I have no right to let my scruples interfere and prevent what you and the Doctor think proper; it is horrible to fancy to what extremes such a woman may carry her machinations, if she thinks there is no one to protect her victim;" and it was, therefore, decided that Ashley should go, and, if possible, see Lord Ernest, and learn from him his real wishes and situation; and to this he was, by Reginald, strictly limited.

To follow Ashley, and tell what then and there befell, will not greatly fatigue the pen of the historian; for, except seeing Old Court and Roberts, who was excessively distressed and nervous, Ashley saw no more. He was civilly, but positively, refused an interview with Lord Ernest, on the plea of indisposition. It was said that his Lordship himself sent this message; but many things are said which are not all true. And when Roberts next attended his Lord, and alluded to Mr. Vernon's visit, he was convinced that he had not known of it, or had been over-persuaded to decline seeing him, his only remark being, "Never mind now—never mind now!"

Though his mission to Old Court had been so fruitless, Ashley was not much surprised, and still glad that the attempt had been made. His next journey was to Seabrooke, to which place these unforeseen events had made Dr. Vernon desirous of returning. But church reparations, like church improvements, are slow in progress, and those going on at Seabrooke maintained this character. Therefore, having made what attempts and arrangements he could to hasten progress, especially at the Rectory, whose state seemed hopeless for at least some months, Ashley, who appeared to have forgotten his own affairs in his zealous and untiring interest in those of his friend, accepted Mr. Morton's invitation to make a home of the Hermitage, and proceeded to the Priory.

Alas! how was all changed there, since that memorable evening when Reginald's manner had betrayed his secret! How was his kind and manly heart wrung, to perceive that the shade of melancholy had so greatly deepened on the brow of Mrs. Templeton, while the lovely face of Helen was mournful in the extreme! Still, how delighted they all were to see him—how they clustered round him—how eagerly they listened to his words; and though tears flowed abundantly at his recital, he felt quite sure that his arrival had given them comfort.

When he left, charged with messages of love from them all, Constance said she would accompany him to the first lodge; and frankly linking her arm in his, as if he had been a beloved brother, she entered more fully than could be done during their agitated interview, into accounts of her mother and Helen, chiefly expatiating on her dear, sweet Helen's unselfish triumph over this great blow, though still feeling it so deeply. She said that she was sure her sister perpetually cherished the hope of fulfilling her engagement with Reginald, and she charged him to impress this on his friend, so as to rouse him from an apathy which, to her, Ashley owned he feared was not the result of bodily weakness only, but a listless, paralyzing influence, arising from a hopeless state of mind, and which would, if indulged, be fatal to the future.

"And you," said Ashley, as they were parting, "is there no word of yourself?"

"I?" she replied, "oh! I only wish I could, by sharing Helen's sorrow, diminish its burden to her! As it is, I have only the sorrows of others, and it sometimes appears to me that I have no right to be so spared."

"Heaven grant that it may ever be thus!" he replied, fixing his splendid eyes on her animated but pale face. "And our neighbors," he continued, "how are they? I am sure they have not failed you at this time."

"Indeed, they have been every thing most kind; Lady Dallas has quite forgotten all her own troubles"—and here she gave a little smile, which reminded him that once, either in lip, in eye, or dimple, a smile ever lurked—"she has sent little Minnie to amuse us, and in all things has been so sympathizing. Mr. Victor also daily brings kind inquiries from his father, who, according to his account, has quite lost his heart to dear mamma."

"And the Forresters?" he asked as an excuse for lingering.

"Very kind; Laurette is still there, and—Mr. Hubert often comes to inquire." Why did she hesitate and blush? why did that pang at the heart, which he had often felt, pain so very much just now? But Constance felt this sudden silence embarrassing, and her quick ear catching the approach of a horse, she held out her hand, and hastily said, "Farewell now—remember, we are to see you again before you leave."

He slightly touched that fair hand, but instead of going the direct road leading to the Hermitage, he proceeded toward the horseman. It was Hubert Forrester—but Ashley knew this before.

"Ah! Vernon, my dear fellow!" said Hubert, "how delighted I am to see you; why, when did you come among us?"

"Only yesterday evening."

"And where are you quartered? not at the Rectory, I am sure, where every thing must smell of paint, and taste of bricks and mortar. Have you swung your hammock among the trees, or pitched your tent on the lawn?"

"Neither; I am at the Hermitage. Victor has gone to Forest Hill to bid you to a quartette luncheon, for I was anxious to see you, knowing you would like to have news of Reginald; but I have no time to spare at this moment, and perhaps you are not quite at leisure.

"Thanks," said Hubert. "I shall be there almost as soon as you; but I have now a little message from my mother to Constance—to Mrs. Templeton—so adieu till we meet."

Ashley did not hasten his return; something had made him feel spiritless and weary; but he, however, preceded Hubert by nearly an hour—and still luncheon waited for the loitering guest—and when he did enter, flushed with heat, and his handsome countenance radiant with happiness, Ashley thought him one of the most glorious-looking beings he had ever beheld; and then, by some strange association of ideas, not easily fathomed, Constance presented herself to his mind, and he stifled a sigh.

"And now, tell me all you can about poor Reginald," said Hubert; "how scandalously he has been used. By Jove! that old uncle of his de-

serves to be executed. What could such an owl as that want with a wife, and she a mere girl? it would be a charity to go and run off with her—and no bad idea that."

"Nor one at all unlikely to be unsuccessful if you attempted it," thought Ashley; and forthwith he proceeded to tell many particulars relating to Reginald, which he knew he was at liberty to do, and which Hubert, kind, generous, and impulsive, listened to with the greatest interest.

"And what will Mr. West do?" inquired Victor, whose admiration of Mrs. Templeton had been extended to her daughters, now that he had had an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with them. "I hope he will become rich, and then marry Miss Templeton."

"She is not at all the girl to make such a romance," said Hubert, "or, upon my honor, I should say nothing would be better than for her to elope with him."

"Nonsense, Forrester," said Ashley; "besides, how could he maintain her? at least at present; he has nothing but kind friends," glancing at Mr. Morton; "and Colonel Templeton is quite the man to disinherit her, if she took such a step. No, no, on every account that has not my sanction."

"Nor mine either," said Mr. Morton; "few circumstances can justify that scandal."

"Very fine talking, you grave and reverend seigniors," said Hubert, with sparkling eyes; "but I know, if I loved a beautiful girl, and she loved me, and any dragon said nay, I would carry her off without a scruple."

"And work for her and yourself?" asked Ashley drily.

"Why, that is a sort of codicil to my will and intention that I have not provided for. I am not fond of much work, and very fond of much pleasure; but if—" he paused and colored.

"Happily," remarked Mr. Morton, "you run little danger of being put to the proof in either case—the elopement or the hard work; if you can make sure of the lady," he added significantly, "there is no fear of a dragon or any other fabulous monster interfering to say nay."

Ashley at this moment felt the room so close that he rose and opened the window, and addressing Victor, said, "How much better you see the Priory from this point than you used to do—or have I forgotten?"

"Oh, no, you are quite right, for the Colonel has been thinning the woods—and it is a real advantage to us, as it gives such a pretty peep."

"I hear there was quite a row about that cutting," remarked Hubert; "it was done at the instigation of that fellow Cooper, who is a bad one."

"So are all who belong to him," interrupted Mr. Morton, with a meaning look, which Hubert either did not or would not notice; for he went on saying—

"It seems Cooper had marked right and left, without much reference to either age or girth; luckily for him, before the men had cut very long, down came a message from the Colonel stopping progress, and he furious with the agent for the mischief he had already caused."

"But," observed Ashley, "this sounds very contradictory; to my knowledge, the trees have been marked for a long time—for I remember my father saying, he was not quite clear as to the propriety of such indiscriminate felling—so the Colonel must have known it."

"And Cooper protests that he had the Colonel's authority and order—if he had, I suppose it was some after-dinner order, for all has been countermanded, and men set to work to plant and repair, as much as possible, this, as well as some former injudicious clearings.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"So the bargain was struck; with the little god laden,
She joyfully flew to her shrine in the grove.
'Farewell,' said the sculptor; 'you're not the first maiden
Who came but for Friendship, and took away Love.'"
MOORE.

AFTER Hubert's departure with Victor, Mr. Morton and Ashley held a long and interesting conversation regarding Reginald; in the course of which, Mr. Morton evinced a good sense and knowledge of business, quite equal to the generosity and kindness of his offers. He spoke of Mrs. Templeton and Helen with the deepest respect, and, knowing the long standing friendship which subsisted between them and all Ashley's family, delicately hinted at the frequency of Hubert Forrester's visits to the Priory; to which, he said, Lady Dallas had more than once alluded; and finished rather a long speech, in which he had no interruption from Ashley, by fervently expressing his hope that, if rumor spoke truly, the course of true love might flow smooth for the fair Constance.

But perceiving, at length, that this subject had no interest for Ashley, who had been very busy adding up some figures on a piece of paper, he turned the conversation to the state of repairs at the Rectory, which Ashley found he must again visit that same day: therefore suiting his dinner-hour to his young friend's engagements, Mr. Morton left him.

Very slowly indeed did Ashley walk toward the church, and when he reached one particular spot, whence there was a most beautiful view of the Priory, its immediate grounds and park, he sat down. Long, long did he sit there, lost in thought; and very grave, nay, sad, was the expression which was impressed on his countenance when he rose, and sighing deeply, prepared for his return to the Hermitage. Ah! he had lost so much time idling up in the churchyard, that he could not fulfill his promise of again seeing Mrs. Templeton; and as he went away early the next morning, he left a note of apology for his omission, and took leave of Mr. Morton, with an increased consciousness of that gentleman's worth.

Now what is all this about Hubert Forrester's visits to the Priory? is it not possible for him to ride over there with "little messages from his mother to Constance—to Mrs. Templeton," without rumor detecting some other motive? Rumor has, in general, so bad a character for veracity, that when she *is* true, it would be cruel not

to own it—and so when she said that the gay young heir of the Forresters was as much attracted by the sweet face of Constance, as by the sympathy he truly felt for her sister, the faithful historian is bound to admit it was a fact.

And what says Constance? is the next inquiry—one not so easily answered.

Shortly before Mrs. West's removal to Harrowgate, and when Hubert had just returned from a continental tour he had made with young Morton from some quarter, and by some means which she could not distinctly trace, Constance had received a vague impression that Hubert was attached to Laurette. Now, it could not be that this whisper had emanated from Laurette herself; no delicately-minded lady speaks of such things till the gentleman puts them beyond a doubt—above all, no lady so proud and reserved as Laurette. Nor had she spoken—she had merely *insinuated*, and this so dexterously, that while every word had the exact effect she intended, it was difficult to remember who had spoken them; and Constance, not caring about the truth or falsehood of the report, gave herself no trouble to investigate it, while Hubert's frequent visits to the Priory seemed only a confirmation.

But when Laurette left for Forest Hill, and still Hubert came daily, and almost always alone, Constance thought it very kind of him. Gradually, however, the daily visitor began to be expected? she was disappointed if he did not come at the usual hour, which she now particularly marked, and during which she did not like to be absent; his anxious inquiries after Helen ought to be answered by one of the family, and as her mother was very much with Helen, who did not usually see visitors, who but Constance could receive him?

Perhaps, had all gone smoothly and happily with Helen's engagement, Hubert would never have made the impression on the imagination of Constance which he now did. At least, he would never have had the opportunity this gave him of being a kind of consoler, a sort of confidant to her—rather dangerous characters, when the heart is unoccupied and the imagination strong—when the consoler is eminently handsome, and the consoled affectionate and enthusiastic.

Constance was naturally gay, fond of society, and possessed herself the most delightful companionable qualities, in a mind richly stored with varied information, and in a fancy of peculiar delicacy and vivacity.

All around her now was sad, gloomy, almost stern; and though we have seen how she shared and lessened the sorrows of her loved ones, there was no sense in proving her sympathy by seeking sadness and rejecting pleasure; no reason why she should close her eyes to the sun, because it did not shine on Helen. In short, before she was aware of it, the joyous, handsome vision, all undimmed by care, or darkened by the world's frown, which daily met her, became to her indispensable.

His voice was almost the only cheerful one she heard: his, almost the only smile that greeted her. He alone, in his gay ignorance of their real position, talked of happiness to Helen and her mother, or ventured to predict that the future would richly compensate for the trials of the present. And then, he was so noble in his proud bearing, yet so graceful; so gentle, so tender in his care and solicitude; so animated and eloquent in his predictions of bright days and cloudless skies!

Constance, like most girls of cultivated and poetic feelings, was an ardent admirer of beauty in every thing. Harmony of form, tone, or color was always necessary to her enjoyment; which was always diminished when discord or deformity presented itself. And she had but to look at Hubert, or to listen to him, and eye and ear alike found pleasure. And so, as many a girl not eighteen has done, she fell in love with him, convinced by all those tokens, intelligible only to the initiated, that this love was fully returned; and it was; Hubert loved Constance, as he believed none had ever loved before—the creed to which every lover subscribes—and this he would have told her over and over again, but he had already spoken to his father, whose consent had been conditionally and very reluctantly given.

First, Mr. Forrester insisted that nothing should be said till they understood each other's characters and tastes better. Needless cause for silence and delay, thought the son, who was fully persuaded that on these points, they were thoroughly informed. Secondly, he argued that, under present circumstances, there was a kind of impropriety in such an avowal. While one sister was mourning the violent dissolution of her engagement, it seemed, to the stately old gentleman, indelicate in the other to be forming one. Finally, and he might have said chiefly, he never had liked, never could like Colonel Templeton; and some proceedings of that worthy officer's having lately reached Mr. Forrester's ears, this dislike had arisen almost to contempt; so he negotiated for delay, and trusted to accidents; for, as to interfering by a positive prohibition, that never entered his mind, where Hubert was concerned; and as the son knew this, he the more readily acquiesced in his father's suggestions. Therefore, so far as silence of the tongue went, not a word was spoken; and still Constance was quite easy and contented; and, upon the whole, rather respected the delicacy which restrained Hubert from speaking till Helen's first grief should have calmed into regret.

But Hubert had another motive in submitting to delay; he hoped that during the interval Laurette would return to Scotland; for, without being exposed to the charge of vanity, he had seen that she was not only the favorite of his parents, but that she aspired to be his favorite also. In his estimation, however, she was by no means likely to dispute the palm successfully with Constance. She was, at least, three years older than he, a seniority fatal to her views on a romantic young man of his age; she was too elaborate, too artificial in feeling and manner, without possessing the beauty of face and figure which had peculiar charms for him

In spite, however, of the silence which was observed, an instinct that rarely errs when directed by love, warned her of what was going on. Laurette knew his secret—ay, as well as if she had accompanied him in every one of his daily

visits, and seen every look he bestowed on her cousin. Her plan was therefore changed, and a new one arranged, for she was bent on conquest. She did love Hubert, and this gave energy and power to her schemes While Mr. and Mrs. Forrester kept silent, she carefully avoided all that might invite confidence; but by artful lamentations about poor Helen, and the injurious effect her disappointment might have on her sister's prospects, she led the minds of her hearers into the train of thought she wished, and left them to work it out alone. Their pride was awakened, they hardly knew why or how—let them find it out, if possible—and, in order to make them sensible of her value, at this critical moment she accepted an invitation to Lady Westrough's, after which she was to return to the Priory and finish her series of English visits by going to Forest Hill.

Laurette hated Scotland, and would go anywhere rather than to Craigalan; even her pride, which might have been gratified by the princely establishment at home, was offended by the exclusive homage rendered to the young heir; and as all her early associations had been formed during the long absence of Lady Sinclair, perhaps it was only natural that she should cling to those who had been the friends of her childhood, and to that country where all she most cared for resided.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Das schwere Herz wird nicht durch Worte leicht."—*German Proverb.*

Reginald, meanwhile, had fully recovered his health, and the first thing now was to decide for the future. For that purpose, a consultation was held with his friends, the Vernons.

As regarded pecuniary means, he was almost destitute, except what remained of the sum which Lord Ernest had so strangely, as it seemed at the time, forced upon him. Sea-View Cottage, to his great surprise, he found his mother had purchased, at least for a long term; for after the conversation between herself and Reginald, which has been related, she began to lay by, and the hundred pounds sent for some ornament, were solemnly set apart as the first fruit of her resolve.

Pretty, but small, with merely enough garden round it to shut out passing gazers, the sum needed for the purchase was but trifling; for it belonged to Mr. Forrester, who put little more than a nominal value on the place, when he learned her wishes.

This being neatly furnished, would probably always command a tenant; but the rent would not support Reginald, and pay the expenses of his professional studies. Lord Westrough had frankly declared his inability to help him, except in using his government influence, and to this influence Ashley hated him to resort; besides, unless this visionary appointment were held irrespective of party politics, who could say how long that to which his Lordship belonged would remain in office? Ashley said they were by no means as firm as a rock, and then all would have to begin again; just so much time lost.

"Reginald, do not irritate me by refusing to share, as far as you want, what I do not; there is all that money which was left me by my godfather, and which my generous father has allowed to accumulate, till it is a fortune. Let us enjoy it together; you are to me as my brother," said the noble Ashley; "my father and mother love you like a son."

"And Carry like another dear brother," said she, giving him her hand, which he pressed with deep emotion; "now, as a son, what should you do when a father advises?"

"Take his advice, and his help also," replied Reginald, in a husky voice, fairly overcome by their love and kindness.

"Right, my son Reginald," said the Doctor; "now we can go on better, and see our way more clearly. What are your own ideas and wishes?"

"To earn my living honorably, and as speedily as may be. Had I been permitted to have exerted myself years ago, I should by this time have been free and independent, instead of just going to school. Older than Ashley, I am fit only to be his pupil; for his profession will, if it can be managed, be mine. I like the exercise of intellect which it gives. I like the demand it makes upon the attention. I like its facts, dry though they be; its research, its quaintness, its associations with the past, connecting it so intimately with the present; these all amuse my fancy, though that word may sound inappropriate; but then, when I think of the time, all this is visionary."

"It need not be; three years soon pass away, and it seems to me this may be arranged even more easily than any other plan; what say you, Ashley?" turning to his son.

"It is already done, my dear father; while Reginald was talking, I settled it all; he is exactly the man to suit Mr. Turner; and we shall yet be distinguished characters, and have a niche in the temple of fame."

"Yes," said Caroline, "and both of you may help to swell the aristocratic ranks of merry England, which, judging from the supply it receives from your profession, would be 'fine by degrees and beautifully less,' were you too grand to accept its honors."

"If that is your *amende honorable* for some former high-treason speech," said Ashley, kissing his sister, "you have paid the debt, and with interest."

And it was settled that the friends should proceed to London, where Ashley was to give the benefit of his experience. Reginald wrote a long letter to Mr. Morton, informing him of the decision to which he had come, expressed his gratitude for kindness received and intended; promising, that if he needed his help, he would ask for it as frankly as it had been offered; and concluded by hoping when they met in London, he would find that time had been profitably spent.

The arrangements for Reginald were soon perfected through the zealous efforts of the Doctor

and his son, and no time was lost in setting off, for Ashley, now that his services were no longer required by the side of a sick bed, avowed his anxiety to renew his legal studies, and read hard, so as to overtake interrupted time.

They were to meet daily at the chambers of the same gentleman; but great as he owned the temptation was, Reginald overruled Ashley's proposal, that they should lodge together. He frankly owned his reasons; he could not, he ought not, to live at an expense which, though quite suitable for Ashley with his means, would be absurd for him, already so deeply indebted to to the whole family. Mrs. Vernon came to his support, and entirely approved of his decision, in spite of her son's argument, that they should both actually save by clubbing their expenses; and she further proceeded to say, that Reginald, whose health still required care, should seek some comfortable lodging, removed from the smoke of London, yet within walking distance; and had arranged for him thus far, when she suddenly remembered, that in one of the letters she had received from Mrs. Templeton during Reginald's illness, she had mentioned her former nurse, Gretchen, as one whose services would be most valuable should he much longer require unremitting attention; she had therefore inclosed Gretchen, or rather Madame Stopsel's address, at Hampstead, where she let a part of what, in her former letters to her former mistress, she described as a very pretty cottage.

Mrs. Vernon read this letter, and copied the address, advising them, before they fixed on any other place, to see what accommodation Madame Stopsel offered; and she added, her knowledge of Gretchen made her certain that, as regarded care and kindness, Reginald would be better off in her simple abode, than amid all the luxuries of Mivart's hotel.

On reaching town, Ashley insisted on Reginald's remaining his guest for a short time; merely, as he said, to take off the chill of the place, and the worse chill of solitude; and in a few days they walked out to see Gretchen, having previously had an interview with her husband, from whom they learned, that if they were satisfied with what she could offer, she could receive one as a lodger.

Reginald was pleased to find that he should here breathe a purer air than that of the great Babylon, and on arriving at the cottage was charmed with the combination of neatness and comfort that every thing presented.

Under the pretense of making Mr. West rest, while she showed Mr. Vernon the view, she led the latter into the garden; and as she had heard only a very disjointed account of all relating to her sweet lady and dear child, as she affectionately called Helen, Ashley, knowing how justly she was valued by those she had so faithfully served, gave her as detailed a history of what had occurred as time would admit of, while her tears and exclamations of sorrow frequently interrupted the narrative.

"Never fear for Mr. Reginald," was her assurance, as they returned to the house; "I shall cherish him for Miss Helen's sake, let alone old acquaintance at Sea Cottage. Ah! sir, what days they were, when you were all little creatures—long before he came; and Miss Constance, the laughing darling, well do I remember the sorrow her sweet baby eyes opened on. And pray, sir, come often, it will do you both good."

And often enough he did come, though it is doubtful what good it did him, to hear tales without end, first of Helen, then of Constance—chiefly, it must be confessed, of the latter—for he made her comprehend, that, as there was not the faintest hope of the engagement ever being renewed, it was better not to remind Mr. West of his loss by naming Helen.

Reginald found the life he now led so congenial to his tastes, so healthy to both mind and body, that, had it not been for one corroding care, "one fatal remembrance," he would have called this the brightest, as well as the most profitable, period of his life. He was working for independence; and, by the blessing of Providence, he felt sure that he should attain it. There was every inducement to urge him on; the expectations of his valued friends must be realized, his debt, his pecuniary debt, must be repaid, and this could be done only by unwearying perseverance; and if, sometimes, he allowed himself the sad indulgence of thinking, that years hence, when, perhaps, both were old, if they chanced to meet, *she* should not have to be ashamed of him, this was an additional incentive to exertion.

He, therefore, courageously looked his real position in the face; he saw its difficulties; he saw also the means of overcoming them; and finding, by experience, that occupation was in every case his best friend, in allowing no leisure for unhealthy and useless regrets, he sought employment on this account, as well as for emolument; and having been introduced to a publisher who was able to appreciate his literary acquirements, busied himself in exercising his really rich imagination in light literature, after the dry and severe labor of his adopted profession had been performed.

Ashley, who had a jealous horror of any patronizing interference, rather encouraged Reginald in declining, at least at present, the very kind invitations sent by Lord Westrough, though he saw the value of preserving his friendship; but he took every opportunity of introducing his friend to several whom he valued for their worth and intelligence, and whose acquaintance was likely to be beneficial to Reginald in the course of his future career; so that, though constantly and usefully occupied, his life was neither monotonous nor solitary.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"Courts are unquestionably the seats of good breeding, and must necessarily be so; otherwise they would be the seats of violence and desolation."—*World.*

Mrs. Templeton, after the conversation with Constance, which had reference to their visit to Grantham, wrote immediately to propose it; in answer to which, a most cordial welcome had been promised; and anxiously did she await the period when the travellers would set them at liberty.

But, unfortunately, Lord Hurstwood's arrival was delayed; and till he had been received and

fêted, they knew there was no chance of their moving. Besides, the Colonel himself had lately been strange and moody, so that even Constance lost her accustomed freedom of manner in his presence; and a violent misunderstanding between him and Cooper, relating to some blunder about felling timber, had in no way tended to make matters more agreeable—and, as if for a climax to these uncertainties, without any previous hint of his intentions, he one day gave notice that he was going to London, where he should probably remain a week.

Under all these adverse circumstances, Mrs. Templeton felt it wrong to keep her brother and his wife, day after day, in a state of suspense, which might perhaps interfere with other plans. She therefore proposed to the girls that the visit should, for this time, be relinquished.

Had Constance spoken with her usual frankness, she would have given a glad assent to this; for the Priory had a daily visitant who rendered it the delectable land to *her*—but remembering that her original object in proposing the change, had been the benefit which her mother and sister were likely to gain from it, she preferred leaving the decision to them. Helen had, at first, embraced the plan, because it had seemed to please her mother; as to herself, she was altogether indifferent about place or change—the one who, to her, would have made a paradise in the desert was away, and what cared she more for Grantham than Seabrooke?

Therefore Mrs. Templeton stated her difficulties, and declined the invitation, though it was with a pang; but she was glad she had so decided, when Lady Grantham wrote to say, that as Cecil had not lately been very well, they should go to the Pyrenees for baths. Henry, his wife, and Cecilia, were, during their absence, to occupy Grantham; but that the latter would like to visit the Priory before settling at home, as she so greatly wished to see them all after her long absence in Italy. Her ladyship concluded with affectionate inquiries after Helen, strongly advising Mrs. Templeton to let her travel with them, as she was sure change of scene was desirable.

"Oh, dear mamma! I can not leave you and Constance," exclaimed Helen, in alarm. "I am much better here with you, than anywhere else without you—you are all to me now," she added sadly.

"Then, my love, I shall not again mention it—except to thank your aunt for thinking of you."

"And, mamma, how glad I shall be to see Cecilia," said Constance; "she is so right-minded and kind."

"So she is," replied Mrs. Templeton; "even her occasional want of, what shall I say? not refinement—"

"Gentleness," suggested Helen.

"Yes, gentleness, is pardoned—in her evident wish to oblige—besides, she is so free from artifice."

"And not artifice alone—but art or artificialness," observed Constance, "if there be such a word; I prefer her rather decided and brusque manner, to Laurette's correct but cold elegance—even Cecilia's figure, and her commanding style, are, to me, more pleasing than Laurette's finished grace and slender form."

"And what a help she will be to us, mamma, when that formidable Lord Hurstwood comes," said Helen. "Cecilia would not care for a roomful of kings or emperors."

"Nor, in one sense, do I," cried Constance, lifting her graceful head; "all I should care for, if a *really* great king came here, would be not to incur his censure—merely because the esteem of the good is always valuable. I do not think rank, however elevated, would deprive me of my self-possession; but what sort of a man *is* Lord Hurstwood, mamma, that his coming excites so much interest—you have often seen him?"

"No, not very often, my dear. When we first came here, his father, the late lord, was living; he died a few years ago. I then first saw his present lordship, who soon left for St. Petersburg, where, I hear, he much distinguished himself in the management of some difficult and important political question. He is now expected from Ireland, where he has large property, and it is said that he means to remain in England."

"Ah, mamma," said Constance, laughing, "how cunningly you think you have evaded my other question—what sort of a man is he?"

"How do you mean, my child?"

"You shall not escape, you maneuvering mother; first, is he handsome?"

"He most likely was."

"Was—ah! that means, I suppose, that he is so no longer, and that he is old."

"He is some years younger than your papa, I imagine—forty-seven or eight."

"But then papa is so handsome—to me he never looks old," said Constance, musing; "if he resembled his portrait, I think there never could have been a finer-looking man."

Mrs. Templeton very calmly replied—"And it is an excellent likeness—but I have seen faces which I think much finer"—here a deep sigh from Helen almost startled her. Mrs Templeton felt sad, for she knew her child's thoughts were of Reginald—though her own allusion included Ashley Vernon—but, as if she had not remarked Helen's interruption, she proceeded to say, "for instance, Hubert Forrester."

Ah, Mrs. Templeton! you are bent on playing at cross purposes, for Constance nearly let her watch fall, and was so intent on fastening it safely that she was silent, and it was Helen who returned to the charge.

"Then, mamma, we are to infer that you do not like Lord Hurstwood—Constance, mamma is in the trap at last—and there I shall keep her till she fully and truly replies."

"My dears," said Mrs. Templeton, pleased to see her sad Helen making an effort to be cheerful, "I can not reply by a yes or a no—so you must allow me to arrange my materials and separate good from indifferent and bad. I think Lord Hurstwood, in one sense, a man of very polished manners—those manners which a person of the least taste and refinement can hardly fail to acquire who frequents the best society—I was told that he long and sincerely mourned the loss of an only sister who died when on the eve of marriage."

"Well," slowly remarked Constance, "though not much in his favor, all this is not much against him—and my knowledge of the world tells me," and she laughed at her ignorance, "that this is

ot to be despised—but go on with your analysis."

"I do not think, if he were to marry, his wife eed be unhappy—though one with very strong ffections would feel disappointed. I believe, also, hat a sensible, totally unromantic woman might e very happy with him—but that he is selfish, nd rather heartless, I fear is true—and nicely eighed, his Lordship is, by me, found wanting. What say you, Helen?"

"I, mamma! he is precisely one of that species hich I particularly dislike," was her decided eply. "But when will the dear Vernons return?" he asked, no longer caring to discuss his Lordhip's character.

"Oh, not for two months, so my last letter ays," answered her mother; "they have been inited to Craigalan, but probably only the Doctor nd Caroline will accept—as Mrs. Vernon wishes o remain with Charles and his family."

"Is Mr. Victor Morton invited to meet Lord Iurstwood?" said Helen.

"Certainly, he is your papa's great favorite; nd were it not for the awkward misunderstandng which attended his father's possession of the lermitage, and his very stiff reserve since, I am ure *he* would be included also. However, he eems much pleased at his son's popularity."

"Mamma, I think I have discovered a secret bout Mr. Victor," said Helen; "by accident I ound out that he wears the miniature of a lady round his neck!"

"Which means," said her mother, "that he is n love, or that you think so—which?"

"You are right—what else can it be?"

"Well, as he always seems very merry and light-hearted—though that is a wrong description of one who is supposed to have lost his heart—I conclude it is a satisfactory exchange; and thinking him true, and his father kind and sensible, I wish him happiness."

"I believe," said Constance, "Helen is mistaken—it is a miniature of his mother, so says Carry. Mr. Morton is a merchant, is he not?"

"Yes, or rather he was, for I have met him so often at the Rectory, that we are quite confidential and friendly, and chat about his affairs freely. Then he is so generous and manly in all his opinions and deeds, besides standing high in the Doctor's esteem, that I hope Victor may fulfill all his wishes—only I think a few years' more experience would be desirable before forming an attachment, if Helen's idea be correct."

Constance blushed painfully; he and Hubert were so nearly of the same age, that this remark was as applicable to one as the other. Happily for her, the conversation again turned on Cecilia's expected visit, and terminated without any more of those "words at random spoken," which are often so embarrassing.

And Cecilia at length arrived, amazingly improved by her foreign residence, and yet without having lost any of that sincerity which was so very refreshing, or that courageous love of truth on which those who knew her so safely reposed.

"What a splendid specimen of English beauty and foreign ease Miss Grantham is!" said Lady Dallas to Mrs. Forrester after Cecilia had duly renewed her acquaintance with her Seabrooke friends. "Sir William calls her Juno the majestic."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Forrester, "she is very handsome, but rather too demonstrative for my taste. I own to admiring the elegant rather than the magnificent—and certainly, in the former, Miss Sinclair excels."

"Oh! certainly," acquiesced her Ladyship; "but they are so different, we hardly ever think of comparing them. But what says our oracle, Mr. Hubert? his opinion is of consequence to the young ladies."

"Oh! Hubert," rather stiffly said Mrs. Forrester; "Hubert would never admire any one so ready to take the lead as Miss Grantham. He prefers the quiet and retiring—*he* has not lost his taste for an English blush."

"Ah! and no one blushes more beautifully than that sweet girl Constance Templeton," was the rejoinder of the blundering visitor, never imagining Mrs. Forrester's speech had reference to Laurette, who hardly ever changed countenance under any circumstances. "It is truly delightful to watch the color deepen and fade on her eloquent face—so perfectly feminine and graceful as she is; and yet how bravely she bore up under their late trial, and sustained the spirits of both her mother and sister."

"It has indeed been a sad disappointment," observed Mrs. Forrester, "sad to all; for these events often leave an uncomfortable cloud on the prospects of a whole family."

Happily, her figure of speech was cloudy also, and by no means clear to Lady Dallas, who would never have imagined how sorrow to one member of a family could involve disgrace to the rest; and probably thinking that the lady of Forest Hill was only more rhetorical than usual, she still went on pitying Helen, unconscious that she was thus injuring Constance. But Laurette's insinuation had not been lost on Mrs. Forrester, who soon felt its effects; for the more she realized it, the less did she like the idea of Hubert's marrying one whose sister had been disappointed and pitied. And yet Mrs. Forrester was kind!

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I'm the strangest person in the whole world; for what care I for money? I write for reputation."—*The Rehearsal.*

REGINALD was one day emerging from the Temple, deeply plunged in thought about some legal difficulty, when a gentleman, whom he had not noticed, but whom he nearly ran against, exclaimed, "Eyes right, young Chancellor, or there will be an action for assault and battery"—his quick sight having detected some papers which the other carried—and then, as Reginald stopped to make an apology, he shouted, "West, Reggy West! or my name is not Charles Stacey."

"Good heavens, Stacey! You here? how glad I am to see you!"

"And how glad I am to hear you say so," replied the new comer; "but for God's sake! do

not lose sight of me in this English Cimmerium, or, like Reputation, you will never see me again. I am going to transact a little business at a banker's near here; come with me, and then I will drive you home. My horse is too aristocratic to leap Temple Bar, so I have left him on the other side. Now, no excuse, I am deaf to it," as Reginald began with, "I am afraid—"

"You had better go quietly," said he named Stacey, "or I will call the police, and vow you have run away from your lodging without paying the rent—and a good joke that would be, too;" and he laughed heartily at the idea.

Nothing loth, Reginald yielded to this violent detention, only he wished to inform Ashley of it, as he had promised to meet him in the course of an hour at his chambers. But his companion would not set him free even for this purpose, so the check was cashed, and away they rattled, till they came to a very pretty villa, near Kensington, where Reginald was introduced to a very pretty little woman, as "my friend Reginald West," and Reginald West was told "this is my little wife."

"And now you are here, you must stay and dine," said Mr Stacey; but this Reginald positively declined, alleging a previous engagement to Ashley, at which name the other again shouted with pleasure; and, learning the address of each, and being pacified with a promise that the next day but one they would both dine with him, Reginald was suffered to depart.

Charles Stacey was a college acquaintance of both Ashley and Reginald. He entered shortly after the former did, and being a young man of extraordinary genius and most amiable manners, he soon won, not only their admiration, but their interest.

By birth he was by no means their equal; but where there are agreeable, companionable qualities, and nothing in the conduct or sentiments ungentlemanly and offensive, frank and open-hearted youth does not generally care for pedigree. His mother was a widow, and he her only child; but the nobleman, whose Irish agent her husband had been, and who had discharged his sometimes unpleasant duties to the benefit and satisfaction of all parties, promised to look after this fatherless boy, and had faithfully kept his promise. Stacey, having been well educated, was sent to college preparatory to his taking orders as there was a small living in his patron's gift which was destined for him. And after being thus provided for, he was given to understand that he must take care of his future fortune himself.

This provision, though perhaps more than he would have obtained had his father lived, was one very little admired by young Stacey! his ambition or imagination had pictured a something, though he might have been puzzled to say what; but a finale to his academical career very different from a quiet, modest country living, with its scanty income, its incessant and abundant labor. His first impression was that he was a very ill-used person: he forgot that his education, though excellent, had been economically procured at a large, but not public school; that nothing had ever been said or done by his noble protector to justify the notion that he meant to educate him as his own sons were, though during the holidays, and on other occasions, he associated freely with them; this permission, though kindly intended, was perhaps a mistake, tending to encourage unfounded pretensions; nor was it the only one. The young man's own wishes had never been consulted as regarded his future destination; had they been, his disinclination and unfitness for clerical duties would have been discovered, and something more congenial to his tastes and talents might have been offered to him.

To his mother he hesitated not to avow his dislike to the path marked out for him; but she was a silly, vain woman, who, though she thought her clever Charles fit for any thing, and nothing too good for him, had distant and indistinct visions of church dignitaries, prebends' stalls, lawn sleeves, and perhaps, in her ignorance and folly, even of the pope's triple crown; so she talked about the gentility of the church till in her mind gentility stood next to, if not in the place of, godliness; and drawing largely on fable and fairy land, she so filled Charles's imaginative brain with a fashionable congregation listening with rapt attention to his eloquence, and young ladies in love with the handsome clergyman, that these dreams jostled and drove away common sense and her homely progeny, and had the field all to themselves.

And so behold the future "conquering hero" in canonicals, at Cambridge, where, preparatory to his becoming the pet of the congregation, he became the pet of the combination-rooms. Instead of stealing young hearts away by sentimental sermons and good looks, he said and wrote good things, and gave a welcome to the enemy which steals men's brains; his witticisms were quoted and circulated far and wide, but the heads of the university forgot him, or passed him unnoticed; his *bon mot* would set the table in a roar, but his neglect of lectures and chapel made tutors look grave; in short, he was the life of his party—but, he was rusticated!

Ashley, who was more constantly at Cambridge than Reginald, had often remonstrated, but in vain—he had threatened to withdraw his friendship, equally in vain; the threat he himself found too difficult for performance, for Stacey was one of those troublesome persons called, "no one's enemy but his own;" though where either the truth or the appropriateness of the designation lies, it seems difficult to discover, for the man who is his own enemy, is, directly or indirectly, the enemy of all who have any dealings or association with him.

Stacey, however, left Cambridge generally regretted—those who condemned his conduct lamented this waste of talent and opportunity, while his thoughtless associates bewailed his departure as an irreparable loss—for who was now to supply the place of this prince of good fellows? He left also, indebted to almost every one who had money to lend, though, in justice to him, it must be said that he was aghast when he became aware of the amount of his liabilities—but again he rallied, for when his disgrace fell upon him like a thunderbolt, "Never mind, old fellow! we will see after you," was said and meant by many of his noble and wealthy particulars; and some kept their word.

And thus did his clerical prospects close in,

these he did not much regret or lament—he had long ago discovered, that over-crowded congregations are disagreeable in more senses than one, and that girls who weep over their prayer-books, invariably have colds and red noses—but then, this news killed his mother, and to her he was tenderly attached; we do not mean, that on hearing of his disgrace she dropped down dead, but she never recovered from the effects of the shock, was never again happy or well, and shortly afterward died."

CHAPTER XXX.

"I remarked with what justice of distribution he directed his talk to a wide circle—he amused the timid, softened the supercilious, and opened the reserved."—Dr. Johnson.

How often do we say, speaking of pain, "it was as bad as it could be,"—or of sorrow, "I could not have gone through more."

The day after Cecilia's arrival, Constance was so much indisposed with a violent cold, that Mr. Curtis condemned her to remain a prisoner in her room. "No such terrible fate after all," as he smilingly remarked, glancing at the numerous accessories of comfort and luxury by which she was surrounded.

It was while she was still an invalid, and before Colonel Templeton had returned from his unexpected visit to London, that Lord Hurstwood's arrival at the hall was announced, and the day after the report he presented himself at the Priory. Mrs. Templeton expressed her regret at her husband's absence, who was expected that same evening. His Lordship, however, seemed to bear the disappointment very philosophically, discussing, with his usual grace, various topics with Mrs. Templeton, Helen, and Cecilia, to whom he was now for the first time introduced. Laurette was most provokingly away; she had gone to look after her domestic pet at Forest Hill, whom, after all, she did not see, and on her return had the mortification to learn, that she had missed the introduction to Lord Hurstwood, for Laurette was a thorough coquette; perhaps also she meant to try the old game of playing off the Peer against the Squire.

Lord Hurstwood had remained some time, indeed, rather a long time for a call, when he suddenly remembered he had a very important affair about which he wished for the Colonel's opinion, and whose absence he seemed to find so inconvenient, that Mrs. Templeton, though scarcely sure that she was doing what her husband would approve of, invited him to luncheon the next day; an invitation which was promptly accepted.

As he had led his family to expect, the Colonel arrived the same evening; but either his business in town had not proceeded to his wishes, or he was tired or bilious, for he brought with him a temper, which, had not the presence of his nieces in a great degree restrained, would in some shape or other have been displayed to his wife and daughter more offensively than it was. Even the arrival of Cecilia failed to chase away the foul fiend; and complaining of the absence of Constance fatigue, any thing which furnished the semblance of an excuse for his manner, he was not seen by any of them after they left the dining-room.

"My uncle is amiable," said Laurette, sarcastically; "I hope it is edifying to be with him when he is in these moods; for I confess to feeling it a slight discipline."

"I must own that I do not think him improved either in manner or appearance," returned Cecilia; "but he looks evidently fatigued and harassed this evening; he most likely feels annoyed at Lord Ernest's unjustifiable behavior. Poor Helen! how admirably she acts. Were she and Reginald West much attached? I was in Italy during the greater part of their engagement, and therefore know but little of the particulars."

"They were very much attached," answered Laurette, "it was quite a love affair; and I should not wonder if Helen, in her romance, has decided already to renounce lovers and matrimony forever."

"That comes of having what is called *une grande passion*," remarked her companion; "happily, we are both too old for such a catastrophe—which, I believe, never can happen after twenty—and as sentiment was never my forte, if I ever should marry—rather an unlikely event, being 'a tocherless lass wi' a lang pedigree'—I shall be contented to receive and give a very moderate portion of love."

"Perhaps you would not object to a little aversion just to begin with," said Laurette, laughing; "but I agree with you, that at our age a marriage *de convenance* is the most sensible arrangement."

Had she forgotten Hubert while she said this? by no means; it was the bitter consciousness of her real feelings, and the dread she now had of their being discovered, which induced her to adopt this bantering tone; she had begun to fear that she was wrong in having permitted Hubert to suspect the truth; and was doubly careful to hide from all others.

The next day was a sort of review, preparatory to the grand field day, when all was to be stately and magnificent. Colonel Templeton, who was anxious to be on friendly terms with his noble neighbor, and much gratified to find that the overtures toward intimacy emanated first from the Hall, played the gay and courteous host to perfection; and as to his Lordship, if he had been pronounced "really very agreeable" during his morning call, his manners and conversation at luncheon were delightful—so graceful and chivalrous in his attentions to the young ladies—so respectful to Mrs. Templeton, that Helen looked at him with eyes full of gratitude—so full, that he noticed again and again the look and the eyes too, and perfectly remembered both, even after he had left her presence—and then his conversation—so perfect in the selection of subjects sure to interest, proving him both the well-read man and the accomplished courtier; Cecilia and he played admirably into each other's hands, capping anecdotes of foreign courts and customs, that never once allowed the conversation to flag.

Unfortunately, Laurette was not in her usual spirits; she complained of a headache, that convenient malady; but the truth is, she was mortified to find herself a nonentity where she meant

to have been conspicuous. Though remarkably well-informed, endowed with a ready wit and graceful flow of language, she knew nothing, by experience, of foreign life, and had no personal associations with continental celebrities, and was, therefore, condemned to be a listener where she had anticipated trophies as a talker; and afforded, by her ill-concealed indifference, a marked contrast to the silent but evidently gratified attention of Helen,

Though it must have been clearly shown that Seabrooke Priory was famous neither for domestic happiness nor public gayety, on such occasions as that now about to take place, it evinced no deficiency of splendor or perfect appointment; and as Colonel Templeton glanced along and around his table, he felt that even Hurstwood Hall could not outshine the wealth and beauty which he had assembled to do honor to his lordly neighbor.

Mrs. Templeton's graceful loveliness was still conspicuous; and being desirous of supplying any deficiency of animation in Helen, with her very becoming attire, she tried to put on cheerful looks, and succeeded so well, that even her husband was pleased as well as surprised.

True to her promise, Helen, though certainly not gay, was by no means ostentatiously sad; and with her cousins, each very attractive in her own peculiar manner, assisted her mother most efficiently to receive their numerous guests.

Constance, to her infinite disappointment, was still invisible beyond her own room—indeed, by order of Mr. Curtis, Helen was banished from their joint sleeping apartment into her dressing-room, adjoining the conservatory; "Precaution," as the village Galen oracularly observed, "being better than cure; and Miss Constance had symptoms of fever and sore throat, which, though at present trifling, required care and attention."

Lord Hurstwood, whose popularity was still in the ascendant, won more golden opinions, when, in the course of the evening, he proposed to call a council of ladies, in order to arrange a *déjeuner* at the Hall, the grounds of which were now in all their bloom and beauty. When this proposal was received with smiling approbation by the fair hearers, he remarked, that such a bachelor establishment as his could not expect to be honored with the presence of gentle visitants until some lady would assume the temporary hostess, and be there to receive them; and addressing Mrs. Templeton, he ventured to hope that she would fill the office, in default of a permanent occupant—and Lady Dallas with her usual look of meaning, declared, that as he said these words, his eye fell very distinctly on the unconscious Helen; who certainly, so far as grace and beauty went, was very likely to attract *him*—a professed admirer of loveliness; since it was unanimously agreed that rarely had she looked more captivating; her white dress of rich materials was relieved by no color save that of a few natural flowers, and her graceful head and perfect features were seen to advantage by the classical style in which the splendid dark hair was arranged, while her intellect and feeling which gave grace to her movements and music to her voice were eminently visible in her varying countenance.

Cecilia Grantham looked queen-like in her rather strange foreign fashion, which, however, became her admirably; and though Laurette perhaps made a little mistake in wearing a kind of half Spanish costume, it nevertheless suited her dark beauty and elegant little figure better than might have been expected.

Of course, where all the principal families of the neighborhood were assembled, there would be the Forresters; and though Mrs. Forrester admitted to herself that as Lord Hurstwood had arranged his party at the Priory, he could not have avoided nominating Mrs. Templeton deputy-queen, she yet thought that distinction should have fallen on her, as due both to her age and the length of her residence in the county.

Mr. Forrester, also, was not quite at ease. Hubert had been so pre-occupied, so dull, so unlike himself, that his father could not but ascribe the change to the absence of Constance; and began to fear that her influence on his son's happiness was stronger than he had anticipated. He had also remarked that Colonel Templeton indulged very freely in wine—that he and Lord Hurstwood had talked a great deal with a foreign gentleman, who had accompanied a neighboring family, of gaming and gaming-houses abroad, during which he had evinced an intimate acquaintance with the mysteries of the said places, which greatly shocked the aristocratic prejudices of Mr. Forrester—a man whom pride alone would have kept from any amusement in which sharpers and swindlers were almost sure to be his associates; even had not his habits and tastes been opposed to speculation and risk. In short, he never had liked the Colonel. They differed in all essentials, and many hints which he had collected from various quarters acquired strength from this conversation, and reminded him of the exceedingly doubtful character of the party by whom the Colonel was accompanied some years ago, on his return from the Continent, so that he left the Priory with all his prejudices arrayed more violently than ever against Hubert's suit.

CHAPTER XXXI

"Ye gods! what crime had my poor father done,
That you should make a poet of his son?"
VANBRUGH.

We left Reginald in his humble but peaceful retreat at Hampstead gradually learning what was meant by the words labor and study. Happily his acquaintance with the difficulties which attended his choice did not daunt nor deter him from steadily pursuing it. Happily, also, as novelty wore off, indifference did not succeed; but he went on day by day finding his views of life and its responsibilities clearer, more enlarged—his self-knowledge imperceptibly leading him to a self-reliance he would formerly have thought almost presumptuous—but which he now saw was quite compatible with the conviction that there was still much to learn.

As he realized the fact, that henceforth he must take rank among the sons of labor, and work for a living, the charm which was at first thrown over the notion of independence did not dissolve.

He not only found his energies respond cheerfully to the calls for exertion, and furnish a supply of industry equal to the toil and need—but he found that he was really happier—better able to bear his trials and losses with resignation, than when condemned to inactivity and the *ennui* of unemployed leisure. He was now making a successful struggle, and this assurance gave him dignity in his own eyes; he was laboring for independence, and the thought cheered him in his daily task.

It is true he never forgot that she whom he still tenderly loved was separated from him forever. It is true he acutely felt the great change and blight that had fallen on his own once brilliant prospects. But the remembrance was not one of constant and unmitigated bitterness. Life had still its duties for him to perform, and in the faithful discharge of them he trusted to find a fitting recompense.

His new course of study at first entirely occupied him; but when he had, by the help of the gentleman with whom he placed himself, arranged that, and judiciously apportioned his time, he found there was still enough leisure for social purposes, and the pursuit of that literary occupation which he hoped would prove remunerative, and relieve him from pecuniary dependence on friends whose generosity was exceeded only by their kindness and delicacy.

Having related to Ashley his unexpected meeting with Charles Stacey, and the engagement he had conditionally accepted for both of them, it was agreed that Ashley should write and confirm the acceptance; and at the time appointed they made their appearance at the villa, the elegant exterior of which was only in keeping with the style and comfort of the internal arrangements.

They were the only guests, Stacey saying he anticipated too much pleasure in talking over old times to have their confidential chat restrained by the presence of a less intimate friend. Rumor had informed him of Reginald's changed fortune, but there was still much of which he was ignorant, and which he felt a kind interest to learn; while, as Stacey's spoke in the wheel of fortune seemed now uppermost, his guests felt much curiosity to hear how he had fared since they had all parted at Cambridge.

Mrs. Stacey joined them at an elegant dinner, but apologized for the necessity of leaving them to take their coffee alone—she was engaged to a *soirée* at her friend Lady De Vere's, and expected her Ladyship's carriage very shortly to fetch her.

"And so you two industrious fellows are going to graduate at Westminster Hall?" said Stacey, when they were alone; "well, success attend you, you deserve it, for having the courage to make the attempt. I tried it after I left Cambridge. A solemn old fellow, who was, however, very kind and generous, recommended it, but I soon found the life would never suit me."

"Why not?" asked Ashley, anxious to learn what time had made of this "no man's enemy but his own."

"Why, my dear fellow, the atmosphere of chambers did not agree with my constitution. The dust and rust of legal antiquities and curiosities would have been fatal to my genius. My fancy turned every deed into a deed of horror; and, to my imagination, parchment, 'parchment was and nothing more,' when, in a lucky moment, I met Lord Charlton, who was so shocked at the inroads eating mutton had made on my health, that he carried me off to spend Christmas at the Duke's in the north, where there was a house full of company, all, as the puffers of oil and cheap coats say, 'the *élite* and *haut-volé*' Well, such a glorious time as we had of it! *Tableaux vivans*, private theatricals, balls, flirtations, 'such rousing of the owls in a night-catch,' for, I promise you, my mellifluous voice was at a premium—and, to crown all, it was discovered that I had a tolerable gift for improvising! so I leave you to imagine how I was courted and *fêted*!"

"And, after all this banqueting at Olympus, this feasting on nectar and ambrosia," inquired Reginald, "how did your genius condescend to fold its wings and brood over the earthly matters of the law?"

"Oh! it was rebellious, absolutely contumacious!" was the gay reply; "flatly refused to soil its plumage by contact with such dirty literature. And when I called on my good old quiz" —(this good old quiz had paid the fees and promised all reasonable help)—"to tell him jurisprudence was not my element, he drily retorted, 'Nor any other prudence, I believe,' but congratulated me on having so soon made the discovery, as it would save him any further waste of money. Cool that—was it not?"

"Very," answered Ashley, almost as drily as the good old quiz might have done.

Stacey continued, "My mother's little fortune" (her fortune, poor old woman! it consisted of a few hundreds, saved by a self-denial that would have been laudable, had it been for a better purpose than to minister to her son's extravagance)—"had already been spent; in fact, it took wings and flew away, during a short visit I paid to Paris directly I left Alma Mater; but, luckily, I had been introduced to a bookseller by his friend, my crusty old master; to him I now went—for the exchequer was low—in short, was empty. I knocked off a few songs as a specimen —they pleased him, he paid me, and really paid well, liberally—took me to his country-house—and, by Jove! you should see the style in which some of these shop-keeping fellows live. I was inspired by green fields and clear sky, and, presto! there was soon a pretty little volume ready for the discerning public. My fortune was made; why should I, with a mine in my head, bury myself in gloom and seclusion? besides, rank, beauty, elegance, which almost fought for the prize—my unworthy self—were much more to my taste than blue bags, wigs and gowns, and all the atrocious masquerade of bench and bar. My dainty muse, my delicate Egeria, likes them not; while there is scarcely a coroneted album in the land, that has not some gossamer contribution from me, inspired by the fashion and grace which fill England's noble saloons."

"Ah!" said Ashley, with a comic emphasis, which greatly amused Reginald, who believed he read what was passing in his mind—as to the value of such inspiring sources. "But you have not told us your love episode, and it is treason to Mrs. Stacey to omit that."

"It is soon said," replied Stacey; "I have lately married a nice little wife, and—*me voilà*."

"And a very comfortable sight you present," remarked Reginald; "may you go on and prosper, and your shadow never be less."

"No fear of that, my dear fellow," said Stacey; "but your forbearance has made me detestably egotistical, and so dismiss we this subject; it is now your turn to relate your adventures, therefore imitate me, and give them in full."

He had heard a good deal of what Reginald briefly related—and listened with that kindness which was one of his characteristics, for kind he was, and generous also—so, without any allusion to Helen, Reginald told of his present pursuits, hopes, and wishes—but when he said he was employing his leisure in attempts at miscellaneous authorship, Stacey eagerly exclaimed, "I know a man whom you will suit, and who will exactly suit you—can you meet me to-morrow at the Institution? I have no other way in which I can show my friendly interest; and it must be to-morrow, as the next day Susan and I leave home to assist at a few theatrical amusements at Roehampton; and when these will be over, and all the invitations to which they are sure to lead, neither I nor the genius of gayety can say—can you come?"

Reginald promised to be punctual, and Stacey repeated, "I will introduce you to the very man to further your project."

In this autobiography, as in every other, a few chasms need filling up; the brilliant coloring of the self painted artist requires a little toning down, and the elaborate and profuse embroidery with which the common texture of the material is concealed must be carefully removed. At no time is it so difficult to keep strictly to truth as when we are the heroes or heroines of our own story—and Charles Stacey, a poet, a man of imagination and fancy, was very little likely to steer clear of this rock a-head to all biographers, who are sure to tell too little or too much—for instance, he did *not* tell that twice he had been arrested; on the first occasion a few "good-hearted fellows" subscribed their superfluous cash and set him free; but the next time, he was obliged to mortgage his brain before he was liberated—his publisher freed him from one sort of imprisonment to inclose him in another; and the genius that pined away at the companionship of rusty and dusty legal records, that spurned all rule and all law, sold itself, pawned itself, haggled about pounds, shillings, and pence, and, for a term, became that horror of intellect—that bane to talent—that mental degradation—a bookseller's hack!

Stacey was happily rescued from the claws of the harpy who flourished and grew fat on human brain, and furnished his country-house luxuriously from the life-springs of genius; and found a steady, just, and liberal friend in the gentleman to whom—free from all petty rivalry—he was going to introduce Reginald. He also omitted to say that his wife, a guileless, but rather weak little body, was Lady De Vere's *protégée;* the word is by no means synonymous with friend, an explanation not so needless as many think. Her Ladyship had permitted her to give a concert at Rochampton, to which she, as hostess, had an unlimited supply of tickets for self and friends, besides acquiring, without any cost, the character of being a liberal patroness of art. There Stacey first met her; they sang together, and, by the display of their varied talents, charmed the noble company, by the greater part of whom they were probably forgotten the next day; and after a few weeks' acquaintance, married on the strength of their sweet voices, and for the same cause were continually in demand at one aristocratic *réunion* or another, where they willingly went, under the delusion that they were guests, while the truth is, they were only assistants gratis!

All this time, and while they were leading this butterfly life, Stacey's poem, which had been announced as "shortly to appear," had reached only a few hundred lines—he himself was in debt, and his little wife's wedding finery began to look very shabby by daylight, while she was without the means of supplying the deficiencies. This he did not mention; but his memory must have been very bad, or he would not have forgotten to tell his friends, when they congratulated him on being the owner of a villa so elegantly furnished, that it and its contents were only hired!

"And what think you of our friend Charles?" asked Reginald of Ashley, as they returned to town.

"I think all I have heard and seen is both unsatisfactory and painful, except his frank offer to you; and that proves there is some good stuff in him still," was the reply. "Why, my dear Reggy, it is easy to see through the flimsy life he is leading; and, unless he soon becomes conscious of the rottenness of all on which he seems so confidentially to lean, he must fall. Good God! to think that a man with a pair of hands and a well-informed mind, can allow himself to be juggled and cheated as he is, astonishes me; and because he is admitted to the society of lords and ladies, how he can be so blind to *their* meanness, as well as his own, is incomprehensible.

"But, my dear fellow, do you intend to say, that a man of inferior birth or fortune can not be received by the most lofty and most wealthy without forfeiting his independence and self-respect?"

"By no means—nobility, with intellect, will always be the first to seek and honor the latter wherever it is found allied to real worth—but it is the degradation of patronage—the paralyzing efforts of familiarity without respect, which I so detest. It is useless for Stacey to say or think, 'I am their equal; nay, in learning, in talent, in genius, their superior;' for he is throwing himself away among those who, having little or none of these qualities, do not value them in him. On the contrary, they are contented to take his tinsel instead of his gold—his excitement instead of his inspiration. But he must come and see us, and discover, that plodders as we are, we are honored with the companionship, and friendship, too, of the leading minds of the day."

"And no bad exchange for the introduction which he has so kindly promised me," said Reginald.

This promise Stacey redeemed at the appointed time, and it led to results most valuable to Reginald, who felt his mind and power of application

strengthen, as he judiciously exerted and worked them both.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"But you are no such man; you are rather point device in your accoutrements, as loving yourself, than securing the love of any other."—*As You Like It.*

THE signal for gayety which Lord Hurstwood's arrival had given, was promptly responded to by the county families; and after the *fête* at the Hall which was on a scale of unusual magnificence, party vied with party in receiving and doing honor to the noble giver of so sumptuous an entertainment.

It was very mortifying that at the moment when Seabrooke had an unusual fit of hilarity, and when visiting and pleasure seemed the order of the day, Constance Templeton was excluded from all participation in these festivities. It is true she was no longer confined to her room, but it was thought more prudent to keep her at home, safe from the fatigue and excitement of large parties and crowded rooms.

When, at length, these extraordinary dissipations were over, Cecilia returned to Grantham; and Laurette, loving dove, hovering round the nest which contained her treasure, accepted an invitation to the Grange; and Seabrooke once more resumed its quiet but still friendly intercourse.

During the whole of this season of gayety, in which Constance had taken no part, there was a frequent, nay, a constant visitor to the Priory—one whose presence to the convalescent more than compensated for the privation.

It seemed as if is were fated that Hubert Forrester should be associated in her mind with the character of consoler in all periods of sorrow, or sickness, or loneliness; for though both her mother and Helen had offered to give up any engagement which took them from her, Constance would not hear of the proposal—and this most affectionately and truly on her sister's account; who seemed so much better for the exertion these parties exacted, that Constance unselfishly insisted on her attending them, though this involved the absence of Mrs. Templeton, without whose chaperonage she could not have gone. Sometimes Constance thought that she ought to tell her mother of all that was passing in her heart—and felt that it would be a great comfort to do so—but she was checked by the reflection, that, till Hubert spoke, she could not, with propriety, be the one to break the silence. Had her mother been less engrossed with Helen, less solicitous to support and spare her, she surely must have noticed much that was passing; but there was no one whose vigilance could supply her want of observation.

The Forresters had decided in keeping their own counsel—the fancy might die away. Laurette ignored the matter from the same motive, and a hope that such would be the case; and though that Argus of the neighborhood, Lady Dallas, had during one of their conversations alluded to Hubert's evident admiration of Constance, her cousin denied the charge, and silenced if she did not convince her Ladyship, by assuring her that such a report, if it reached the ears of the parents on either side, would be extremely injurious—and might lead to great mischief.

It happened that one day Lord Hurstwood and the Colonel were riding through the woods belonging the latter, when his Lordship, pointing to some trees, remarked, "You cut very young here, do you not?"

"Cooper, my agent, *marks* very young trees," was the reply—"but these will not fall yet: indeed, he involved me, or rather himself, in a scrape about several hundred he cut on the Hermitage side—it almost ended in a quarrel between us—happily I interfered in time to save these, though they still bear tokens of the dangers they ran; they are now safe for several years, though I wish they were not—for in consequence of some extensive improvements I have been making, I should be glad to turn my wood into gold."

"This is a splendid property," said the Peer; "and it must richly repay you for any outlay you may make—I do not know of a more compact and beautiful place anywhere."

"So my daughters will one day find it," replied the owner; "but with both of them to introduce, and very likely soon to portion, I do not find my expensive outlay come back quite fast enough." Expensive and extensive as he represented both outlay and improvements, he very wisely abstained from pointing out either—and, indeed, his Lordship must have been blessed with extraordinary power of vision, to have seen what was only imaginary. He, therefore, replied with much gallantry, "I should think with such daughters, though I have seen very little of the younger, and especially with this noble estate to divide between them eventually, you need not be saving and screwing for portions; and I take this opportunity of saying, what I have for some time meditated doing, that if you will grant me the elder, I shall consider her quite gift enough without so many thousands down—for, on my honor, I never saw a more lovely creature anywhere."

Almost speechless with amazement, the Colonel had, however, too much presence of mind to show it, lest it would seem as if the offer were such as he had no right to expect; he therefore merely replied with a laugh, "Oh! win her by all means, my Lord, you have my consent;" and then remembering, that when his Lordship's offer became known in the county, the history of Helen's recent engagement would be told him, with Heaven knows how many historical embellishments, he determined to be beforehand with gossip, and to make the first impression; and added carelessly, as if the affair had been one of mere nursery folly—"I ought to tell you, that Helen is rather romantic, and there was a notion of affection between her and young Mr. West; play-companions they were, almost from the cradle—but the folly of Lord Ernest completely extinguished that faint spark."

"Oh! I think nothing of these childish absurdities," was the composed reply of this man so well read in foreign courts; "I have lived too long among continental manners to attach the

least importance to these *passagères* fancies—and upon the whole, either custom or conviction leads me also to prefer the foreign plan of letting experienced relatives conduct the whole of these negotiations; in this, I have no doubt you agree with me."

Of course he did, and would have been very glad had his daughters been educated on this system of passive obedience and non-resistance, as it would have prevented much of the trouble and inconvenience which his prophetic mind foresaw would attend his proceedings.

"Dine, then, with me, *tête-à-tête*, to-morrow," said Lord Hurstwood. "when we will quietly discuss the matter—but consider me pledged. I am old enough—or," correcting himself with a laugh, "fatigued enough with public life to abandon foreign service; it was quite my intention, on my return, to marry, and this fair Helen decides alike my choice and my plans; so *au revoir*," and they separated.

Very slowly indeed did the Colonel ride toward home, thinking over the unexpected offer which had just been made. To do him justice, it was a result for which he had never speculated or schemed. He *had* felt for Helen, and his sympathy had been increased by the uncomplaining dignity with which she had borne her sorrow; and though her successful efforts to appear cheerful had really gratified him, he had never so wholly misunderstood her character as to fancy she ceased to remember and mourn; and if the thought of her marrying ever crossed his mind, it had always been as at some distant period, when time had done its usual work, in destroying the poetry of youth and replacing it with the prose of age. Perhaps Lord Hurstwood, of all whom he knew, would have been the least likely to have presented himself as a probable future son-in-law; but the idea having been started, he pursued it keenly—becoming more and more pleased with it, and more and more resolved not to be disappointed.

But he had much to do before this successful result could be attained. Much that would cause pain, sorrow, difficulty, and—who knew?—perhaps opposition. None of these anticipations and reflections moved him—except, indeed, the difficulty of deciding upon his plan. Should he try conciliation—work by kindness? or should he at once clear away all obstacles, by striking terror into the gentle heart he meant to use as a stepping-stone to his own designs? Yes, thus it should be—this was the shortest and surest way—and yet there was a dim outline of one figure standing boldly in his way, and not to be driven thence by threats or menaces; it was the vision of a figure of great beauty, with resolute brow, with uplifted and advanced hand, in an attitude equally defiant and protecting—making an actual movement, he tried to wave it away, and passed his hand over his eyes to shut it out, so that he might think of all the advantages this alliance offered.

No fortune required, at least at present—that suited him admirably—one daughter placed in such a position as would, perhaps, enable her to raise her sister to a similar eminence. His name united with that of Lord Hurstwood, whose rank, wealth, and political reputation were known throughout the civilized world. And was all this to be relinquished by yielding to the fancies of a romantic girl—preposterous! Like Pharaoh, he hardened his heart. It was too good to be rejected or thrown away for a whim—too attractive a picture to be washed away by a few tears; and he vowed a deep vow that it should not. Again, the beautiful face, with a frown on its brow and its bright but threatening eyes, was faintly visible. But setting spurs to his horse he rode quickly on.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I'll have it dispatched,
And suddenly, my lord, that I may say—
My honorable, my right honorable daughter."
MASSINGER.

CONSTANCE having been out riding, and overtired herself, by her mother's advice remained quietly in her room, therefore Mrs. Templeton and Helen were the Colonel's only companions at dinner.

When they rose to leave after desert, he, who had been quaffing glass after glass, rather more quickly than was even his wont, called out, not very gently,

"Stop! I have some rare news to tell Helen."

Little expecting the thunder-bolt that was ready to fall, they both obeyed; and the Colonel, replenishing his glass, said, "I have been riding with Lord Hurstwood, and I can tell you, Helen, he has a discerning eye—he admires you prodigiously."

"Me, papa!" said Helen, wholly unconscious of what was to follow—not so her mother—her sensitive love divined all—her apprehensive heart anticipated the storm; and faint and giddy, she rested her arm on the table.

"Yes, you—you hypocritical little monkey, looking as if you did not know this."

Still, not comprehending how her knowledge or ignorance of this unimportant fact could signify, she smiled and said nothing—but her father, slightly provoked at receiving no help from exclamation or protestation, proceeded very speedily to enlighten her, by adding, though his voice slightly faltered, "He admires you so much that he has commissioned me to offer you his hand."

"This, and to me!" said Helen, with a kindling look.

"Ah! you may well be surprised," said he wily father, seizing this advantage, and feigning not to understand all that the tone and look very plainly said; "it is an honor which does not fall to every one—this laying coronet and title at the feet of a little girl, and you may well look proud of the distinction."

"Papa," began Helen—she paused, for his face looked unpropitious—encouraging herself, however, as she became aware of the necessity, she continued, "Papa, I must still suppose you jest."

"Jest!" he repeated, striking the table fiercely; "you may be as amused as you please with the jest, for I promise you that it will prove a reality"—then, seeing that she still looked bewildered, he resumed; "Listen, girl—attend to me, Helen,"

as she drew nearer to her mother; "this marriage pleases and suits me—and," with a dreadful imprecation, he added, "it shall take place!"

"Mamma, mamma, did you hear?—what does it all mean?—what is it?" she inquired, turning her blanched face toward her father.

"It means," he sternly replied, "that I have promised you shall marry Lord Hurstwood, and this promise I will keep."

In speechless terror poor Helen looked at her mother, who now first spoke.

"Lionel," she said, "this can not be; think of all that it involves."

"Madam," he replied, "it will be, and I have thought of all that it involves—it involves honor, wealth, station, power—it frees me from difficulties, and it pleases me that my daughter should be Lady Hurstwood—and now, instead of encouraging her in insensate and useless resistance, I advise you to let your daughter benefit by your experience, and learn from you the folly of attempting to frustrate *my* will;" and he rose, and before Helen, who tried to stop him, could find strength enough to do so, he rudely waved her away, and left the room.

"Oh, mamma," said the miserable girl, sinking at her feet and sobbing on her lap; "oh, mamma, is it true—must I learn this dreadful lesson from you, and must you teach it? Speak, mother," she urged, as Mrs Templeton, faint and suffocating, could hardly breathe. At last she said, "God knows whether it must be so, but if it must, I feel that my heart will break in performing the task."

"If? oh, mamma, you said if—is there, then, any hope?"

"Alas! my precious child, I dare not say there is—still—Helen," she suddenly exclaimed; "have you courage? can you be true to yourself?" and then tenderly caressing her trembling hands, she mournfully added, "but what will this avail?"

"I do not understand you," said Helen with a look of tearless despair; "only tell me what I can do, I will try any thing to escape this dreadful fate."

"And I scarcely understand my own meaning," replied her mother; "we can neither of us reason or think to much purpose at present. Constance must be told—but not to-night, she is still very delicate—but early to-morrow we will see her, and take counsel together."

"Then, for her sake, dearest mamma, I will make an effort; but she must know all very soon; she is my only hope now that you have none—but surely, surely," she added, with a fresh burst of sorrow, "this must pass away like some frightful dream; I can not be asked to consent to any thing so monstrous."

"Listen to me, my dear child; all that can be done to avert so terrible a doom shall be tried, in spite of a voice that whispers it is hopeless; control yourself for this evening, before your sister; she has great energy and courage, qualities which, I fear, my poor girl, we both are deficient in—and we know no effort she can make will be wanting."

And so, by seeking Constance late and leaving her early, Helen succeeded in not exciting her suspicion or curiosity; while Mrs. Templeton, who had remained the whole time with them, by a powerful effort, continued to talk as usual on indifferent subjects, and took leave of her for the night when Helen did.

The latter was seated listlessly before her dressing-table when her mother entered the room, which, since Constance had been threatened with fever and sore throat, had been her bed-room. She bent down to kiss the poor girl, who raised her tearful eyes to her face, as if seeking consolation in her looks, but she could not read it there.

"I have just remembered that you are ignorant of a trifling alteration I had made, but which has hitherto been useless; to-night my anxiety for you will find it serviceable, but you must know of it, or my unexpected presence might alarm you. Look here, Helen"—and going toward a pier glass let into the wall, she removed two ornaments, and then showed her that the panel was a door which opened to the conservatory at right-angles with the door of her own apartments. Helen looked astonished, and Mrs. Templeton proceeded to explain.

"When you and Constance were coming home—and I need not tell you how I thought of that time, hoping, as I did, for so much happiness from your dear society—I fancied I never could be too near to my treasures, whom I longed, as it were, to hide in my bosom; and it one day struck me that I should like a means of communication by which we could at all times meet quietly and freely; I therefore had this door made. At that time I had no idea of concealment, and, of course, it is known to many of the workmen then busy in performing my orders. But as your father was away, and, besides, rarely visits our domains, I am sure he knows not of it. I do not by any means depend on your maid Ruth; Dawson has hinted very unpleasant things to her disadvantage, and I had intended her dismissal; but Constance's illness, and various other events, have caused me to delay. She knows nothing of this; the rooms were finished and furnished before she came; see how the opening is masked;" and she showed Helen how a common blind on the other side effectually hid the opening. Helen looked surprised at the simple ingenuity of the contrivance. This duplicate key of my conservatory door will enable you to find me without crossing the corridor."

"Thanks, dear mamma; though I can not exactly see the advantage of this arrangement."

"I fully intend to use it to-night, my love, for I shall keep anxious vigils till you are at rest, or comfort you with my presence I shall come this way to avoid the risk of disturbing Constance, and to-morrow I shall be able to see you as early as I like. And now, darling, let me leave you with something like a hope that you will seek and find repose. Let no morbid indulgence incapacitate you for exertion and thought;" and yielding to her mother's wishes, Helen went to bed, where, two hours afterward, her mother found her asleep; and though the flushed cheek and troubled brow spoke not of calm or happy slumber, Mrs. Templeton knelt in thankfulness for this brief respite from the consciousness of what, her boding heart said, was to be the great trial of her child's life.

It was Helen's turn, the following morning, to avail herself of this newly-discovered means of entering her mother's rooms; and Mrs. Templeton, after an almost sleepless night, was, at an early hour, thoroughly aroused by her entrance. She assisted her mother to dress, and they then talked with more composure on Helen's part than Mrs. Templeton had ventured to expect, of the whole matter. Still, nothing that seemed likely to prove successful in averting the evil presented itself, and Helen sat with clasped hands and pale cheeks while her mother warned her against saying or looking any thing that might rouse her her father to passion, or even anger. At length, hoping to find Constance awake, and recovered from her fatigue, her mother entered her room, and was cheered to find her not only dressed, but declaring herself quite strong and well—both would be needed when informed of the extraordinary scene which had taken place the previous day. And when Constance did hear of this fresh trial which awaited them all—for in every thing she rejoiced and sorrowed with her mother and sister—she seemed as if unable to believe it. She could not, at first, by any effort realize it. What! while Helen's heart was still still filled with love for Reginald, ask her to wed another! What! threaten her, constrain her to utter vows which her affection refused to ratify! Monstrous! impossible! and Constance paced backward and forward, uttering vehement protests against it.

"Helen," she suddenly said, "we must seek papa. Suppose he should take your silence as a proof of acquiescence. Mamma, we must all go down to breakfast. Helen must not absent herself—she must try to be firm."

"Constance," interrupted Helen, "I have not courage to encounter my father."

"But you must summon it," cried her impetuous sister; "think what is at stake, Helen, not only your happiness—almost your honor—but the happiness, the peace of poor, noble Reginald."

"Oh! sister, sister, name him not, I implore you," said Helen, bursting into a passion of tears.

"I name him—but it is to rouse you," replied Constance. "Heaven knows it is done neither unkindly nor heedlessly; but you are still stunned—still unable to think, or you would see as clearly as I do, that your fate is greatly in your own power. Refuse—but be firm, or you are lost."

Helen fixed her large dark eyes on her sister; a deep glow overspread her face, but was quickly succeeded by a deadly pallor, as she felt how impossible it was that she could imitate her resolution.

"My glorious girl!" said her mother, gazing on her animated beauty, and catching courage, almost hope, from her dauntless bearing and words; "yes, you are right. Helen, this is something of my meaning, when I said you must be true to yourself. I, I your mother, say, here you ought not to yield; Constance and I will precede you."

"Oh! no, dear mamma; oh! Constance, do not desert me—I never can enter alone. Go you first, we will quickly follow." But when she entered the room it was empty.

Constance, however, took her post, and was making breakfast when the Colonel entered. She glanced at him, but saw no signs of relenting in that gloomy face, a gloom which the perusal of his letters did not tend to dispel; and, after the usual greetings, all was silence till he abruptly said, "I dine at the Hall to-day; I shall inform his Lordship that I have an obedient daughter."

"Oh! father, have pity on me!" exclaimed Helen, feeling that this was perhaps a crisis; "think what I have so lately suffered, in silently bearing the great trial that has fallen to my lot. Do not, oh! do not make my life intolerable, by urging me to a step I never can consent to—never ought to consent to."

"Helen!" he said, quietly, but not the less did his words stifle all hope. "Helen, this folly and opposition are useless—it must, it shall be."

"Oh! papa, be merciful; mother, entreat for me!" turning to Mrs. Templeton, who was weeping. Alas! what would avail *her* entreaties with that selfish man—and her tears flowed more abundantly. "Constance"—and she raised her sorrowful eyes to her sister—"plead for me;" but Constance stood silent and firm by her mother. "Papa does love you, and, perhaps—" but she could say no more, for sobs came thick and fast and stopped her utterance.

And did he not love her then, that gentle, unoffending girl? He looked sternly at her, and then at her mother, and slightly shuddered. Constance saw the look and the movement. What did they express?—pity?—oh, no.

"Dear mamma, take Helen away," she said, for she perceived that the latter was only injuring her cause by her evident distress and terror; and as Mrs. Templeton complied, leading away the passive girl, and closing the door, Constance, without the least sign of trepidation, though evidently much affected, advanced toward her father, and said, "Papa, I have but this morning heard of this strange, distressing proposal. I am not going to suppose it any thing but a horrible fact, still I can not imagine that Lord Hurstwood—that any man with the feelings of a gentleman—would condescend to accept an unwilling bride—no true-hearted man could think of inflicting so much cruelty on another who has scarcely the power to resist; therefore, this can proceed no further."

"You have more sense than any girl I ever met with," said the Colonel, "but in this case you are quite wrong. Lord Hurstwood knows of Helen's folly, and is yet willing to marry her—so that argument falls to the ground."

"Then he must be a degraded and dishonorable man," replied Constance, without the least passion, but with strong contempt both in manner and expression. "Still, his being regardless of his honor is not to make Helen forget hers; and she can not marry one man while loving another."

"'Pon my soul, Constance, if you go on so, I shall believe you as great a fool as the others"—a polite and manly way of classing his wife and daughter. "Ask your mother what comes of love matches—love matches, indeed," he repeated, with a sneer.

"I can not ask mamma about any thing which

would, when known, weaken my respect for either of my parents," replied Constance, with a spirit and dignity which so pleased her father that he said, rather more gently,

"Why make all this opposition, when in the end she must yield, for *I* will not—she will be obliged to see that it is her duty."

"But she must not yield; she never can so misconceive what is her duty. Listen for one moment to me, papa," she said, rendered desperate by her secret terror, "listen to me indulgently—it is the cause of my dear sister I am advocating. Her duty to you is, never to marry without your consent—your duty to her—yes, I repeat it—your duty to her is, never to compel her to take a solemn oath which she can not keep. Helen has tacitly promised to give up Reginald, not because he is unworthy, but because he is poor, and you object; and nothing would induce her to break this promise, unless—" she slightly hesitated

"Unless what?" thundered her father.

"Unless," she said, looking at him with her proud eyes, "unless you make her, by trying to compel her to marry this—this—man." She uttered these words slowly, and as if sounds could not fully express the depth of her abhorrence and scorn.

"Enough of this," he said, rising; "Constance, you forget yourself;" and she felt that, perhaps, her zeal was hurrying her too far—so she made no reply, and they separated; he to prepare for his visit to Hurstwood, for he was wholly unmoved at any thing that had been said; and she to destroy all hope Helen might have encouraged from her mediation.

"Have you done any thing for me?" cried Helen, eagerly, as Constance joined her and her mother.

"Alas! no, dearest—still I do not mean to give up; but go you and take a quiet turn in the garden, and let mamma and me consider what is the safest and best course to pursue."

"Constance," said Mrs. Templeton, when they were alone, "do you despair?"

"I do, mamma, unless Helen be strong enough to assert her rights; were it me, nothing—nothing should tempt or terrify me into compliance. But dear Helen has lately been so overwhelmed with sorrows, 'they so tread each other's heel,' that she is bowed down with them; and to think that at this time, when they are so greatly wanted, the Vernons should be away, every thing seems against us. Can not Ashley be sent to?"

"No! no! not Ashley, he can do nothing here," replied Mrs. Templeton, quickly rising as if a thought had suddenly struck her; "and you fear, then, that we can not depend on Helen's courage?"

"I fear we can not!"

"Then, my darling, leave me now, and seek Helen, she needs comfort and support. I think it very likely that Mr. Victor may call this morning, as he talks of soon leaving for the Levant; if you meet him, send him to me, and desire the servants to do the same."

"I fear," thought Mrs. Templeton, "that Constance is right regarding Helen, and I so distrust my own judgment in a matter which so deeply affects my feelings, that I tremble lest I should be misled;" and she sat for some time in deep reflection.

It was, as Constance had observed, particularly unfortunate that the Vernons should be away at this juncture—their friendship, their judgment, would have been now invaluable. The gentleman who supplied the Doctor's place, though a most amiable young man, was not to be thought of as his substitute on this occasion—the Granthams were away, and, for a variety of reasons, Mrs. Templeton shrunk from consulting either Mr. Forrester or Sir William Dallas—not from any doubt of their kindness, but she felt she could not make them comprehend her views of the case. It was when Constance proposed Ashley, the idea flashed across her mind, that in Mr. Morton she should find the help she needed. She was convinced of his integrity and honor—his kindness also was evident in all his proceedings, and she knew that his warmest sympathy would immediately be roused, when he understood how deeply this matter affected Reginald. To him, therefore, she determined to apply—to state the whole case, and frankly submit to his judgment her desperate alternative; and, having arrived at this conclusion, she prepared the following note to him, which she hoped to be able to send by Victor, now almost a daily visitor.

"Mrs. Templeton takes the liberty of requesting an interview with Mr. Morton, at the Hermitage, this afternoon at five o'clock. She depends upon his usual kindness for pardoning this intrusion."

This done, she felt that one step was taken—and hoping that it had been in the right direction, she quietly awaited Victor's arrival, and trusted that his father's answer would signify that he could see her—for as the Colonel would be absent at the Hall, it was an opportunity not to be neglected—besides, time might be most valuable, as it was impossible to conjecture what would be the result of this dinner at Hurstwood.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"I entertain the offer of this match,
With purpose to confirm it presently.
I have already named it to my daughter."
TOURNEUR.

"AND what says my sweet lady to my suit?" inquired the Peer of the Colonel, when they were relieved from the presence of servants.

"Oh!" replied he gayly, and as if relating a capital joke; "she gave herself airs, treated Mrs. Templeton and me to a few tragedy-queen graces, and angrily refused to hear of any thing so shocking—it is clear that she means to make you enact the Amadis, and put on armor before you win the prize."

"*Volontiers*," cried his Lordship, filling his glass; "let us drink success to the attack; and very beautiful doubtless the fair cruelty looked, while playing the persecuted princess."

"She will probably give you an opportunity of judging of that," laughed her father, well pleased to see how his bait was taken.

"Then that, perhaps, I may have the pleasure of doing to-morrow."

"Pardon me, no. The truth is, that Mrs. Templeton, who is rather romantic, has imbued her daughters with a few exploded sentimentalities, and all together, they raise such a chorus against your Lordship for having employed an ambassador on this tender occasion, though the unworthy papa performs that office; instead of ourself coming in full dress, coach-and-six, outriders, and such tom-foolery, that Helen, who has a pretty little pouting temper, is in the angry heroics, and till this quiets down, which it will do in a day or two, my counsel is, to let the young lady expect you a little while before you appear."

"But suppose she should mistake this absence for indifference? I should be sorry—"

"Not at all—not at all likely—it will only prove to her that you are not disposed to encourage her romance."

"As you will then," coolly replied his Lordship, carefully preparing his fruit, with most unlover-like solicitude, for himself; "but as I can not have an audience to-morrow, I fear I must postpone that pleasure till I return from town, where I have business the day after, which may detain me. In the mean time, I rely upon your good offices, for I shall hate much courting, as you in England call it; and I should also wish to have the marriage celebrated with as little delay as possible. Has she been presented?"

"No, it was postponed in order that her sister might accompany her."

"*Tant mieux!* then I shall have the pleasure of knowing that the most beautiful *débutante* of the season is my wife. My relative, the Duchess of Isleford, shall do me the service of being chaperone. Mrs. Templeton will, I hope, be satisfied with introducing her other lovely daughter—we can not allow her to monopolize. Apropos, I was looking over some gew-gaws last night, and sent off a box of these toys to Storr's to be reset. I shall now delay this till I can consult him in person—and I hope, by the time I return, to find Mrs. Templeton and her daughters disposed to judge me leniently, and to pardon my foreign method of wooing."

A conversation then ensued relating to settlements and such matters, and the Colonel, charmed with the success of his schemes and hints, and from the liberal intentions of Lord Hurstwood more than ever bent on carrying his point, passed a very pleasant evening with his well-bred son-in-law elect; and parted from him the next morning, with smiling predictions of success, short lovemakings, and a speedy marriage.

He might well venture to foretell all this; for he returned to the Priory, his heart stealed to all entreaty—armed from head to heel in iron, so that no assailable point should be found—he was more invulnerable than Achilles—for with remorseless hand he himself had cast all feeling into the petrifying Styx; and he rode home, resolved to crush all obstacles to his wishes, while he availed himself of every thing likely to facilitate them. With this view he determined to take advantage, not only of Helen's gentleness and timidity, but of her affection, which he knew was strong and uncalculating; this, joined to her utter ignorance of all relating to the details of business, he thought he could direct in his own favor; and for this purpose, before he proceeded to extremities, he very ingeniously arranged a little drama, in which he was to sustain the principal part, that of the parent appealing to the daughter; in other words, the villain of the piece, whose difficulties were to be removed by the misery and degradation of his child.

In the mean time Mrs. Templeton's little plan had encountered no obstacles. Victor came, took the note, and the following reply quickly reached her: "Mr. Morton will be happy to see Mrs. Templeton at the hour indicated."

She therefore set out with Helen, and drove to the Hermitage; and bidding her return and call for her in an hour, she was conducted by Morton to what he smilingly called his state apartment—for though externally the Hermitage was much in the same state as when occupied by Johnson, it had undergone great changes and improvements within. The furniture was elegant, apparently a collection from distant countries, both curious and costly; but though at another time it would have attracted Mrs. Templeton's attention, from its novelty and rarity, at this moment she scarcely remarked any difference or felt any interest beyond satisfaction at the sight of Mr. Morton, on whose aid she so fully relied.

"I shall not waste time in conjecturing your surprise at my note or conduct," said she, directly they were both seated, "they are the result of my firm belief in your kindness and honor. I know, also, that you are much interested for many who are very dear to me, and in my sad and lonely need I come to you no less for their sake than my own"—she paused, as if making an effort, while Mr. Morton sat silent, but evincing by his look and attitude the most respectful sympathy—she then quickly resumed: "My daughter Helen, as you know, was engaged to Mr. West, the rest also you know; but though engagements may be broken off, love will not be bid hence; the memory of former associations can not depart at the first command. You will think there must be extraordinary circumstances when a mother speaks calmly, voluntarily, of her daughter still loving where there seems not the least hope of union. But Lord Hurstwood now seeks her in marriage, and Colonel Templeton has promised to further his suit."

"How! when so lately he consented to her marriage with another, and while she yet sorrows for his loss?" burst forth Mr. Morton indignantly.

"Wonder not, but listen to my plan, to my remedy, inspired only by despair, and to be used only in the last extremity. With my consent, Helen shall never be forced into so dreadful a fate—but my open opposition will avail nothing, perhaps would only provoke harsher measures—I do not even expect the mercy of delay. I have but one other step to take, before acting very decidedly—it is to appeal to Lord Hurstwood himself."

"Right," said Mr. Morton; "report, which describes him as a thorough man of the world, describes him also as a gentleman."

"Yes, to that character I make my appeal. I have already prepared a letter, and must be guided by the events of the next few days; should my

letter have no effect, and he still should persist, then, Mr. Morton, my hope is in you."

"And it shall not fail," he exclaimed with energy. "I solemnly promise to further your wishes, and aid you to the utmost: say on."

"Then," she said, and her lips were pale and trembling, while her voice shook with emotion, "Reginald West must come and fetch her away; yes, he must condescend to steal away my darling girl; and her unhappy mother must not only connive at, but arrange the elopement—think, think what it must be when this is the only alternative."

"Mrs. Templeton," cried Mr. Morton with vehemence, "I honor you—I place myself entirely at your command; you have but to say what you wish, and it shall be done."

"Then you do not condemn my scheme, you do not think me imprudent and rash to have imagined it—though if you did, I should still act, for I am resolved to save my child."

"Condemn! good heavens, condemn! when you are snatching your innocent child from a fate worse than death; marriage with one when the heart is devoted to another! the infamy of such proceedings, no matter by what sophistry they are made to appear sublime and heroic, fills me with disgust, and heart and soul shall I joyfully help you to save her. Of course, the first thing, when the crisis seems near, will be to summon Mr. West. Various circumstances prevent my offering to convey her to him; some day you shall know them."

"There is no one who can act for me but you and Reginald; the Vernons and my brother, to whom in this emergency I should, for the first time, have applied, are all far away."

"And Miss Templeton, herself," inquired he; "will her resistance be useless?"

"Alas! it would, even if I could depend on her maintaining it; but she is so gentle, so unused to contention, and from recent trials so unequal to it, that, if left to herself, her fate would be sealed; no—all was well examined before I became hopeless and desperate."

"I see, and you have no alternative but to adhere to your plan."

"I fear not; therefore directly you again hear from me, summon him; but let all be done with the utmost caution—one false move and all is lost;" and her voice sank to a whisper, as she added, "were my agency suspected, not only would my separation from my children be certain—very certain—but my liberty would be scarcely secure. Now, adieu, and accept my most grateful thanks."

When Helen returned, she was surprised to see the excited and troubled glance of Mr. Morton, as he bent his eyes with almost painful pertinacity on her face, while respectfully taking leave of her mother, whose thoughtful mood continued unbroken during their drive home.

"The villain! the cowardly villain!" said Mr. Morton, aloud, as he traversed his garden; "and those sweet creatures are his victims; but unless Providence sees it best to frustrate me, I will save this gentle girl.

Meanwhile, Constance, whose daily vision had been sadly interrupted during her indisposition, met Hubert to-day with such evident pleasure, though she soon relapsed into sadness, that had he not felt bound by his promise to his father, he must have declared his love during this interview. As it was, his manner was so tender, there could be no doubt of the nature of his feelings, as gently taking her hand, and bending his fine eyes on her distressed countenance, he said:

"Dear Constance, what is the matter?—no bad news of Reginald West, I trust?" and she, quite overtasked by her grief, and overcome by the sympathy in the look and tone, burst into tears, and could only reply by shaking her head.

"Nay—nay, tears! this is too sad, this must not be; confide in me as one—" he paused for a word, "as one who has known you from childhood—come, tell your old friend and true knight what it is?"

"Nothing from poor Reginald," she replied more calmly, soothed by the irresistible charm of his manner, "but dreadful news *for* him. Lord Hurstwood has proposed to Helen, and—but I do not know that I ought to tell this."

"Surely to me you may tell any thing—Helen has not accepted him?"

"Oh, no!" she cried, now roused to defend her sister from what she thought almost a reflection on her delicacy. "Oh, Hubert! how could you imagine such an indignity of Helen?"

"Merely to account for your grief, which seemed hardly justified by the simple fact of a proposal, that," he continued, smiling, "most young ladies would consider an honor, proceeding from one so distinguished."

"Ah! but you have not heard all—only think, Hubert, only think," she repeated, clasping her hands, "papa says it shall take place. Oh! I know it will kill Helen;" and again a violent flood of tears burst forth.

"This begins to be indeed serious, I fear," said young Forrester, gravely, for he, as well as all who knew Colonel Templeton, set him down as a domestic tyrant; "may no one interfere, Constance?"

"No one," she sadly answered, "even I lose courage and hope—but, of course, you will not mention this—though, soon perhaps—" she could not finish—the terrible idea of the whole county discussing Helen's prospects was too much.

"Certainly I shall not name it while you enjoin silence; but might not my father—" and then remembering his father's avowed dislike of the Colonel, he also stopped. "Where are Mrs. Templeton and Helen?"

"Out in the phaeton; mamma thought a drive would do them both good—and hark! I hear the ponies; mamma, I know, will like to see you, so wait for her; but Helen, I think will prefer being alone."

And she hastened to inform her mother of Hubert's visit, while he remained to ponder on the startling news she had just communicated, and the more he thought of all it involved, the more did he feel sure that while it would fill the hearts of Mrs. Templeton and Constance with sorrow, it would blight to the very root the happiness of Helen.

The next day passed with all that heavy dread which suspense ever brings; and yet not one word from Colonel Templeton by which his wife and daughters could guess his intentions.

"Had he relented?" asked Helen.

To which Mrs. Templeton replied by a mournful shake of her head—for she knew he had not—and the agony of doubt began to tell on Helen's looks, and in her languid movements, when Mrs. Templeton accidentally learned that Lord Hurstwood had left the Hall. After consulting her oracle, Constance, she decided on telling Helen of it; it was better that she should at once know this was was only a lull, in order that she might be prepared for the storm when it burst, for such her mother's experience convinced her would be the case.

And so the weary hours dragged their slow length along, till a few days before that on which Colonel Templeton expected his Lordship's return; when, as the sisters were in their pretty sitting-room, Constance reading to Helen, the latter, who was reclining on the sofa, started, and said:

"That is papa's step; oh! sister, he is coming here—do not leave me, I entreat you," and almost before she finished speaking, he entered; for the time had now come when his little drama was ready for performance: he had learned his part perfectly; the scenery was well painted, and he hoped the traps would be quite hidden, and work effectually.

"Helen," he said, almost kindly, "I want to speak with you—Constance, go to your mother;" and with a foreboding heart, Helen heard her close the door.

"You seem so averse to this proposal, and so insensible to the honor done you," he began, "that were I like some fathers, I might punish you by humoring your folly—but as I am not altogether disinterested in this case, I shall state my chief inducement for favoring Lord Hurstwood, and appeal to your better feelings and your sense of duty for withdrawing your refusal. You probably know, or at least have a right to expect, that at my death this handsome property will descend to you and Constance. Well, in order to render it as complete as any thing the county can boast of, and also to be remembered when I am no more, by the improvements I have effected for my heiresses, I have lately laid out very large sums of money in clearing and altering—some of this money I have borrowed, and, to be frank with you, I have anticipated my income, cramped myself for the benefit of my children, and am at this moment sorely pressed for payment—indeed, I shall be held disgraced if I do not fulfill my engagement, which I really can not, unless assisted. Lord Hurstwood is the only one who will come forward and advance to any amount, and save me from some measure of dishonor—but then you must consent to marry him—will you do this for your father, and spare your mother all the anxiety which must follow when she becomes aware of the truth?"

Ah, poor Helen! he has you in his toils, the well-oiled trap-door silently gapes for you—had the arch-liar been able or forced to speak the truth, he would have said, that the best thing for him would be, that his memory should die with himself—had he stated the result of his clearings, he would have named a handsome sum put into his hands, at the expense of hundreds of young trees, and to the injury of the estate for many years—money which was soon dissipated in gambling and its attendant vices. He, to affect to shrink from disgrace and dishonor! why, they were epithets affixed to his name by those who knew him, as familiar as household words.

"Speak, Helen, what will my daughter do?"

"Oh, papa," she replied, with tearless eyes, but in an agonized tone, "take my life freely, but do not sell me—ask any thing but this."

"Of course," he retorted, beginning to feel irritated that she did not at once comply; "your life is useless to me, so you offer it—there is but one request I make, therefore you promise all but that.

"Is there then no other way?" she asked, greatly terrified even at her own terror, and slightly moved.

"None—but I give you three days for reflection, and will do my best to hinder Lord Hurstwood from coming; in the mean time, and if you consent, I promise also to postpone the marriage as long as I can.

To Helen this concession seemed a boon beyond all expectation. "Papa," she said, "I am not very well nor very strong—perhaps I do not see my path quite clearly at present—but if my happiness would be the only sacrifice, I think I could freely make it for you—only—but my head swims," and she fainted.

He laid her on the sofa, and so death-like did she look in her young beauty, that for a moment his cruel resolve faltered; but muttering "She soon will recover," he entered Mrs. Templeton's room, and told her that Helen was not well; but when Constance attempted to follow her, he held her forcibly back, saying, while his brow was stern and lowering:

"Folly enough there already—you stay—and mark me, if I find you influence Helen against my firm determination, tremble at the consequences."

She looked at him till even his angry eyes fell; but she uttered not a word; and as he descended the grand staircase, he heard her voice asking at Helen's door, "How is she, dear mamma?" and then it closed, and when she and her mother, a few hours after, entered the dining-room, Helen slept.

"Ah, there is Mr. Victor come to luncheon; though I am always glad to see him, how I wish it had been Ashley or any of those dear Vernons," exclaimed Constance.

"I echo your wish most truly," replied her mother, who was, however, thankful to see a messenger from the Hermitage now a daily event: for Mrs. Templeton found her beautiful vision in Victor Morton, and this day she was especially glad to see him. She had learned all from Helen; and though she herself was convinced that what her husband had so plausibly represented was a cunningly devised fable, she was by no means sure she had proved this to Helen, who indeed seemed so completely subdued and wretched, that Mrs. Templeton was dreadfully alarmed both for her health and reason. She began to fear that, tried as the poor thing had been, she would become a passive victim to her father's wiles, and she resolved no longer to hesitate about attempting her plan—time was now precious, and Helen must not be lost through her vacillation.

Her letter to Lord Hurstwood, though sent more than a week ago, with orders to be forwarded, had received no reply—so from that quarter she had no hope of assistance. Had she known

that the worthy Cooper had played postman, she might still have paused. A personal appeal would have been hazarded, and all might have been changed—but now hours and minutes were flying by, while she was inactive; so she at once passed the Rubicon, by giving Victor a packet she had previously prepared, which contained the following lines to Mr. Morton and a letter to Reginald: "The die is cast—forward the inclosed express to Reginald—it is to summon him to us, and without delay, or all will be lost. Any suggestions your kindness and experience may offer, as to how he can come and where remain, act upon, and believe us all deeply your debtors."

To Reginald she wrote thus: "Read my letter to the end before you presume to judge me. Reginald! events have very recently occurred which have increased our difficulties and sorrow a hundred-fold. Unless you step in to save her, Helen is lost—lost to happiness as well as to you. You must not delay an hour after you read this, or she who loves you only will be given to another. Her miserable mother implores you to come—to come clandestinely, and take her away. Think how imminent must be her danger—how fearful her peril, when I—I, whose only pride was my children—whose only joy was their presence, entreat you not to desert us in this bitter extremity. And, oh, Reginald, my son, if I *am* wrong—but surely you can not think so—let not my error be visited on my guiltless, persecuted girl."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"And, by my word, the bonny bird
In danger shall not tarry." CAMPBELL.

MR. MORTON, leaving instructions with his servants, on whose discretion he could fully depend, started without delay for Reginald's abode carrying this precious document with him. He had pretty accurately guessed what would be required of him, and had prepared all accordingly. He had money, and he knew how to spend it, for others as well as himself; four horses met him at the various stages, and the same were ordered for his return—and thus, traveling all night, the better to conceal his movements, by six the next morning he reached the small cottage occupied by Reginald.

And now, as he drew near to the garden-gate, the horrible fear, suppose he should be away or ill, arose in his mind, which had previously been busy with many other thoughts. "Thank Heaven!" he cried aloud, as attracted by the unusual appearance of a carriage-and-four, Reginald, ever an early riser, and now busily engaged in preparing a paper for his publisher, looked over the blind. Seeing that the new arrival was Mr. Morton, his tried and valued friend, he hastened out, exclaiming, "In the name of all that is unexpected, tell me what brings you here, and in such post-haste style?"

"I came because my horses would come," was the cheerful reply, for he was anxious to state his real object without alarming Reginald, who still looked as if he had been an invalid; "but will your cottage afford a cup of coffee?"

"Come in at once and see," was his answer.

"First let me give my orders to the postillions," which were, to secure four fresh horses, and in ten minutes' time to have them ready for starting—he then followed Reginald; and as quickly as possible, Gretchen, who prided herself on the excellence of her coffee, had a comfortable meal prepared, and having supplied Mr. Morton's need, for he had taken scarcely any refreshment since he left home, Reginald proceeded to question his guest about Scabrooke, though the name perpetually hovering on his lips was left unpronounced.

"I heard from Mrs. Templeton yesterday," said Mr. Morton, taking the plunge.

"I hope she—that all of them are well"—and he stopped with a sigh.

"Yes, pretty well—Miss Constance has, I hear, been rather an invalid. Victor is almost a daily guest there, or at Forest Hill, and brings news of the whole parish. The truth is, I have a little commission from Mrs. Templeton, but without your help, I shall not be able to succeed."

"In all things command me freely—what can I do?" he asked, with a quivering lip and beating heart.

"It is to accompany me back to the Hermitage, and"—but Reginald impetuously interrupted him, exclaiming—

"There is something the matter with Helen—tell me—tell me—but, for mercy's sake! do not say she is ill."

"She is not," replied Mr. Morton with emphasis; "but she is ill at ease—there is talk of a marriage—stop," he added gravely, indeed sternly, for Reginald's looks became wild, as he made a passionate movement—"stop, Mr. West, listen to me, and do not by any mistimed vehemence frustrate what her friends have arranged—you are summoned by her mother to save her—to carry her away—to marry her—do you now understand? but you do not"—for he perceived that Reginald by no means comprehended the extremity of the case—he, therefore, proceeded more plainly—"unless you can resolve to do this, she will be given to Lord Hurstwood, without delay or pity—do you refuse?"

"Refuse! Great God, no—refuse!" and he started up, "why do we lose a moment?—sweet, dear Helen—refuse to take you to my heart as my cherished wife! thus called for, I would hasten from the other side of the globe—what may be going on even now—why delay when time is so precious?"

"It is precious, but we have enough for our purpose—and since my arrival, another idea has presented itself. Your good landlady is, I know, the attached nurse of this poor young lady; now the step we are deliberately about to take, requires very strong reasons to render it justifiable, and any thing we can do to lessen its impropriety, ought not to be neglected. She must, therefore, accompany us, and return with you and this sweet girl—for your marriage must be delayed till the requisite measures have been taken—is that a good amendment?"

"Good!" said Reginald, wringing his hand, "it does you honor; and I know she will go if possible—so that must be ascertained directly."

But Mr. Morton, seeing that he scarcely knew what he did or said, advised him to pack a few

needful things, while he consulted Madame Stöpsell, whose husband willingly yielded his consent, she was ready for her short absence almost as soon as Reginald. Stöpsel was told to have all ready for Helen, as Gretchen would not suppose failure, and he was also to inform Mr. Vernon of what had occurred; and again they sped back, reaching a small village, a few miles from Seabrooke, toward the dusk of the evening, when Reginald took care not to be recognized, and reached the Hermitage quietly and unnoticed in Mr. Morton's carriage, which was awaiting them.

Vain would be the attempt to describe Reginald's horror, indignation, and grief on learning the mere outlines of this attempt on Helen's happiness—the particulars of which Mr. Morton did not know. Till he found himself thus suddenly threatened with her loss, he had not been conscious that hope still lingered in his heart—had not been aware that this had insensibly given him courage and patience; he now felt, that were any fatal event to deprive him of her—life would lose all its attractions, and that he would thankfully close his eyes on it, and die.

Again and again did he peruse Mrs Templeton's letter of entreaty; and again and again did he to himself, and aloud, promise that she should never, never repent of her confidence in him.

"Can nothing be done immediately?" he inquired, as soon as they reached the Hermitage.

"Nothing," replied his host; "very early tomorrow, Victor will see Mrs Templeton; he will probably breakfast there, for he is of necessity partly in our confidence, but he has been well trained to discretion, so fear not him. Let us act in all things rationally, so as to diminish the chances of failure. We now need refreshment and rest; we must take both. To-morrow night will decide all—and, like wise generals, we must be cool and on the alert, to meet and defeat whatever may impede us. Miss Templeton will, of course, remain with her nurse till you are married—you must go elsewhere."

"I ought to be transported with joy at this most unexpected fulfillment of my dearest wish; and yet there are two causes which oppress me to agony," said Reginald, and he looked melancholy and dispirited. "First, this sweet, injured innocent is driven to take a step by both of us equally condemned, alike opposed to our feelings of propriety. And then, when this precious gift is mine—mine to love and cherish, and retain while life lasts—think you, Mr. Morton, I am not painfully reminded that she gives herself to a beggar—to one who is himself living on the generosity of others? To work for her, Heaven knows! would be one continual pleasure, could I do so with success—but—" He stopped and hid his face in his hands.

"When you have real troubles to contend with, Mr. West, and especially when you need all your presence of mind and resolution to rescue her you love from misery, it seems scarcely wise to conjure up ideal trials, or by dwelling on them to incapacitate yourself for unusual exertion. Permit me to conclude," said Mr. Morton, seriously, as Reginald attempted to speak, "you love this young lady?"

"More than life, more than life," murmured the poor fellow; disregarding the interruption, his friend continued—

"She loves you—a frightful danger menaces her. You alone can save her. Not only that, you alone can make her happy. Young gentleman, this, then, is not the time to listen to the suggestions of a foolish pride. You are now called upon to stifle every selfish consideration, and cast aside all these artificial impediments. In short, my dear friend," said he, kindly, and approaching Reginald, "you are to take this book, and use the contents whenever they are wanted to add to her comfort."

Reginald was completely overcome with this delicacy and kindness; he tried to speak, but could not, and repeatedly pressed the generous hands that came thus loaded.

"Come, come," said Mr. Morton, himself much affected, but assuming a cheerful manner—"old as I am, I would give a thousand pounds readily, eagerly, to save her loving heart from the least pang—but you have the privilege of protecting her from all. And now we understand each other, so good-night."

Whether Mr. Morton slept well, we pause not to ask—certainly Reginald did not.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"She is won! we are gone, over bank, bush, and scaur."
SCOTT.

VICTOR breakfasted at the Priory, not a little wondering at the brisk correspondence which had suddenly sprung up between the lady there and his father. For, though he knew that it was caused by some fresh trial to Helen, in which Mr. West was deeply concerned, he little suspected what the *dénouement* was likely to be.

The note he brought from Mrs. Templeton was to this effect: The Colonel was going to the Hall, to fix the next day for Lord Hurstwood's visit, and *Helen's acceptance* of him would follow, but he would return to dinner. Mrs. Templeton would have an interview with Reginald, before twelve, at the Hermitage.

The intervening time was passed by the two gentlemen in settling their plan of operation, which would be submitted to Mrs. Templeton, for the underlined words in her note proved that she expected no respite or change.

Punctual to the time, she arrived, and terrible was her emotion on first seeing Reginald. But she soon became composed, at least in appearance, and requested that Mr. Morton would favor them with his presence; for, deeply interested as his friendship had made him in this transaction, his experience and calmness would materially aid in avoiding all danger of disappointment.

Their plan was this: Mr. Morton and Gretchen were to remain at the gate leading to the private garden. She knew both the spot, and the trick of opening the spring, should that be found shut. Reginald was to enter by the upper conservatory at eleven, and there take Helen from her mother's hands. "And, oh! Reginald," said that sad but

tearless mother, "cherish my child—never by look or thought reproach her for this act, of which she yet knows nothing; but remember the alternative, and thank God for permitting these means of rescue! Promise me this, and I shall trust you."

"I swear by all man holds sacred, that I will be her loving, gentle husband to the end of our days!" and a sensation of joy filled his heart, and shone out in his pale face, as he thought that the being he loved so devotedly, and, till lately, so hopelessly, would be his own.

Quite satisfied now that the matter had proceeded thus far without obstacle, that she had remained firm to her purpose, and most grateful for the delicate thought and feeling that had secured the motherly attendance of her faithful Gretchen, with whom she held a short conference, Mrs. Templeton, in comparative peace, returned to the Priory.

"And now for Helen," thought the anxious mother, so completely roused by the danger of her darling, that she seemed scarcely to fear even her husband. She cared for nothing but the safety of Helen; and to secure that, was prepared to brave every thing. All else was, for the moment, indifferent to her: and gratified with her success hitherto, she, with almost cheerful looks, joined her daughters at luncheon.

Constance was surprised at her mother's manner, for knowing the cause of her father's absence, she was half wild with apprehension, as to the effect the proceedings of the next day would have on Helen's destiny.

As to poor Helen herself, she seemed to have sunk into an apathy that was more alarming to her sister than the most violent demonstrations of grief; from the vehemence of the latter some resistance might be expected—but what hope was there, when she seemed unable to offer any opposition?

Oh! how long did the day seem to Mrs. Templeton! how impatiently did she sigh for the hour which should remove one of her idols from all danger of injury.

At length came dinner-time; at first, the meal seemed to pass as usual. Constance had lost all that sparkling vivacity which brought sunshine among them—and all were now silent and gloomy. Mrs. Templeton sat lost in her own thoughts and anxieties; Helen, as if unconscious of every thing—even the servants, who were partly cognizant of what was pending, moved about with more of the solemnity of waiters at a funeral, than with that brisk and smiling alacrity which generally characterized them.

Under all these circumstances, it was perhaps to be expected that Colonel Templeton, when alone with them, should draw their attention to the present time, and to their actual position, which he did by remarking with a sneer,

"We are a most lively set, quite an agreeable family party. I only hope Lord Hurstwood may not find our spirits too overpowering when he lunches here to-morrow."

Helen mournfully turned her face toward him, and sighed deeply, but did not speak. Constance felt the color mount to her brow, and courageously said,

"I hope, papa—"

But what she hoped, none ever knew, as he rudely interrupted her by saying—

"I have neither the inclination to listen to disobedient speeches, nor to have my will disputed by my ill-directed daughters; this evening I shall hold some conversation with you," looking at Helen, who, however, now gave no signs of attention.

"Not this evening, I entreat of you, Lionel," petitioned Mrs. Templeton; for her heart seemed to die within her, as she glanced from the statue-like countenance of Helen, to the angry one of her husband, and thence to the decanters by which he was surrounded.

"Well, to-morrow, then, and directly after breakfast; I have a little information to give her regarding Lord Hurstwood's munificent intentions and plans, which will tell greatly in his favor."

Since the conversation he had held with her, when he made up a sentimental fable, artfully appealing to her feelings, he had carefully avoided the subject. His policy was, to take her silence as consent, and to hurry her into a promise just before his Lordship's arrival, so as to leave her no alternative but to ratify it, in the presence of the latter; to-morrow would, therefore, suit him better.

Constance fondly put her arm round her sister, and Mrs. Templeton rising without making any comment on her husband's speech, they all left the room; the Colonel soothing his irritation, as well as he could, with his wine, which daily seemed to become his most favorite solace.

"We are all looking weary," remarked Mrs. Templeton, as she dismissed the tea-equipage; her pulses telling her that *the* hour—the important hour—was fast approaching. "I have lately had wretched nights, and so has poor Helen; we shall be obliged, I fear, to leave you very early to your own resources, Constance—and do not let Ruth disturb your sister; when you dismiss her, let her go to bed."

Helen languidly rose to bid them good night, and left the room. They exchanged looks, and were silent for a few moments, when Constance said—

"Is she to be lost without one more effort?"

"No, dear child, while there is the least chance, we will not relinquish the task, we must both make one more trial in her behalf; but it is cruel as well as useless, under the idea of sympathy, for us to harass her to-night; so kiss me, darling, and early as it is, take my blessing and wishes that you may find rest."

"You must let me be your physician for once, dear mamma, and I shall take upon me to prescribe one of Mr. Curtis's infallible draughts—you may safely take it, as I know of what it is composed. I think it will send you to sleep—to-morrow," she said with a shudder, "we shall need all our strength, both of mind and body."

Constance had a little plan of her own, which this early separation greatly facilitated. She had resolved to write to her father, since he would not permit her to speak; and she meant so to plead for poor Helen, that he must relent—she intended so to entreat, that he could not refuse; and encouraging herself to hope all from her affectionate eloquence, she the more readily

allowed Helen to retire without trying to comfort her.

Mrs. Templeton, who generally dispensed with personal service, and rang whenever she required it, entered her boudoir and locked the door, to feel safe from all intrusion; she thence passed to the conservatory, and opened the one already described as leading to Helen's present sleeping apartment.

It seemed to her, as if every thing she heard and saw tended to deepen her resolve, and give her strength to carry it out; and when she looked at Helen, what a sight for a loving mother met her anxious eyes! She sat on a low chair, leaning her head on the back, her arms hanging by her side—her eyes were open, but she appeared unconscious of every thing; even her mother's entrance, by the concealed opening, failed to rouse her.

Mrs. Templeton approached, and gently laid her hand on her head; a slight shudder alone gave indication of sensibility.

"Helen, Helen!" cried her mother, really terrified—still Helen took no notice.

"Merciful Heaven! what new trial awaits me," she ejaculated, kneeling by her daughter, chafing and caressing her cold hands.

"Mother, grieve not," slowly broke from her pale lips, but the voice sounded strange and hollow—"it is good to die."

"Talk not thus, my darling," cried her mother, laying her head on her bosom, and removing the glossy hair which hung heavy on her brow—then, believing that she required some powerful stimulus to enable her to shake off this frightful apathy, she added, with a deliberate purpose very abruptly—"I bring hope, my child—do you hear me?—I bring hope and rescue"

"Rescue!" she said, now slightly moved; "rescue, and hope?" she repeated.

"Yes, both, if you will but rouse yourself to assist me"

"I can do any thing to escape this fate," she replied, quite able to listen, and with a look of intelligence in her eyes; "but how can so great a blessing be gained?"

"With Reginald's help," said her mother slowly, "all could be gained."

She started—she almost screamed.

"Hush!" whispered Mrs. Templeton, having now to lay the spirit she had evoked; "yes, Reginald—he is at hand—will soon be here to save you, to take you away; rouse yourself thoroughly, and listen to me, and try to understand me." As she said these words, oh, blessed sight! Helen burst into tears and wept abundantly, nor did her mother try to check her; but when her sobs became fainter she proceeded to say, as calmly as she could, "You have known enough of me to be sure that I should never even countenance, much less assist in or advise any thing that would reflect on my children's reputation." Helen was silent, but evidently attending to every word; and thus encouraged, her mother went on. "Our duties sometimes seem to clash. I say seem, for I much doubt whether they ever do; it may be that some feeling, half revealed, or only half understood, inclines us to one or the other; or because we really and honestly do not comprehend all the word duty involves. Now I firmly believe it to be my *duty* to save you from this contemplated marriage."

"Dearest, best mamma," murmured Helen, kissing her. And seeing the success of her rather lengthy exordium, on which she had purposely dwelt, in order to fix Helen's thoughts, she proceeded more rapidly: "In short, I never will consent to it. While you were left unmolested, I never should have thought of such an opposition to your father's will as to have sanctioned your marriage with Reginald, much as I love and respect him; but now I command it. And—hush! do not speak—and this night, in company with our faithful Gretchen, he will take you away, and, directly the law permits, marry you, which, however, can not be before the expiration of three weeks."

Breathless with astonishment at all she heard—almost giddy from the rapidity with which she had been raised from the depths of despair and been told to hope, Helen gazed at her mother for a minute before she could find words; and then, while her face, lately so ghastly pale, became crimson from some hidden thought, she said—

"Elope! oh! mother, must I encounter that disgrace?"

"Yes, elope, or what word you please, Helen; either submit to that, or consent to marry Lord Hurstwood."

"And Reginald, oh! what will he think of me?" and again she wept.

"He will think that you are an ill-used, helpless girl, whom he is bound, by any method that is not disgraceful, to serve—and this is the only one—he will also think that your sorrows and misfortunes bind him, by every motive, to protect, love, and honor you. Yes, Helen, honor you; for where is her purity who gives her hand where her heart can not accompany it? where her truth who swears to love, when she has already none to give?"

"Dear mamma!" said Helen—and again a faint tinge colored her cheeks—"then you give me to Reginald, freely, cheerfully."

"Yes; freely, cheerfully, gratefully. And now, lose no time! look out your darkest wrapper; give me a few things you will immediately require; for," looking at her watch, "the time draws near."

Helen trembled so violently that her mother was forced to do every thing for her; she herself was firm and self-possessed. But even while fearing lest Helen's nerves and courage should fail them at the extremity, she remarked a light in the eyes, and a movement about the countenance, which showed that the name of Reginald had not lost its talismanic influence.

When all was ready she took her mother's hand, and, kneeling kissed it reverently, saying, "Bless you, mother, for all you have done for me. And, oh! God grant that this last crowning act may not involve you in greater sorrow! if I thought it, I have courage to face every thing."

"Fear not for me," replied Mrs. Templeton; "I am sure that in acting thus I do my duty; but now, wait here courageously alone, one minute," as she heard several clocks tell the hour; and, going into the conservatory, she opened the garden entrance just in time to admit Reginald.

He was very pale, but he looked resolved and stern.

"Where is she?" he whispered.

"Here," was the hushed reply, for Helen had glided out from her room the moment she heard his step.

He lifted his hat for a moment, and the shaded light fell full on his pale face and glittering eyes. Helen also mechanically raised her vail—and once more they looked in each other's faces—both so young, so beautiful! both so worn, so sad!

"Helen!"

"Reginald."

"Dear Helen!" opening his arms, and she fell on his bosom. He pressed her convulsively to his heart, and looking at her said, in a low but solemn voice, "mine!" then, again raising his hat, he added, with deep reverence, "mine, whom I swear to protect and cherish; and, as I deal by you, so may God deal with me!"

"Amen!" said Mrs. Templeton, deeply touched. "Kneel, my children, and may the blessing from on high be with you now and forever. Reginald, I trust you with something more precious than life, but I have neither doubt nor fear. Take this," giving him a small packet; "consult with Mr. Morton about the contents. Now, kiss me, my son—kiss me, my daughter, and, farewell!" She also gave him the small bag she had filled Helen's wardrobe, watched them till they were lost in the gloom and windings of the shrubbery, and locked the door.

Then, and not till then, did a reaction take place. She had strength to place her lamp safely on the table, and then she must have fainted; for when she recovered it was nearly one o'clock.

She bathed her face and hands in cold water, and approaching her dressing-table to prepare for bed, saw a vial and slip of paper; on the latter was written: "This is one of the draughts Mr. Curtis sent me—it will be of use, dearest mother, and send you to sleep—take it, and good-night. C. F. T." And, after Mrs. Templeton had undressed, she swallowed the draught, simply because she had not the power to reflect, or the strength to dispute even a written order; and soon after, over-tasked and exhausted nature sank into a repose which lasted for many hours.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Prythee, speak;
How many score of miles may we well ride
'Twixt hour and hour?" *Cymbeline.*

Mr. Stöpsel, though requested to communicate with Mr. Vernon, when he went to business, with true German indifference to such orders, interpreted the command in his own way.

He first visited his shop, to see that all there was right; and finding that he must go into the city, determined to call in the Temple as he returned. But it was nearly one o'clock when he had executed his errand; and during the whole of the morning Ashley had been expecting to see his friend.

As hour after hour passed, and he did not appear, Ashley became rather uneasy, for Reginald was always so punctual, that he feared he was ill, his health being still occasionally delicate.

Twelve boomed out St. Paul's; twelve was echoed by the giants of St. Dunstan's, and repeated soprano, contralto, and basso from the numerous clocks all around—half past—still no Reginald, still no note or messenger

Ashley could wait no longer—but leaving a message, in case they should pass each other on the road, he set off to see after him. Arrived at the cottage, he was much relieved to hear that Mr West was well, but out. In reply to his further questions, Mr. West, the servant said, with a slight increase of dignity in the flutter of her cap-ribbons, had that very morning, before seven o'clock, gone off with four horses!

"Four horses?"

"Yes, sir, four—and my missus."

"Speak plainly," said Ashley, rather angrily.

But the ribbons this time waved, indeed, it may more properly be said, tossed with insulted majesty.

"Well, sir, I can not speak more plainer—four horses, my missus, and a strange gentleman."

Hopeless of extracting information, he next asked, but more gently—"And left no message for me?"

"Not as I know of, sir."

"Nor said when he should return?"

"No, sir—but missus did—his room is to be clean turned out, and got ready for a lady, and they are to bring her to-night."

"Well," said Ashley, half aloud, "then patience and wait." And his handsome face resumed its usual expression of serenity, so that the offended ribbons no more vibrated with anger; and the wearer told her confidant, the young lady who did the work next door—in genteel parlance, the general servant—that, "not 'aving an 'art as 'ard as hiern, them fine eyes of his'n made sad avick of it."

While Ashley was thus philosophically summoning patience, and resigning himself to ignorance and his fate Madame Stöpsel's German servant made her appearance, and from her he received a confirmation of all the other had said, with the important additions that her master had a message for him, and that the stranger had left a card.

Silently denouncing the stupidity which ribbons, and cap too, covered up, Ashley rushed into the sitting-room, and seized Mr. Morton's card, on which he had written in French: "Expect them to-morrow morning—Miss Templeton returns with them—a letter will tell you more."

"Helen here! Good heavens! what can it mean? A letter—ah! that will explain, and it probably now lies on my table"—for Mr Morton, who had not forgotten any thing, had, even while traveling, scrawled a few lines of explanation to Ashley, which he posted at the nearest place he passed.

Jumping into the cab, Ashley was whirled back to town, and had the mortification of hear-

ing that Mr. Stöpsel had called during his absence; but there lay the precious letter which was to unravel the mystery; for though of necessity short, Mr. Morton gave him all the information that was most important. A note, with little more than a few incoherent words from Reginald lay by its side, adding little to his knowledge, but a great deal to his amazement.

As he read, Ashley became almost dizzy with wonder. Helen flying from her father's house, and at her mother's command, and with Reginald! was a picture he could hardly believe real—but real it most assuredly was.

And now what could he do to help them? for as to attending to business, that was impossible—no, he would dedicate himself and his time to their service—and how could he best show his zeal?

First, he would endeavor to see Mr. Stöpsel, and learn, if possible, something more precise. So, fairly yielding to his impulse, off he set once more, to do, he knew not exactly what, except that he was resolved to be at Hampstead to meet the travelers on their arrival.

He then remembered that Reginald must give up his lodgings to Helen, and, of course, remain his guest; so back he went to settle for his accommodation, and once more *en route* for Stöpsel. From him he learned little that he particularly cared for, beyond the information contained in Mr. Morton's letter, except that Gretchen had left strict injunctions for every thing to be done and arranged, that could tend to make her dear young lady comfortable.

"Is there any thing wanting?" asked Ashley, visions of furniture and upholstery floating before his "mind's eye"—but Stöpsel assured him that every thing was already very good and complete, and that he could not imagine any addition needful.

But, delighted with this thought, which promised him occupation for the remainder of the day, Ashley for the second time started for the Cottage, and was charmed to find various deficiencies which he should be so happy to supply; therefore, a luxurious lounging chair for the sitting-room, with a pretty work-table, and some elegant chimney ornaments, being all he could detect as wanting, or indeed find room for there, he began his voyage of discovery in the bedroom. It looked very cheerful and very pretty—capital for a young bachelor; but where were all the appliances and comforts which its future fair occupant had been used to? and how could he tell what these ought to be? Decidedly, however, he could improve the appearance of the toilette-table—and so he did, with several costly trifles, which the man who supplied the other articles was so obliging as to suggest; and when this was done, vexed that there were no further improvements to make—like Alexander, when he wept that there were no more worlds to conquer—Ashley sighed to think how he should now pass the time, before he could expect his truant friend.

To the sitting-room he again descended; and

> "Satan finds some mischief still
> For idle hands to do."

he began to arrange Reginald's writing-table, when an unfinished sentence, partly illegible, owing to a large blot, which had fallen from a pen hastily thrown down, arrested his attention. He guessed directly how it was; Reginald must have been writing when interrupted by Mr. Morton's arrival—and he was right—it was part of a review which he was preparing for a forthcoming number, and which, in the hurry of his departure, he had left exactly as when he hastened out to welcome his friend.

"This sheet is precious," said he, indulging in a little bit of sentiment—and he was in the act of withdrawing it, when she of the ribbons entered—"Lawk, sir! pray, pray don't touch that—none of us, not even missus, dares to meddle with Mr. West's table."

Respecting her scruples, he laid it down; determined, however, no printer's devil should ever defile it with black hands, and already fancying he saw it framed and preserved by Helen, as a family relic, connected with the great romantic incident of her life and Reginald's.

Still there were many wearisome hours to pass. "Oh! he would have dinner, he really needed refreshment"—and Mr. Stöpsel returning from his daily duties, Ashley was enabled to have a chop and a glass of wine.

He was ignorant of the time when Reginald would start from Seabrooke, even if all went right, and now a doubt of that came to his rescue; yes, it really was a relief to be uneasy—hitherto he had imagined success certain, and that idea had become familiar and monotonous—this less comfortable supposition excited and roused him.

The philosophical landlord advised him to go to bed and permit himself some repose—he himself intended to follow his own advice—and Mr. Vernon could be called at four—three—any hour he liked; the stranger gentleman did not arrive till six the previous morning.

No, he thanked him—he would be found expecting them with his eyes open—the consequence of which was, that, spite of strong resolution and still stronger coffee, aided by a volume of German diablerie,—the lounging chair, consecrated to Helen's use, spread its arms and tempted him, about four o'clock, to sit down for a wink—merely a wink; and at eight, when they arrived, he was sound asleep, and only awoke to be aware of the bustle made in receiving them.

He sprang up, and was out in the garden in a moment—yes, there they are—there is Helen; Heavens, how changed! there is Reginald, pale, but beaming and cheerful; and there is Gretchen, like every German woman, cramming "Ja, ja," with all sorts of intonations, into her conversation with her husband; her kind, round face looking as if she had just risen, or, more properly, just awoke—which was nearly the truth, for she had slept soundly for many hours.

So wholly unexpected, so very wonderful and sudden, had been the change in Helen's destiny, that it was not surprising if she failed to realize it immediately. She felt like one in a dream; nor was it till she beheld Reginald, and heard his voice, that she was quite convinced that what had passed between her and her mother was a certainty. Perhaps, indeed, she scarcely comprehended the whole truth, till she found herself

alone with him, the cool night air blowing fresh and reviving on her feverish cheeks, and gently rustling among the trees in the shrubbery.

With every sense sharpened by terror, she heard the key turn in the door of the conservatory, though they were several paces from it; and the thought then arose, that it was, perhaps, the signal of perpetual exile from her home—from her mother—from her sister; and she half turned round, as if to retrace her steps—when memory whispered "to-morrow!" and the thought of what then awaited her made her no longer hesitate. Trembling, so as to be scarcely able to stand, she tottered, rather than walked, spite of the encircling and sustaining arm of Reginald, who did not venture to address to her one word of encouragement, even in a whisper, so greatly did he dread lest any imprudence should deprive him of his recently recovered treasure.

"All safe," was softly uttered by each party as they met; and then, as quickly as they could, they made for the Hermitage, to which they were obliged to walk; and though, under ordinary circumstances, the distance would not be thought great, all felt they had never before found it so far. On their arrival, the black servant alone awaited them; for Mr. Morton never needlessly extended his confidence; if people found out any thing, he could not hinder it; but he did not help them to the discovery. Refreshments were spread, and some were also ready packed. The carriage and horses they would find at the village already named, where a person, greatly bound to Mr. Morton, settled this part of the business; a heavy bribe, and one still heavier, being promised, if all went right, secured silence and punctuality.

"I shall drive you," said Mr. Morton, who had entered with extraordinary zeal and kindness into the matter, "and see you safely on the road to London. Have the banns published directly," he whispered to Reginald, "and send copies to that anxious mother the instant the ceremony is performed;—use the contents of the pocket-book, and another, also freely. And now, dear Miss Templeton, we may not linger."

Helen silently entered the carriage; her companions followed, and they speedily reached the spot where the post-carriage waited.

"Let me have early and constant tidings; God bless you, Miss Templeton; and you, too, my brave boy. Take care of that," directing Gretchen's attention to the basket; "you must not stop for refreshments, so it will be very useful."

They step from one conveyance to the other, the door closes, and they are off, as fast as their fresh and impatient steeds can go.

All was so well planned, and all so well succeeded, that they met with not the least delay. Helen wept incessantly and silently for some time; she then nestled closer to Reginald, and slept heavily and motionless till nearly four; and when she awoke, she felt refreshed, and free from headache. Reginald fondly kissed her brow, and on her inquiring if he had not also slept, he smiled, and protested that he was ashamed to say he feared he had. She then entreated him to try and obtain more rest, while she kept watch—but this was impossible; so they agreed to talk, but gently, so as not to awaken Gretchen; for those who had just met after having been, as they thought, parted forever, were not likely to be at a loss for subjects of deep and engrossing interest. Thus passed the remaining hours, till, as has been related, they arrived at the cottage, when they were met by Ashley, who was thoroughly awake in a moment. He rushed forward, and met Reginald with Helen hanging on his arm, to whom he was saying, "Welcome, dear one, to our home;" and shaking him warmly by the hand, and drawing Helen's disengaged arm through his, he said:

"Welcome! welcome! both of you—all of you—how glad I am you have come—what an age it seems since I have been expecting you—every thing is ready for Helen. I propose that Madame Stopsel at once see her safe in her room—we will then have breakfast, for which all is prepared—and by that time we shall be quieted down, and fit for business—Mr. Stopsel's room is at your service, Reginald, for the present; but I have arranged all for you, with me, in town."

Glad enough was Helen to lay her weary limbs on the comfortable bed, and after she had taken some breakfast, she slept—this time, the sweet, blessed sleep that refreshes both mind and body; and when, toward noon, she awoke, it was with a feeling of security from trial and sorrow, such as she had long been deprived of.

At length Madame Stopsel entered to assist her to dress, and Helen was quite astonished at the glow of pleasure with which she heard that the gentlemen would both return to dinner by five o'clock—she, who had lately been so very miserable as to have thought future happiness impossible; and though she sighed when she reflected on her very peculiar position, and could scarcely keep back her tears, when she remembered the recent scene of her parting with her mother, all, all seemed endurable, except the fate from which she had fled.

"Ah! Miss Helen," said Gretchen, as she was looking for some toilet adjunct which all Ashley's care and ingenuity had failed to supply, "you will miss all your grand things here, though how Mr. Vernon remembered half he has, surprises me. He has been up here, they tell me, routing about, and settling the things as well as he could, and very well that is—look at those beautiful bottles, and those candlesticks—a noble creature he is, and always was."

"Dear Gretchen," replied Helen, kissing her on both her plump cheeks, a mode of salutation Gretchen particularly affected, "what signify grandeur and pomp where there is not peace? Were it not for the absence of my dearest mother and sister, much less than I find here would suffice for *my* happiness—so never again allude to such trifles."

While Helen had slept, Reginald gave his friend an account of all that had lately happened at the Priory, for Helen had furnished him with the details.

"Think what a villain he must be," said Ashley, vehemently; "for though he is to be your father-in-law—I must say it—to act so as to compel such a woman as his wife to decide on this measure—"

"But, surely," rejoined Reginald, jealous at

this implied censure on his two idols, "you do not blame it?"

"Blame it, my dear fellow! that would be an unmanly thing; I only meant to say that he must have tyrannized and persecuted to the utmost, or she would never have done what I have repeatedly heard her censure, unless there were some such desperate causes as those which drove her on. My firm belief is, that any mother is justified in saving her daughter from the degradation that menaced Helen; while no girl of delicacy could ever consent to it, if she properly understood what real delicacy means. Unfortunately, the disgrace and dishonor are so jumbled up with sentimental nonsense, of sacrifice, and heroism, and all that jargon, that no wonder many a miserable girl is bewildered. Reginald, duties are never antagonistic—it is impious to think so," concluded Ashley, echoing almost the words of Mrs. Templeton to Helen.

"Why, Ashley, you are warm on the subject; one would think you held a brief for some of these gentle victims."

"Am I?" he asked smiling: "but now about your marriage—before we go to town we must have that settled. Here, I trust, your sweet bride is safe—no chance, I should think, of tracing her."

Reginald looked disturbed. "God forbid!—still I shall be anxious and wretched till we are secure from molestation and danger—and though you wish me to share your lodgings, I think I must settle near here, where I am sure to be perpetually hovering."

"How do you communicate with Mrs. Templeton?"

"I have arranged nothing—time was wanting—at present, through Mr. Morton—and I shall avail myself of this channel immediately—and look here, Ashley, what he insisted on my borrowing—using, was his generous word." But, suddenly remembering the packet Mrs. Templeton had given him, when they parted, and which he may be pardoned for having forgotten till now; "let us see what this is, and about which I ought to have consulted Mr. Morton."

It was opened, and contained several papers; the first had the address of a solicitor, well known to Ashley as a most respectable man; to whom Reginald was referred for any information he might require beyond that Mrs. Templeton gave. She told him of the manner in which five thousand pounds had been settled; that, as interest had accumulated, it also, from time to time, had been invested—so that, except several hundreds which she had received on various occasions, when she had not thought it right to apply other money to her purposes—it had remained untouched—the interest of the original sum she now wished to *secure* to him and Helen—the accumulated interest to be still at her command. How business-like, how cautious she had grown, since the luckless day when she had given herself to Lionel Templeton, and cast her splendid fortune at his feet!

"And so, after all, you have run away with an heiress, you lucky fellow," cried Ashley, gayly; "but you look as if you hardly knew how to welcome this unexpected wealth."

"You are right. I had intended using Mr. Morton's offer only in case of need, and had been pleasing myself with the idea of working for Helen—of letting no one share this precious privilege."

"And so now, because she will have many comforts, without the pain of seeing you worn to a thread in procuring them, you are discontented. Upon my word, you romantic fellows are hard to please."

Reginald smiled at Ashley's Mentor-like lecture, but owned that he deserved it; and, leaving strict injunctions with Gretchen, which she was sure to observe, to let no one enter the house who was not well known to her, they proceeded to arrange about the marriage, Ashley slily remarking, that Miss Lydia Languish would pronounce this "no elopement after all," it was so business-like and methodical; and then, with a look of irresistible humor in his handsome eyes, he reminded Reginald of the basket of provisions they had, by Mr. Morton's orders, snugly stowed in the carriage, and their three formal and tidy little carpet-bags, which followed them as they descended, so thoughtful and cosy, till, struck with the anti-pathos which had mingled with their romance, almost to the utter destruction of the latter, they both laughed heartily:—"From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"But who the chieftain's rage can tell,
When, sought from lowest dungeon's cell,
To highest tower the castle round,
No Lady Edith there was found?"
Lord of the Isles.

While Mrs. Templeton and Helen were having the agitating conversation already related, Constance sat down to compose her letter of letters, which was to be so irresistible. But before she commenced her task, she quitted her room to take the medicine to her mother, and not finding her, she left it, with the few lines found by it.

Her letter was at length finished, and almost to her satisfaction. This done, she went to bed; and while Helen, with faltering steps, was quitting her home, Constance slept.

The next morning when she tapped at Helen's door and received no answer, hoping her sister was asleep, she descended to the breakfast-room. The letter was in her bosom, ready to be given to her father, when she judged the favorable moment had arrived. He was much later than usual; and, glancing, as he entered, at the vacant place, remarked, "Alone?"

"Yes," she replied; "Helen is asleep, I did not open her door to disturb her; and as I played physician to mamma last night, I was not likely to rouse her, and destroy the effects of my prescription. And papa," she continued, in a changed and faltering voice, "as this is the last appeal I shall ever make in behalf of Helen, I have written it—my courage fails when I attempt to speak, and I thought, perhaps, you would not reject it on one perusal only."

She took it from the folds of her dress, and placed it by him; as she did so, the mournful expression of her naturally bright and beaming

young face struck him—its sad beauty smote on his heart—for he felt he had brought the cloud which shadowed its radiance. He, however, read the letter, but without any visible emotion, and quietly placing it in his breast-pocket, continued his breakfast in silence.

Constance felt sick and faint, as she beheld her last hope so remorselessly destroyed, when suddenly voices were heard in the hall, and the door was hastily opened by Mrs Dawson, closely followed by Ruth—both looking pale and frightened. The Colonel glanced up astonished; but before he could speak, Dawson, in a trembling voice, said, "Ruth has just informed me, sir, that Miss Templeton is not in her room, nor has she even slept there!"

Constance clasped her hands, and wildly shrieking, "The pond! the waterfall!" was darting from the room, when her father forcibly restrained her,

"Stay!" he shouted, in a voice of thunder, while every evil passion looked out of those expressive eyes; "speak, wench!" seizing and almost shaking the terrified Ruth; "what else is gone?"

"I do not know, I am not sure," she quivered forth; "but several things—bonnet, carriage-cloak—"

He needed no more—it was plain—Helen had fled! and he was perhaps baffled! And uttering a dreadful oath, he dashed up the stairs, closely followed by Constance, who had directly read his suspicion, and dreaded, she scarcely knew what.

He almost burst in the panels of the door that led to their bed-room, in his wild impatience making for the most evident entrance, and swept through the apartments like a raging hurricane—but he found nothing except confirmation of his fears. He then, with hasty strides, approached his wife's sleeping-room; but Constance, brave, loving Constance, at once herself when danger menaced that worshiped mother—and unerring instinct told her it now did—had preceded him; and as he entered, the demon in both face and heart, he was arrested by the sight he beheld.

Constance, like some bright and holy angel, stood by her mother's bedside—the old look, the old attitude, only more decided and defiant than ever—with one hand, she warned him to stand aloof, while with the other, she seemed to shelter her sleeping mother from harm—it was as though she possessed some power more than human, for he stopped as if petrified. She softly said, "Hush!" and changing her position, pointed to the object she was guarding with such vigilant jealousy.

Mrs. Templeton, having been almost worn out with anxiety, and soothed by the draught she had taken, in blessed ignorance of her danger, was sleeping as peacefully as an infant—to the fond eyes that now guarded her, she looked unusually lovely, for the habitual melancholy of her expression was changed to one of perfect contentment—while the cheeks, generally too pale, were tinged with a delicate glow, the evidence, perhaps, of incipient fever. "Mother, how beautiful thou art!" burst from the lips of Constance, as she knelt and kissed the small hand which lay on the quilt—and when she arose and looked round, her father had gone!

But short time was there for the indulgence of tender or grateful thoughts, as his voice was heard raging high and loud in the hall; and pausing fervently to thank God for this especial protection of her mother, she closed the door, and hastened to inquire if any thing fresh had been discovered.

There was nothing—but orders were given to various individuals to institute the most rigorous search, and frequently to report progress; while the Colonel ordered out horses, to commence the pursuit of the fugitives, the moment he had the least clue to their destination.

London never entered his mind, though he was pretty sure that, by some means, Reginald had carried her off—and here his habitual selfishness and indifference about others stood in his way. Since his separation from Helen, Reginald—his means and his plans—had scarcely ever been thought of—never inquired after—and thus he was completely ignorant of much that would, probably, have guided his search successfully.

Half-an-hour, an hour, still no trace; when, impatient of further delay, and vowing the most signal vengeance, he sent for Constance.

"I believe you knew nothing of this—there, there, do not pester me with heroics—I believe neither you nor your mother do—for, by heavens! if I suspected either of you—well, never mind—I am unable to think. You, however, must write a note, and send it express, directly I am gone, to Hurstwood. Put off his Lordship's visit—he is expected here—tell him the truth, or invent any lie you choose—I care not;" and he set out on his fruitless errand.

Constance did not feel herself bound to tell the truth, nor did she condescend to a falsehood; she merely wrote, "That circumstances induced Colonel Templeton to request that his Lordship would postpone his visit till the Colonel could wait on him."

Letters and notes were, it seemed, not destined to go safely from the Priory to the Hall—the groom, in his zeal to deliver his missive without delay, rode so furiously that his horse fell and was hurt, when about half-way; and the man, having to walk the rest of the distance, arrived after Lord Hurstwood had set out.

And here occurs one of those miscalled trifles, on which so many results hang—we might pause and moralize a little, and perhaps we ought, only the reader would be sure to skip the page—we might refer to the celebrated cup of tea, to show our historical learning; we might quote Pope, to show the extent of our poetical reading—we shall not do any of these things, which are often done, only to fill up the page—but merely observe, that, had his Lordship received the note, not only would he have kept clear of the Priory on this day—but on hearing of the flight of his intended bride, he might have been too much mortified ever to have called again, and then—ah! let us not anticipate, but regularly and soberly go on.

Soon after eleven, Dawson entered Mrs. Templeton's room, and found her only just awake; but looking so refreshed, that the kind housekeeper almost hated herself for being the messenger of such news as he had to impart.

"You have slept late, madam," she remarked, "but I hope you feel the better for it."

"Much better, thank you," was the reply; and

the sound of the first voice she had heard since the important event of the previous night brought the whole scene before her, and reminded her of the necessity of caution.

"Miss Constance was my doctor," pointing to the phial, "and her remedy has been really very successful."

"Then you heard nothing extraordinary last night?" asked Dawson.

"I must have slept the moment I went to bed," was the evasive reply; "but I shall soon rise, and then have a cup of tea."

Now, though quite against all precedent and rule, that the housekeeper, in a family of their rank, should condescend even to recognize her lady, except when receiving her daily orders—such was not the arrangement here

Mrs. Templeton, before the permanent arrival of her daughters, had been much annoyed by the misconduct or fine-ladyisms of her waiting-maids, who really had little else to do than to be tiresome, owing to her very independent habits. She had, therefore, engaged a young woman for her children, and readily accepted the voluntary offer of Dawson, to attend her for the trifling services she required, instead of adding to her trouble, by having to keep order between two lady's-maids.

There was a bond between the mistress and this kind woman which nothing could sever; it had sprung up at their first meeting, and had grown stronger every year. Sweetness, sorrow, patience, and benevolence on one side—on the other, attachment, fidelity, sympathy.

"The Colonel has gone off in a hurry this morning, madam."

"Has he!" she neither asked why nor where.

"Miss Templeton has gone also," pursued Mrs. Dawson, with a quickened pulse; but no remark or start, as she expected—and then, no longer able to bear this irritating insensibility on the part of her mistress, she added, "and, God forgive me! but I hope he will not overtake her."

Still no reply, and thoroughly exasperated, she said, sharply, "Madam, Miss Templeton is gone—she has run away, and no one knows where."

Expecting that her lady would now be sure to faint or scream, she was almost frightened at her silence, and looked fixedly at her. Their eyes met—she read it all at a glance, as if in a book; and stooping down, she respectfully pressed her hand, and said stoutly, as if to assure her, "The rack should not get it from me."

"Thank you, old friend," was the reply; and the bond between them was stronger than ever. "Tell Miss Constance that you have informed me—nothing more."

Constance, meanwhile, had been harassing herself almost to a fever; dreading—yet longing for—the moment when she should meet her mother; and when Dawson informed her that her lady had asked for her, she added:

"And, Miss Constance, my mistress knows, and wishes you not to speak of it—at least, not yet."

So with downcast eyes and mortified looks, Constance met her mother; and hiding her face on her bosom burst into an agony of tears.

"We must talk of this another time," said Mrs. Templeton, with what, to Constance appeared unheard-of composure; "I have given orders to have Lord Hurstwood admitted, so it will not do to give way now; he must not be dismissed, to hear of this from public report."

"I have happily put off his visit, by papa's orders," said Constance; so you will be spared that trial—but, oh! if the dear Vernons had but been here now, instead of waiting till next month."

"Let us be thankful, my love, to have them *then*," replied her mother; and Constance wondered more and more that she said nothing about Helen; till thinking that she, like herself, felt implicated in a proceeding so at variance with her ideas of propriety, she became more reconciled to the implied wish of keeping silence, and readily permitted it to be an interdicted subject; especially as, though mortified that Helen's conduct should be publicly canvassed and censured, she could not be consistent with her well-known opinions, now one she loved had braved them, by truly and heartily blaming what her sister had done.

She obtained her mother's permission to write to Cecilia Grantham, and entreat her to come immediately to them; remarking that there was no one, not excepting Caroline Vernon, whose society would do them both so much good—an opinion to which Mrs. Templeton very cordially assented

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"Duncan Grey cam here to woo—
Ha! ha! the wooing o't." BURNS.

To Mrs Templeton's surprise, after wha Constance had told her, about one o'clock, Lor Hurstwood was announced—the orders for his ad mittance not having been countermanded, as she had ceased to expect him.

After the usual exchange of greetings, and a few unimportant remarks, she began to suspect some mistake, and that, after all, she should have the pain and embarrassment of herself telling him what had occurred.

"I fear," she said, "that a messenger, sent express by the Colonel's orders, had not reached the Hall before you left."

"Assuredly not; I left rather early, having come round by Forest Hill; but I hope nothing painful or unpleasant was the cause of such haste."

"Painful to ourselves only, I hope," was the reply; "though the news will be unpleasant, I fear, to your Lordship. Miss Templeton, who, from various circumstances, was averse to overtures of marriage from any quarter, having failed to convince Colonel Templeton that she has a right to be consulted—has decided upon using this right—she left us last night."

Believing that he had received *her* letter, one which she fancied no man of refined feeling would have withstood, and without deigning the common courtesy of a reply, except by persisting in a suit which she had plainly told him was distressing, she spoke with an asperity and pride quite unlike her usual graceful gentleness.

But she had met with more than her match, as the Peer, quite cool and collected, said, without the least pique of manner, but a *soupçon* of a sneer in his eye—the single word:

"Eloped?"

"That, I fear, is the proper term," she replied, and wincing, as he intended she should.

"Egad! a girl of spirit," was the courtier's spoken remark, and he actually smiled. "A deuced good thing it was before, instead of after," was the unspoken thought, as he remembered Lord Ogleby, and smiled again.

"I grieve," began poor Mrs. Templeton, for she felt that her meditated attack, like Pyrrhus' elephants, had been turned on herself; but the man who, during his diplomatic career, had been used to turning tables, and such political jugglery—to borrow a modern phrase—promptly took the initiative, and said, with a well got-up look of sympathy, "I deeply grieve on *your* account, my dear madam, to hear this—as, from whatever cause, prudential, romantic, or heroic, such a step is sure to give rise to unpleasant remarks, ill-natured censure, or—"

"Pardon me, my Lord," interrupted Mrs. Templeton, provoked at the dexterity with which he had seized his advantage, and indignant at the use he seemed disposed to make of it; "pardon me, if I remind you, that all these inconveniences you are so carefully enumerating, would have been avoided, had you noticed, as I fully expected you would, the letter I judged it due to you to send."

"To me! I, in my turn, must ask pardon, but I have never had the honor of receiving any letter from you."

"I greatly regret this—since its loss has been the cause of my judging your Lordship unjustly. I can now only repeat, that, knowing my daughter wished to decline any offer of marriage, and entering into her feelings, though her father could not, I wrote, informing your Lordship of this disinclination, trusting both to your delicacy and honor as to the course you would take; had you received this, oh, how much suffering would have been spared us"

"I sincerely deplore the unlucky chance that prevented it from reaching me; and I beg you to believe, that I deeply sympathize with you and your family in this unpleasant occurrence." He was sincere, and she felt it—indeed, she began to think he had not been by any means well-used in this transaction, and, woman-like, she was half disposed to comfort him; therefore when he concluded by saying, "May I do myself the honor of sending and calling to inquire after you?" her reply was quite cordial. "The Colonel will, I am sure, feel flattered by this proof of your friendship; to all of us your Lordship will ever be a welcome guest"—so he bowed respectfully on her extended hand, and departed.

"I think I managed pretty well there," was his remark to himself, as he rode away; "it will not do for me to wear the willow—and yet, she is a beautiful creature—very like her mother—the same outline, so delicate and graceful; the same gentle, dark eyes—and so she thinks she has blinded mine!—but I see it all—she approves of this flight, that I will swear to; nay, more, she knew of it, perhaps arranged it. After all, these women beat us out and out—they are politicians and intriguers in the cradle. Bah! what care I how fair she be—but she is very beautiful;" and he rode more thoughtfully home, memory recalling a face which, in his young days, had seemed to him even fairer, and something like a sigh arose.

But shaking off this unfamiliar mood, and dismissing these painful visions of the past—he decided on the line of conduct to be pursued, so as to spare his vanity and his pride. Happily, the whole affair had been begun and terminated within so short a space of time, that he hoped his own share in the performance remained unknown—or so imperfectly, as to render any explanation he chose to give readily believed. It would not do, therefore, to cut the Priory all at once—no—he would let them down very gently, and then leave the neighborhood for a period, perhaps negotiate an alliance with some young lady, if *any such there were*, who had no invincible objections to marriage from any quarter; and he smiled, as he quoted Mrs. Templeton's words. Yes—that would be the least embarrassing, the most dignified and satisfactory conduct to pursue; and having thus settled the question to his liking, he was once more himself; and so effectual had been the indurating effects of his worldly and courtly career, that meeting the fair Juliet, who profited by the use of her mother's pony chaise to drive beyond the limits of the village, he entered into a half lively, half sentimental chat with that blooming nymph, which ended in a gallant invitation to her, to come and give her opinion of the beauty of some rare exotics he had in the hot-houses at the Hall, an invitation which was at first coyly refused, but finally accepted.

Now, Lord Hurstwood was neither a villain nor a wretch; those who expect he will turn out a Henry the Eighth or a Blue Beard, a Charles the Second or a Rochester, or any other demon in a modern dress, are destined to be disappointed. He was not even a very bad man; though this avowal may be fatal to his claims on our interest.

It is true he had been dissipated, for he began his courtly career while a mere youth, when profligacy and intemperance were royal favorites; and as a well-trained courtier, of course, they became his also; so he intrigued, he drank, he gambled, and fell in and out of debt, according to his ill-luck or his father's generosity; and, like many of his compeers, bade fair to lead a short life, though not quite sure that it had really been a merry one; when, at last, after much hesitation, and postponing the final scene of the farce as long as possible, fat old kings did die and their fat old mistresses died also—the nation cried, "*Le Roi est mort*," and some, who interpreted literally that crafty quibble, that kings can not do wrong, put on black; the courtiers shouted, "*Vive le Roi*," and dressed themselves out for a coronation.

At any rate, a new reign began; vice no longer stared virtue out of countenance; was no longer so fashionable as to be praised, admired, imitated like a Parisian *nouveauté*—perhaps, indeed, there was quite as much of it; but, whether from policy or police, matters not, it discreetly kept out of sight—or when it did appear, was no longer, like

some antique statue, in a state of nudity, but put on comfortable and decent covering.

It was no longer thought a most exquisite witticism to run in debt, cheat the wine-merchant, and become more gloriously drunk than ever at his expense, perhaps his ruin—the discovery had been made, that, take quant. suff. of impudence, ditto meanness; and any one could repeat this true swindler's wit,—princes no longer bequeathed their debts to admiring posterity, with a modest codicil recommending prompt payment; nor did great men leave mementoes of their peccadilloes as legacies to a grateful country, to be maintained and provided for at the said country's expense. A change had come o'er the spirit of the nation's dream; and, happily, it was for the better.

CHAPTER XL.

"There's beggary in the Love that can be reckoned."
Antony and Cleopatra.

It happened that the morning after Helen's flight, Cooper had been detained by business connected with his duties, till an unusually late hour, at the Grange; and when he arrived at the Priory, all was such bustle and excitement, such astonishment and dismay, that no one seemed able to give a coherent account of what had happened. From Ruth he obtained the best information, but even she could not tell much; and he was very closely cross-examining her, when he heard the sound of the Colonel's voice, giving his orders, with all that want of judgment which extreme passion generally evinces, and hastened to him.

At the moment of Cooper's appearance, Colonel Templeton was threatening, not only Constance, but every member of the family, with his most direful vengeance, if any communication should be attempted between them and the fugitive, whom he denounced in language so wildly fierce, as to justify Cooper in reminding him of his daughter's presence. But this interference in no way tended to allay the storm, though it drew it into another quarter, namely, on himself, with such unprovoked violence, that the agent, who had fully intended to have offered his services, which might have been extremely useful, with an offended air kept silent, and quickly withdrew.

"And what think you of this news?" he asked Mrs. Captain, to whom he had related the scene which he had just witnessed, and a few particulars of its cause, that he had subsequently collected—"what is to be made of this?"

"Why, it is to bring grist to my mill," she boldly replied, "as every thing else that happens up there shall, while I have influence and wit to turn it to profit—there is now one less in my way. And what says the proud, pale mother at this stolen march in her prim beauty—but perhaps my dignified madam knew of it."

"Ridiculous," said Cooper; "as if such a thing would be at all likely: why, I hear she is ill, and keeps her bed—though the Colonel has been raging and roaring through the house like a tempest. By George! if she had any hand in it, and he knew it, I believe he would murder her."

"And serve her right, a poor, tame-spirited creature. If he dared to use me as he does her, I would fire the house over his head—I hate her for her meanness."

"Come, come," said Cooper, with a sneer, "this is rather too bad—do you suppose she would put up with it and remain, if it were not for those girls?"

"Ah! I will make the place too hot to hold that other scornful minx. I have not forgotten her impudence about the letter-bag—oh! her letters, truly, must be kept sacred—and no one may look at them, it seems."

"Not inside, and without permission," he retorted, seemingly bent on provoking his martial relative; "and egad! I think she was right—what was it to you and Juliet who wrote to her, or what they wrote about?"

"It signified much, if I could find out any thing to help my purpose. What do you suppose I have come down here for? burying myself alive in this detestably dull place, and among these old-fashioned fools, who are beginning to fancy themselves too good for us—I tell you I will stick at nothing; and if that pretty Jemmy Jessamy, that darling Hubert Forrester, thinks to escape me, he is mistaken—I will stop his philandering at the Priory."

"Now, Maria, you are too absurd; your other schemes are wild enough, but this is preposterous. I tell you it is as hopeless for you to think of inducing him to marry Juliet as if you had fixed on the Rector as a son-in-law;" and he laughed heartily at the idea of the Doctor, in his canonicals and shovel hat, making love to that fair impudence.

"You leave me to manage these matters my own way. Why, there is that sly little Miss Sinclair playing into my hand, while trying for the odd trick herself. But what is going on at the Hermitage?"

"Nothing, except that Mr. Morton seems disposed to purchase Bridgend. I begin to think he took the Hermitage merely to be on the spot if any property he fancied offered itself; for I know there is nothing of a house, beyond large farms, on his Norfolk estate, good as it is; and I think you must be mistaken as to his ever having seen us on the Continent. Why should he be silent if he had?"

"Very true; still, I do not think I am wrong. However, he does not interest *us*; for that German boy of his was too deep, and young Forrester is a better catch. I suppose Ruth will be here today?"

"No, she has nothing to tell. I saw her for a few minutes, and it is better to avoid exciting suspicion by keeping quiet."

"She is a poor tool," observed Mrs. Captain, "and perhaps will plague us after all; but where do you think this wandering damsel is?"

"Of course with young West—most likely on the borders by this time, and the Colonel in hot chase; but if all is as well arranged as the beginning, he will have his ride for nothing—and serve him right for snarling at me as he did."

"He was a hot-headed fool for that; for I will

venture to say you could have suggested something better than he will imagine."

"Yes, and for my own satisfaction, if he should return unsuccessful, I shall apply myself to the task." And he did so; and proceeding with more coolness and method than his principal, through a skilful emissary, he traced Reginald from one step to another, till he found him at Ashley's; thence to his modest lodgings, where, a few days before the marriage, he discovered Helen; and then held council with Mrs. Captain as to what use they should make of their knowledge. Happily, so convinced were these hateful confidantes, that not only was Mrs. Templeton guiltless of having aided in her daughter's departure, but that she was deeply wounded at the remarks to which it exposed her, that they determined to keep this discovery to themselves, at least for the present, so as to prevent the Colonel's interference, who would, and they knew it well, have torn Helen away even from the altar; and thus their malice was made a means of furthering Mrs. Templeton's designs, while they thought only of more deeply annoying and injuring her.

But to return to Constance, whom we left sad and anxious. When she heard that Lord Hurstwood was with her mother, and this in spite of her note, the safe delivery of which she had never doubted, she began to fear some new catastrophe, though what she could not well imagine, it being difficult to fancy any thing worse than the scene they had lately passed through; so, finishing her letter to Cecilia, she, with that ingenuity in self-torturing, not uncommon when the nerves are over-excited and the heart ill at ease, began to torment herself with conjectures about the effect this fresh disaster would have on Hubert and his opinions. She then wandered into Helen's room, the bright thought flashing across her mind, "Perhaps there I shall find some indication of her intentions, which may tend to tranquilize us, some message, some farewell." But there was none. She examined the drawers, still with the same ill success; only she noticed that a few articles of dress seemed to have been hastily removed, while the others were left in great disorder. Smoothing and arranging these, she locked away every loose or stray object she could find, and then again descended, in the eager hope that Hubert might have arrived—but he had not. Wandering about, unhappy, lonely, and with a slight feeling of being neglected, she entered the garden; but to-day, in vain did its rare beauty meet her eyes—in vain did the loveliness of nature call her to admire it—she, almost an enthusiastic worshiper of its glories and its infinite variety of attractions, to-day felt them not. Suddenly and hastily she ascended the steps that led to her mother's conservatory, and rushed to a particular plant of Indian origin, under the broad leaves of which they all three had been in the habit of leaving little notes, containing information of their movements, which they did not choose to leave as verbal messages—still the same result—there was nothing to repay the search. And she was diligently employed at the foot of these same steps, trying to ascertain whether the impression of a small foot could have been just made by herself, and whether it was in the right direction, when she caught sight of Hubert in the distance.

"Yes, it is he—certainly it is," as he drew nearer; "how would he meet her?—did he know?—or had he come because he was still ignorant of this last trial?—if he knew, would he think that Helen's flight reflected on her?" And as he approached, she was thankful to perceive that his look and tone were as kind—nay, why conceal the truth?—as loving as ever. Poor Constance! has it come to this, that thou art grateful to see kindness, or, if thou wilt, love still on that countenance, in thy eyes so glorious? Alas! such was the case, and the bright color rose to her beautiful cheeks when the thought came—"Perhaps he does not yet know of the blight that has settled on us all;" and she felt ready to weep; for this was no prudery or affectation—no morbid sentiment or overstrained notion. Constance really felt as if she were lowered in general estimation.

His first words proved his ignorance, and she felt she must have the task of telling him.

"Well, dear Constance," for seeing that she looked so very sad, he was, unconsciously, more tender than ever, "How is Helen? and what is to be done?"

"Alas! Hubert, then you know not of the blow that has struck us almost to the earth. Last night—" She stopped, but he looked so anxious, she continued hurriedly, "Last night she left us!"

"Good God! fled! where?—with whom? This is distressing news."

"We do not know—it is so unexpected, so overwhelming. Papa is gone in pursuit. Lord Hurstwood is now with mamma;" and she burst into tears.

"Nay, dear Constance, do not give way thus." He took her hand, which she did not withdraw. How he longed to tell her all—to tell her that he loved her—he fancied—it was not vanity, he was above that weakness—he fancied he should then leave her less sorrowful; but, to his honor be it said, he remembered his promise, and was still silent, though inwardly vowing this silence should not last. "Constance," he proceeded, "tell me, can I—can we—be of any use? You know you may command me in any way; but how does your mother bear this?" for he began to fear for his resolution, if he did not change the subject; and while her grief made this more difficult, his chivalry whispered that it should not be taken advantage of.

"Dear mamma has so much to try her, that she bears up wonderfully under this, though, of course, she feels it dreadfully; but I almost doubt whether she has yet realized the full extent of this last catastrophe. I have just sent for Cecilia Grantham, for there is a look of feverish excitement about mamma which makes me uneasy; and now this interview with Lord Hurstwood, and the suspense till papa returns, may be too much for her—and I dread so much being alone."

"Then you have no idea where Helen is?"

"Yes, I have a strong conviction that she is with Reginald West; in short, that he assisted her flight. Only think, Hubert, what she must have suffered and dreaded, to have been forced into a step so repugnant to her principles."

"Poor girl! she must indeed—not that I blame her; no one, knowing all the circumstances,

could; and I wish I had permission to publish these at once. Do you still refuse to grant it? It must be as you will, then. But I shall not now wait to see Mrs. Templeton, who would, probably, rather be alone;" and somewhat abruptly he departed, leaving Constance with much to think of, and scarcely understanding whether she was comforted or not by this interview.

If Constance thought that Hubert's hasty departure had any connection with the tidings he had just heard, in one sense she did him injustice; it was not because this fresh sorrow made him feel less for her, but because he so deeply sympathized with her grief, that he resolved to have the right of sharing it, and trying by every means in his power to lessen its poignancy.

He was now determined to bring matters to a termination; therefore, directly he reached home, he sought an interview with his father, nor did he leave him till his consent was given—with great reluctance, however—that he might plead his suit with Constance, his father promising to accompany him at the same time to see the Colonel. Conditions were, however, affixed to this concession, that nothing should be done till they had news of Helen's marriage, and that she was safely and honorably provided for; it was useless for Hubert to entreat on this point; his father insisted with firmness quite unusual when his son's wishes interfered, but Mr. Forrester's objections were increased ten-fold by this escapade of Helen's; and Mrs. Forrester, spite of her unbounded love for her son, could hardly yield to his entreaties, and give her consent on any terms.

In this mood they met at dinner, at which Laurette, using her privilege of being almost *l'enfant de la famille*, joined them without invitation—for by this time the news had reached, not only to the Grange, but had spread through the whole village—though, as Lord Hurstwood had calculated, no one but Hubert knew how much his proposals had brought about this crisis.

Laurette's quick intelligence soon put her *au fait* as regarded the thoughts and feelings of her three companions. Hubert had already proposed to Constance, without waiting for his father's sanction; or was about to do so with it—either supposition readily accounted for the looks and manners of them all—and in any case she would try and contribute her usual offering of a few drops of gall—if one did not swallow them, another would.

"I should not have ventured to show myself anywhere but here," she remarked, *à propos* to nothing, and affecting deep concern and distress, skillfully mingled with a little reproachful look, as if she felt ill-used, and another smaller look of humiliation; "but though not one to parade what I can not but feel as reflected disgrace—for I do not forget that she is my cousin—I knew among such kind friends I should still receive a cordial welcome."

"Why should you or any one else doubt that?" retorted Hubert, much irritated. "Helen's act is her own, and reflects on no one else, even if it do on her, poor girl! which I am not the least disposed to admit."

"Hubert!" interposed his mother, solemnly, "*we* can not excuse this, so we will not discuss it—at least, just now—though, as to Laurette, I do not see how the censure can extend to her."

"Nor to anybody else," persisted Hubert, looking as a spoiled only son can sometimes look, and thinking Laurette perfectly detestable.

"Now for arrow the second," thought that clever markswoman, carefully examining her quiver for the longest and sharpest, that should, if possible, like a skewer, run them all through.

"This will make Constance a fine prize," said she carelessly, "and bring swarms of hitherto undecided swains to her feet. Nothing like *les beaux yeux de sa cassette* for that. I am much mistaken if uncle Lionel do not make her sole heiress—she was always his favorite."

Hubert and his father exchanged glances. The arrow must have passed right through him, for he suddenly started, and became crimson to the very brow. It also found its way sure enough to the stately old father, who looked indignant and offended. Nor did the mother wholly escape a slight scratch, quite enough, though, to bring tears to her eyes.

"Well done; it has hit the white," said the amiable Laurette to herself. "It will be too late for the Priory to-day, even for me to be admitted; but to-morrow, like the slaughtering sparrow so famous in nursery poetry, I will go with my bow and arrow, and practice a little archery there also."

"Hubert," inquired his father, after she had gone, "did you notice Miss Sinclair's remark?"

"Yes," said Hubert, angrily, adding very disrespectfully, "and I wish she had been at Jericho before she thought of making it here. But no once could ever suppose me influenced by so paltry a motive;" and then suddenly remembering that if he had had his own way, and been allowed to propose to Constance when he first wished, this imputation could never, by any possibility, have been attached to him, he poured out such a torrent of reproaches on himself for having been obedient, and on his father for having required it, that Mr. Forrester was effectually silenced; and his mother, not knowing of this outbreak, having ventured to hint that Constance was compromised by Helen's proceedings, he defended her so vehemently, mixed with such severe reproaches on his mother for her unwomanly cruelty, that she burst into an agony of tears; a result so unusual, that Hubert was at length moved to ask pardon, kiss and be friends, and concluded by again promising to delay further proceedings for a short time.

After a fruitless search, Colonel Templeton returned, and learned that his wife was ill in bed. Mr. Curtis said it was a nervous attack; and he was right, for many days elapsed before she was able to leave her room.

His arrival was quickly followed by that of Cecilia, who, with a promptness which ever accompanies sincerity, had, immediately on the receipt of her cousin's letter, started off for the Priory, leaving Grantham, at that time the very focus of gayety, for the house of mourning—Constance having informed her of their distress—and urged this as a motive for her coming which she knew would not be disregarded.

Mrs. Templeton had kept up an appearance of composure during her interview with Lord Hurstwood, and till she heard that the fugitives had reached London; and then, knowing that weeks must elapse before she could be quite at ease, she fairly gave way; and her illness being attributed by the Colonel to her sorrow and anxiety, was mercifully the means of averting all suspicion from her.

Under these circumstances, the presence of Cecilia was a general advantage. Her uncle heard from her that Lord Hurstwood had seen Mrs Templeton; and though the particulars of this interview never transpired, he was gratified to find that all communication between the two families was not quite broken off. He spoke to her of Helen, of his still unsuccessful search—in all this she indulged him; but when he began to utter threats or invectives she invariably signified her disapproval, or left the room. She did not unwisely defend Helen in all she had done—she rather sought to excuse her, and to win him to pardon her; but here she failed. Gradually, however, her influence prevailed so far, that he resumed his usual pursuits, no longer harassing them by outbursts of anger and fury.

One morning, when he entered the breakfast-room, he found Constance so deeply absorbed in reading a letter, that she did not notice his entrance.

"From whom is that?" he asked, with a look of suspicion.

"From my aunt Sinclair," replied she, not noticing his manner or tone.

"Let me see it," he said, rudely; "I shall permit no underhand doings with you."

Coloring violently, Constance quickly handed him the letter, while Cecilia gazed at him with astonishment so evident, in eyes which her mother had properly called fine, that it was impossible to mistake her thoughts.

"Prevention is better than cure, so says Curtis," he remarked, with an awkward attempt at a laugh, and too much ashamed even to glance at the letter; "but if Constance is to have her private letter-bag, it must be on parol."

"I refuse to keep it on those terms," said Constance; "if any letters came which contained news from those I love, I should read them. I therefore give up my bag."

"Uncle," said Cecilia, "I need not remind you that I rarely interfere in what does not strictly concern me—but this does—and I appeal to you, as a gentleman, if this is quite consistent with that character. There are many circumstances connected with an event, which I am sure we all regret, that I trust will eventually plead in behalf of those concerned; and it is an error to suppose one mistake can root out the love of years."

"You have said more than any other would have ventured to say," he replied; "you have alluded to one who is an alien and an outcast—one who—"

"I am sorry to hear there is so little courage, then," she said, quickly, seeing to what he was tending; "but, without her being put on parol, I know you do not mean to meddle with a lady's letter-bag;" and thus the matter ended, Constance being wisely deaf to the pride that whispered, "refuse the amnesty," because she really shrank, with something like horror, from the idea of having her letters once more at the mercy of the agent's unscrupulous family.

She had not spoken the whole of this time, but she looked steadily at her father when he began denouncing Helen; and it is remarkable that from that hour she rarely addressed him as father, never by the more childlike epithet of "dear papa," which had often fallen like music on his ear—nor did she ever again press her innocent lips, with the caress he so much loved, on his brow. Always respectful, she was never again fond.

CHAPTER XLI.

"——— the pure, open, prosperous love,
That pledg'd on earth, and seal'd above,
Grows in the world's approving eyes."
Lalla Rookh.

Firm to his original purpose, that nothing in his manner should show how mortified he really was, at the desperate alternative Helen had adopted, rather than marry him, in the course of a few days Lord Hurstwood again presented himself at the Priory, and found that no tidings had been received of the runaway, nor yet from the Colonel, though the return of the latter was hourly expected.

This he learned from Cecilia, as well as that her aunt was so ill as not to be able to leave her room. This news afforded him a pretext for another visit; and from one cause or another, again and again did he come—at first, to the great, and scarcely concealed, annoyance of Constance; but as he was always courteous, and his intentions apparently were both kind and respectful, she gradually unbent, and received him graciously—and this the more easily, as her mother had told her of the fate of her letter to the Hall, a fact which she had ascertained through the cautious inquiries of Dawson.

Thus cleared from what had seemed the most objectionable and least pardonable proceedings, Constance judged him more favorably—and began to think that it was nothing so extraordinary that he should admire Helen—and admiring, that he should then desire to win her.

Laurette, the arrant coquette, was constantly at the Priory at those times when she knew he was most likely to be there.

He had had one interview with the Colonel, during which, as had been his arranged line of policy, he gave, instead of receiving, sympathy; and recollecting the few hints that had escaped from Mrs Templeton, by which he plainly saw that it had been the Colonel's intention to make him his dupe, and not finding it suitable to his dignity to resent this openly, he lost no opportunity of uttering words which, to one not cognizant of the truth, seemed to have no special meaning, but which yet made the Colonel smart, as it stung by a cloud of musquitoes, and induced him inwardly to resolve that, if his Lordship did him the honor to call, he should not often find him at home to receive him.

But the absence of the master of the mansion was borne with sufficient philosophy by the gallant noble; when one, perhaps all the graces, as he mentally called them, received him—at least, with extreme politeness, if not pleasure. He was, in short, delighted with the success of his endeavors to remove any unfavorable suspicions his matrimonial *contretemps* had excited—charmed also at the friendly mode of calling, which he had established—above all, the notion of still playing the amiable to three such damsels, was any thing but disagreeable to a man of his tastes and habits. Another reason, also, often drew him there, which would have deeply wounded the self-love of Laurette, could she but have suspected it; he was excessively amused at her little tricks—her pretty maneuvers, through which he saw as plainly, as if she had been a raw young *attaché* sent by his opponent to tell some political lie—diverted him extremely; for, in fact, her utter ignorance of his character was perpetually betraying her into some amusing absurdity; and I seemingly bent on blundering her part, she affected a little air of sentiment, as if she took him for one who was struggling to hide a wounded heart, and needed the balm of sympathy to effect his cure—she covertly offered him condolence and pity, both in tone and looks—and all this to him, who was doing his utmost to prove, to all who knew the real state of affairs, that he cared as little for the loss of his mistress as for his glove or cane.

Cecilia, above all these petty arts, and quite free from design of any kind, had, perhaps, never appeared to greater advantage. Poor Mrs. Templeton, whose nerves had been, as it were, laid bare by late events, was the only one who, loving her truly, did not hail her appearance; but to one suffering as she was, from bodily weakness, and the greatest suspense and anxiety of mind, Cecilia's presence was, in every sense, too much. Her dignified, but, perhaps, rather decided, step—her musical and well-toned, but rather loud, voice; the rustle of her rich and ample silks; the demonstrative manner in which she placed and replaced any thing about the invalid, sometimes made her aunt shrink; but then her kind and bright face, her sensible remarks, her unflagging spirits, were such valuable counterweights, especially to Constance, who, from some feeling she had not tried to comprehend, was never more than friendly with Laurette, that when, in the course of a week, Mrs. Templeton admitted the young people to her boudoir, and occasionally accompanied them in a walk or drive, she felt that Cecilia's presence was as bright and cheering as sunshine.

One day, very shortly after her recovery, Mrs. Templeton, being alone with Constance, said:

"While I was suffering so severely from my nervous attack, I deliberately refrained from alluding to the painful circumstance which has lately occurred. I might, perhaps, have spared you much, as your distressed looks and manner have not been unnoticed—but I really feared my own weakness. I have heard both of and from Helen—she is quite safe—in honorable security—and we shall soon, and frequently, by some means, which you must not seek to know, hear more."

"Dear mamma, how your words relieve me," said Constance, only kept from vehement demonstrations of joy by the fear of agitating her mother. "One question—and Heaven be praised, first, for what I already know—is she with Reginald?—are they married?"

"Not yet, to both your questions; and now no more—though I see a whole volume of inquiries on your face; when I have any thing certain to communicate, be assured you shall hear it."

"And you are well enough to dine with us, are you not, dearest?"

"I hope so; and to-morrow we will all go and look at the Rectory, both within and without, and pass judgment on Mr. Merton's taste, which, I hear, has been at work there."

"Ashley must be very busy," remarked Constance, "to delegate so much to our venerable Hermit; but I suppose he will find time to run away from his duties, at least to meet the dear Rectorites—how I long to see them all."

"So do I, dear child, though we must not grudge the Doctor this almost unexampled absence—the first of any length I have ever known him take. Have the Forresters called or sent lately? I have a very kind note from Lady Dallas, which Laurette brought yesterday."

"Oh, yes, they have sent every day," said Constance, coloring, and very hastily adjusting her her mother's collar, but certainly not improving it.

"Very well; and now, dear, I am tired—send Dawson."

The day at length came when Mrs. Templeton expected to have all her fears and anxieties put to rest, by receiving information of Helen's marriage; she had been so much excited the previous evening, that Mr. Curtis, at the earnest request of Constance and Cecilia, had been again summoned. Mrs. Templeton patiently resigned herself to composing draughts, solitude, quiet, and the usual remedies; though she well knew that neither peace nor quiet would be her lot till the important packet arrived she had so much wished for. "Canst thou minister to a mind diseased?" she might have asked of her kind Esculapius—"canst thou compose the mind of the mother, who knows that this day, unsustained by a mother's presence, unaccompanied by a father's blessing, her beloved child will pronounce the vows that bind her to another?"

And the next morning, having insisted on rising to breakfast, in spite of entreaties that she would remain quiet, when the bag was opened, it was with a feeling of faintness that she took from Constance a letter of unusual dimensions. She opened it; "Heaven be thanked!" was her half-uttered exclamation, as she unfolded a paper before breaking the seal of a letter which accompanied it. "Constance, pass this to your papa; it is the certificate of Helen's marriage."

"Dear aunt," said Cecilia, tears in her eyes, and she kissed her—but she had too much tact to say more while her uncle was present.

With a cry of joy Constance seized the precious document, and laid it before her father. He was opening a letter, from which fluttered a paper of similar appearance—he glanced at it—and his brow grew dark as midnight; with a muttered curse he collected both documents and the letter, and without deigning further to read the contents, he held them in the flame of a taper, generally placed at his side for the convenience of sealing

letters or notes, and though his hand shook with passion, he persevered till they were consumed.

"Uncle," said Cecilia, her face in a glow, and her eyes sparkling with indignation.

But not a word from Constance.

"They are but copies," said Mrs. Templeton, her pale face flushing to the very brow, as she rose and left the room, carrying her letters with her. They were from both her children, as she fondly termed them; and when Constance, after a while, entered, she gave them to her to read, and sat with her arm round her remaining treasure, while the tears of the latter fell like rain, and blinded her so, that she could scarcely see words of love and tenderness—expressions of regret at separation from them, and hopes of happiness, in the full confidence, the lovely writer felt, that Reginald would never make her repent the course she had pursued. She then turned to Reginald's letter. "Ah, mamma," said she, "let us no longer sorrow, but rather rejoice; it is far better as it is;" and tenderly embracing her mother, she went to tell Cecilia of this termination to their present anxiety.

How happy was her meeting with Hubert, to whom, without reserve, she told of these dear letters; and though he left her after a very brief interview, so deeply did she love her sister, that the thought of her and her new duties made it delightful to be alone.

Hubert hastened back to Forest Hill, eager to be the first to carry the news of Helen's marriage, and claim from his father the fulfillment of his promise, and that, immediately. Having convinced him that any change in his sentiments was utterly impossible, he obtained his consent to accompany him on the morrow to the Priory; for, though far from using the exact words, Mr. Forrester began to think that, if it must be done, "then 'twere well it were done quickly;" and, accordingly, the next morning's sun shone on the stately figure of the father and the handsome one of the son as they set forth to determine the fate of the latter.

Constance was in the act of descending the grand staircase, when she heard the voice of Mr. Forrester inquiring for the Colonel, and requesting the servant to inform him, that he had ridden over purposely to see him.

Divining the cause of his visit, she flew back into her now lonely apartments, and almost breathless sank into a chair. As she thus sat, striving to regain composure, she heard the rich voice of Hubert singing a few bars of a trio which they had both, months ago, practiced with Helen Weil did she remember that evening the only cloud then resting on them being the illness of Mrs. West. Heavy and dark enough did that *then* seem—but how rapidly had it increased, both in size and density—till, lately, it had blackened their whole horizon.

Mrs. West was now dead—Reginald was stripped of all his brilliant expectations, and was toiling for his bread—and Helen, her dear, her beautiful sister, was forced to become a fugitive, and an alien from her father's house.

She hid her face in her hands, as if she would shut out the sad pictures which memory presented, when again the voice she loved came floating upward in a gay refrain: she listened, till the cheerful sounds were accepted as tokens of happier days; and knowing for whom Hubert lingered on the terrace, she descended to meet him.

"Ah! dear Constance!" was his cheerful greeting, "how delighted I am to see you; I was half afraid you would be hid somewhere till my father"—he paused—"in short," he said, looking unusually grave and earnest, "I must learn the truth from your own dear self. Am I mistaken?—have I been giving you my love, my idolatry in vain?—have I been cherishing a blessed hope which can not be realized?—Constance, you know that I love you, but you can not know how much—can you give me hope—love, in return?"

"Oh! Hubert, how ungrateful you must think me, if you doubt," was the whispered reply.

"It is not gratitude I ask for," he quickly said, "it is love—your love, dear Constance."

"And is that all?" she asked, with a smile, which he thought was that of an angel, giving him her hand.

"All! dearest; what more can I wish for? and with this precious hand you give it, do you not?" so drawing her toward him, he pressed the kiss of affiance on her blushing cheek.

"My father is with the Colonel," he said, after a pause, full of deep emotion to both; "but, Constance, one condition he insists on, in spite of my entreaty and opposition. In a short time, Victor Morton will leave for the Mediterrancan; he has long wished me to accompany him; and though he is the king of traveling companions, I need not tell you, I could not think of it—nor why. Well, my father consents to our engagement, if I win you; and I have, have I not? Of course, also supposing neither the Colonel nor Mrs. Templeton disapprove; but he will make me set off on this rambling expedition—what think you, dear one?"

"Do not mistake me, dear Hubert," replied Constance, "if I say I at once see the propriety of this plan. Time alone can soften the effects of our last misfortune; and when we meet after this parting, perhaps Providence will so have ordered it, that our troubles may be lessened; so let us try and think that this is for the best, though sadly shall I miss my kind and daily consoler—when do you think of leaving?"

"I believe Victor starts in the course of six weeks; but there are many things to be done for us before I go. Hargraves must be looked after, and a thousand other matters settled—but here are our respected fathers, both looking any thing but dreadful."

They did not, however, look very cheerful; and Constance, trembling very much as her father drew near, and feeling that if the scene were prolonged she should faint, sat down.

"Mr. Forrester has been asking me to give you to his son, Constance, and I have consented," was all he said.

But Mr. Forrester, looking at the beautiful girl who was thus coolly disposed of without, as it seemed, being allowed any voice in the matter, could not help adding, with that old-fashioned chivalry, which agreed so well with his proud and reserved manners:

"Which consent, we venture to hope you will make my son—will make *us* happy by confirming."

But she could not speak, for her father's want of courtesy, not to say kindness, had deeply wounded her; and Hubert, seeing she was much overcome, and willing to terminate the interview and set her free, added, with a gratified smile, "I hope Constance will not prove inexorable;" and while she escaped, shook hands with the Colonel, and warmly thanked him, as well as his father.

"I have informed Colonel Templeton of your proposed absence, in the reasonableness of which he entirely concurs."

"And Mrs. Templeton?" asked Hubert.

"Mrs. Templeton is far from well," replied her husband; "to-morrow, perhaps, she may see you."

But though to the father, who was still very indifferent about the whole matter, this was a sufficient reason for not urging an interview, not so to the son. He left his father at the Rectory, and rode back, requesting by note to see Mrs. Templeton, if only for a few minutes.

Directly she left the gentlemen, Constance hastened to her mother, whom she found in her boudoir, writing.

"Mamma," she said, kneeling by her side, no uncommon attitude, "Mr. Forrester is here, and Hubert:" she paused, but the smile and the blush spoke volumes—and her mother, looking at the lovely face raised so fondly to her, read that the hour was come, when she must give away this treasure also. Still, it was so wholly unexpected—the gift asked for, was, to her, so inexpressibly dear, so exceedingly valued, that for a minute she was silent—perhaps, also, some thought or fancy of her own had to be banished—but it was impossible to see a shade of anxiety steal over that sweet countenance, and not hasten to remove it. So she said, very tenderly but calmly, "And they have come to ask for my Constance, and she says, yes—is it so?"

"Yes," she faintly echoed; "and, mother, bless me."

"I do, my child—I always have—and the blessing has returned a hundred-fold into my own bosom, in both my children; yes, both—and you love this gay and handsome Hubert."

"Ah! mamma, you think him handsome; no wonder, then, that the foolish Constance does."

"Not foolish, if she love him for qualities without which there can be no reasonable hope of happiness—but like me, in this also, she loves him because he is true and honorable."

"Dear mother, how good you are—how well you know how to make me quite happy. I sometimes felt as if I must be almost wicked to have joy in my heart while all of us have lately been so wretched; and let me say this now, that you can not think how greatly I wished to tell you all I fancied—but I could not very well, could I?"

"Not very well, certainly, till Hubert took the first step, unless you had doubted the return of your affection—and then, my pet, you know you must have avoided him."

"But that was not the case—and so—but we shall not part very soon, dear mamma;" but before she related why, the little note was put into Mrs. Templeton's hands, and much gratified at the kind and delicate feeling it evinced, she ordered Mr. Hubert to be immediately summoned.

Constance was still by her mother's side, when on Hubert's entrance, with a smile, put out her hand; he kissed it, and with the hands of mother and daughter tenderly clasped in his, stooped his graceful figure.

"God bless you, children," said the mother solemnly. "Hubert, you have won her love—value and respect the gift, as you hope for happiness. You are both young—very young—therefore, I am glad you have an opportunity offered you for understanding more clearly what such an engagement as yours really means. Murmur not at a short delay—let it be a period of useful probation; and, under all and every circumstance be true to yourselves, be true to each other. Now go—and, Hubert, tell Mrs. Forrester what an invalid I am—but that I shall, I hope, be equal to receiving her to-morrow."

Ah! how proud and gay he was as he rode along: and how he almost succeeded in convincing Mr. Forrester that he had done a very good and very meritorious day's work—almost, not quite; for all that gentleman's prejudices against the Colonel had been strengthened during their strictly business-like interview.

The master of Seabrooke had testified nothing like a due sense of the dignity of the family into which his daughter was to be received. The Colonel talked of nobility—Mr. Forrester of ancestry. The Colonel dwelt on the fortune his daughter would eventually possess—Mr. Forrester of the Hargrave estate Hubert would at once have assigned to him; and though the value of the Seabrooke property was ostentatiously paraded as the Colonel evaded any precise reply as to the sum he would immediately lay down, Mr. Forrester felt sure that he was embarrassed as regarded ready money, a conviction which gained strength when he remembered how often report had said that immense sums had been lost at play, both in London and abroad.

However, by insisting on Hubert's absence time was gained. Hargraves, also, required repairs and alterations, which *he* should not feel bound to hurry on; and though it would be doing injustice both to Mr. and Mrs. Forrester to insinuate that they hoped or even anticipated any material alteration from time, when their own and their son's honor were equally concerned in the proceeding, they were glad that Hubert was so far reasonable as to have yielded.

Laurette was duly informed the next day. Mrs. Forrester called at the Grange, after an interview with Mrs. Templeton and Constance, during which she saw and heard so much to admire in both, and believed there were so many causes to excite sympathy, that the good old lady was nearly reconciled to the idea of having so sweet a creature for Hubert's wife—and decided that she was really worthy of him.

And what thought Laurette of this news? to her by no means unexpected—fervently as she had hoped some chapter of accidents would at least have postponed the *dénouement*. Laurette's real thoughts were not always "for daws to peck at;" and, on this occasion, she kept them to herself.

But she tendered her congratulations very warmly, and wrote to Craigalan, expressing her earnest wish that her father and mother would make an effort, and visit town. She had suddenly

discovered that it was very long since they had all met at the Priory—where she was sure their presence would now be so serviceable, as well as agreeable—dwelt on the claims of other old friends, and concluded by saying, that, if they made the first move southward, they would probably persuade her uncle Lionel to take her aunt and Constance to return the visit; a change which she suggested would be of much benefit, after all they had lately gone through.

She then called at the Priory, kissed Constance with an affectionate smile, and remarked, that while she and her mother were so unhappy about Helen, this little interlude of proposals and acceptance must be doubly valuable—it was so calculated to concentrate their thoughts on affairs at home—and then left her cousin, with cheeks tingling at her implied sensibility, to act the part of comforter to her aunt, to whom she accidentally remarked—"I am sure the feeling that Hubert is pledged in a serious engagement, anywhere among their own circle, must be a great relief to both his parents, who have been greatly annoyed at his folly in calling so perpetually on that disreputable person, Mrs. Mordaunt, and her equally objectionable daughter;" and though she had not the gratifying assurance that the arrow had touched the mark, it had—and, spite of the unconcern with which Mrs. Templeton had appeared to hear this innuendo, many a painful hour did its rankling cause that fond and anxious mother.

CHAPTER XLII.

"Amaryllis I did woo,
And I courted Phillis too." WITHERS.

"'Tis well to be off with the old love,
Before you are on with the new."

THE day at last came which was to bring back the Vernons. Constance and Cecilia were at the Rectory long before the hour appointed for their arrival—flying from room to room to see that all was in order, and ever detecting something that required arranging. They had come accompanied by a servant, loaded with flowers from the Priory, which Cecilia declared was literally "sweets to the sweet," as the Rectory garden was one scene of beauty—for knives and scissors had been doing sharp duty in cutting away all that was faded or unsightly.

The house was filled with the perfume of its fragrant ornaments, and Constance, having just declared all perfect, had risen to give a more graceful effect to a vase of choice exotics, when the bells pealed forth their rustic music, and the sounds of welcome from many voices, in a loud huzza from the parishioners, who had assembled to greet their pastor, reached the quiet drawing-room.

She paused in her arrangement, and sat down, looking very pale. Since she had last seen them, how much had happened! But there was short time for sorrowful retrospection; the sound of wheels, a rush, a cry, and they are all kissing and embracing as if scarcely knowing what they did—all, for the Doctor was, for a minute, as much overcome as any of them.

"And your mother, Constance, where is she?"

"Coming—she, or rather we, feared the bustle and first excitement for her—but the bells were to be her signal—and lo! here she is."

She bore the meeting admirably—was perhaps more calm than Mrs. Vernon; and though many painful feelings agitated each individual, gratitude and pleasure were certainly predominant.

When alone with Constance, Caroline wept bitterly as she listened to a hasty outline of what had passed—for no letters could tell what five minutes' conversation did—and they then speedily rejoined the rest of the party, when it was arranged that they should part for this day, and leave the travelers to settle and rest themselves; and that Mrs. Templeton should spend an hour there the next, with the Doctor and his wife, while the carriage took back Caroline to the Priory, there to meet Laurette, and pass the day with them.

Meantime, the visits of Lord Hurstwood to the Priory were, in one sense, any thing but angelic—that is to say, they were neither few nor far between; on the contrary, they were long and frequent.

Thus it happened, that calling there one day, rather earlier than usual, he was informed that the young ladies were in the drawing-room conservatory, whither he proceeded unannounced, the servant having left him to seek his mistress. His entrance was quite unobserved by the cousins—the room in which he stood being darkened by blinds, while they sat in the full light of their floral apartment—and certainly he may be pardoned for pausing to look at the picture they presented.

Constance, in her simple white dress, relieved by one bow of her favorite color, blue, her rich brown hair wound round her well-shaped head, and her sweet face peeping through her thick glossy curls, was seated on a low divan, profusely scattered with cut flowers, which she was arranging. Laurette, fashionably, but most becomingly dressed, had her somewhat dark style of beauty skillfully brought out by a pink bonnet, remarkable for the absence of any thing like showy trimming, while her standing position gave her an opportunity of assuming one of those graceful attitudes which had lost all appearance of being studied from having become quite habitual.

Cecilia sat with a half opened book in her hand, from which she seemed to have been reading; an animated reply, which she was making to Laurette, displayed to singular advantage all the dignity of her manner and the irresistible charm of her mouth and smile.

"I maintain," she was saying. "that there is not the least resemblance between the case of this sentimental heroine here," indicating the book, "and our dear Helen. This girl runs away with a worthless lover, after having had proofs of his baseness—Helen did nothing of the kind."

"Certainly not," said Laurette, with a sneer, little conscious who was approaching so slowly—for his Lordship was seized with sudden cramp—"she ran away to escape 'the dandy of sixty, who bows with a grace.'"

"What a caustic little devil it is!" was the

listener's thought. "Hang it! I am not quite forty-eight."

"But had she not loved Reginald, who is a noble and a true gentleman," replied Cecilia, "that objection would not have excused her with every one. Most girls would consider an offer from one of his rank and station an honor—and depend upon it, Laurette, there will be as much scheming among mothers, ay, and among daughters too, to secure him, as among courtiers to get the vacant ribbon."

"What a complexion that girl has, and what a shape," muttered the peer; and having recovered from his cramp, which still prevented his moving in double quick time, he gently retraced his steps, but not before he heard Laurette, with a mocking laugh, say—"Shepherds, have you seen my love?" and protesting by all that was spiteful, that the little dark vixen would die an old maid, he made his way through the hall to the door of the conservatory which faced the park.

He smiled as he gracefully saluted the ladies, and thought of the "dandy of sixty;" but, true to his courtier training, he was careful not to show the least trace of pique in his manner to Laurette, except, that when she began to play her airs of patronizing sympathy, he replied in so gay and jesting a tone as to throw back the ridicule on her

This time, as he returned to Hurstwood, he was so absorbed in thought as not to remark whom he passed on the road; such, at least, we must suppose was the case, as so polite a nobleman would never remorselessly have cut a pretty acquaintance like Miss Juliet, who "happened" to be driving the way that led to the Hall; indeed, as she had more than once remarked to Lord Hurstwood, it was something extraordinary this should so often "happen;" to which he would gallantly rejoin some nonsense about attraction and sympathy.

He now, however, passed her so quickly, that she scarcely heard the hoofs on the soft turf, before his horse was far a-head, throwing the dust in her face, as plentifully as his master had previously thrown it in her eyes; the groom respectfully touched his hat—but that was for my lord; he grinned—and that was for the lady. Juliet was ready to cry from rage and mortification—she did not, however, but went home, and did what was more often the case—she was saucy to her mother instead; conduct which that sensible matron was not likely to permit; insolence followed violent reprimand and the result was one of those outbreaks nicknamed, by some who had heard them more than once, on account of their noise, "the Coopers at work."

A few days after this, Laurette and Constance had set out to the Rectory; Mrs Templeton and Cecilia were to follow. In her stately way, the latter was pacing the terrace, when Lord Hurstwood appeared from the garden wing, and as she was walking from him, he had full time to remark the well-proportioned and springy figure, which was surmounted by a head and bust fit model for a Juno.

"Hymen, I invoke thee," said he, raising his hat, and still retaining it in his hand, as the figure turned and showed the pleasant face belonging to it.

"Good-morning, my lord," she said, in return to his silent bow; "Mrs. Templeton will, I believe, be here immediately"

"I hope not before my object in coming, so soon after my visit of yesterday, is stated; and were it not presumptuous to hope for a very great happiness, I should venture to add, not, I hope, before my object is gained."

"So successful a statesman as we all know your Lordship to be, should never anticipate failure. I have read it somewhere, that half the secret of success is, to believe it certain."

"I wish I could listen to you, Miss Grantham, as worshipers of old did to their oracles—with implicit faith in their predictions—but this I have not the vanity to do; in any event, however, *you* will decide my fate. May I therefore crave the honor of your attention for a few minutes?"

Cecilia bowed, slightly agitated.

"With me the age of romance is passed—I am nearly forty-eight"—he said this to let her know he was not sixty, and to spare her the trouble of consulting the peerage; "domestic life, and the happiness it brings, have been long enough neglected for my public duties; but till I saw you, I never saw any one with whom I felt sure I should find it. If I should be so highly favored as to have obtained the least interest in your good opinion, my dearest wish will be gained. Pardon me, also, if I seem presuming, or too eager to secure so great a boon; but if you can make me happy by at once replying favorably to my request, I entreat you to do so. If I ask too much, or am too precipitate or hasty, condescend to consider what I have said."

"Lord Hurstwood," answered Cecilia, now thoroughly herself, "I am said to be frank, almost to rashness; and perhaps," she continued, smiling, "you, like a true politician, will turn this confession to your advantage—be it so. I trust implicitly to your honor;"—he bowed, well pleased at this exordium—"but before I decide, I should prefer that you, as well as myself, see Lord and Lady Grantham, who have but just returned to England; on which account my visit here will terminate in two days."

"Then," he said, bowing on her hand, which she readily held out, in three days' time I shall have the honor of seeing Lord and Lady Grantham, and of again meeting you under their roof; till then, thus the affair remains; I now take my leave, and carrying with me your permission to hope."

"Nay, that is your own addition."

"Then ratify it with your own gracious and sweet consent—so that it may not be my invention; you will also permit me to communicate with you by letter, should I have forgotten any minor detail, while wholly engrossed with thoughts of securing the crowning blessing of life."

To this she readily consented, and he was taking his leave, when he said, "But here is Mrs. Templeton; I will merely bid her good-morning, and adieu. Our next meeting will, I trust, be a happy one at Grantham."

And he departed, quite reconciled to the English method of wooing—and quoting the poet's advice:

"Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongue;
Let every eye negotiate for itself,
And trust no agent."

The following day, as might have been expected, brought a note from the Hall; to obtain some trifling information was the ostensible reason; the real one was to have an answer from Cecilia; but as she has already decided on accepting him, there was no need for any little finessing—it, however, gave her the opportunity of saying that her parents were the first to whom she should mention his wishes; her love and respect for her aunt, being subordinate to her strong feeling of affection toward them.

Mrs Templeton's interview with the Doctor and Mrs. Vernon was, at first, painful and exciting; for though they had received full accounts, by almost the last post from Ashley, and were able to inform her of many things which were not mentioned by either Reginald or Helen, yet the history of the sad train of events which had led to this most unexpected result revealed much which displayed the tyranny and hardness of the Colonel more evidently than ever. But enough was learned to fully exonerate both Mrs. Templeton and Helen, in Mrs Vernon's opinion; even the good Doctor went so far as to say, that, much as he wished they had been at hand, to comfort and sustain her during this season of perplexity and trouble, he was very glad that his absence had saved him from the difficulty of being obliged to decide, where, he feared, his feelings and his his sense of duty might have been at variance.

She also informed them of the engagement between Hubert and Constance, as well as of the contemplated departure of the former; and though they both congratulated her in the most friendly manner, it was evident they thought this temporary separation a wise arrangement; especially the Doctor, who remarked that Hubert, whose generous and affectionate nature none who knew him could deny, had hitherto had very little opportunity of knowing much of himself or of the world; and though he went on his long tour with one not older than himself, still Victor Morton was years his senior in experience; was used to traveling about in the most independent manner, and possessed such valuable introductions, that great advantage might be derived from this plan.

"And when is Ashley coming, Caroline?" asked Constance, as they sat chatting together. "How I long to see him—for I am not fully in mamma's confidence yet—she merely tells me briefly, Helen is well, or, as she said lately, Helen is married—but there is so much wanting—not that I for a moment wish to learn what she thinks it best to conceal; but there are so many gaps, which I could honorably ask Ashley to fill up."

"We expect him very shortly," replied his sister; indeed, I think papa and mamma are disappointed that he is not here to receive us—but you know with him friendship is a very absorbing feeling; and while he can serve Reginald and Helen, he will not leave them, even for us—whom he can only please, not assist."

"What a lover he will make," remarked Constance, smiling and then blushing.

"Yes," said Caroline, gravely; "with him it will be once and forever."

"But, suppose—though even the supposition is very shocking—but suppose the lady should die?"

"He will still love her memory more than any other living creature; 'to live with them is far less sweet than to remember thee.'"

"But if unworthy?" persisted Constance.

"Ah! that is supposing an impossible case. My brother," she said, rather proudly, "never can love anything unworthy—he seems intuitively to avoid all such."

"You are quite right there, dear Carry—and this has always made me feel, that the friendship of Ashley conferred more honor than rank or station." And in their exalted estimate of one who richly merited their praises, neither of these beautiful girls seemed ever to have thought it possible that Ashley might suffer from a third cause—that of loving without meeting a return.

After Mrs. Templeton and Constance left, Caroline sat down to write to this beloved brother. She told him first of their disappointment at not seeing him—sent him news of the Priory, and of the village generally; and as she was closing her letter, Mrs. Vernon entered.

"To Ashley, dear?" she asked, looking at the letter.

"Yes, mamma."

"Did Constance tell you anything of Hubert?"

"Nothing, and I really forgot to ask of him—though I suppose she knows of the scheme Victor mentioned last night. But I have told Ashley how wonderfully the traveled young hermit is improved—really, if he goes on so, he has a chance of becoming celebrated."

"Then, my dear, you must tell Ashley, who can scarcely yet know it, that when the wanderers return, Hubert's engagement to Constance will be ratified, and they will be married." How surprised you look!"

"I am a great simpleton to be perpetually surprised at these love affairs. I hope I shall have fair warning when my turn comes—if ever it do—but dear mamma, I am surprised still—though I have heard of it for these last two minutes."

"And yet there is nothing very extaordinary," was her mother's quiet remark.

"No—certainly not," was the rather hesitating reply and manner. "I see Constance can keep her secrets."

"No, my love, she can not—for she particularly requested her mother to inform us of the fact, and without any delay—are you pacified?"

"Oh! mamma—I am sure I respect her feelings too much to be otherwise—but," and she looked full at her mother, "Hubert is not my choice for Constance."

"Indeed! and why? or on whom would your perfect approval have fallen?"

"On no one I know—but Hubert Forrester, amiable and charming as he is, has not, and I fear never will have, the deep yet lofty feelings which she is so eminently calculated to appreciate."

"Well, my dear, I can not contradict you—for the truth is, this is exactly my opinion—but time and intelligent society may greatly improve a nature so honorable as that of Hubert."

Therefore this piece of news was added in a postscript, without remark or comment. But it

did not seem greatly to have interested Ashley, as he never noticed it in his reply, which contained a long account of himself and his friends, but merely expressed his regret at not being able to leave town just then.

CHAPTER XLIII

"There's a bliss beyond all that the minstrel has told,
Where two that are link'd in one heavenly tie,
With heart never changing, a brow never cold,
Love on through all ill, and love on till they die!"
MOORE.

HELEN has been left a long time to recover from the fatigue of her rapid journey; so long, that if she had had nothing to do but to examine her new abode and all it contained, she must have wearied of the task.

But such was not the case—in truth, she was so much occupied in realizing the change in her prospects, which had been so unexpectedly effected, that days glided into weeks before she succeeded.

She sometimes felt as if she had been suddenly cast on some strange and uninhabited island—so hushed and quiet did all appear; so entirely was she removed from her late agitating associations—so completely had her more familiar apprehensions given place to others, and entirely new ones—still, with all this there were tranquillity and peace—and she felt how gracious the change was.

But these thoughts and feelings occupied her only when she was alone. When Reginald and Ashley came in the evening, sometimes remaining to tea, at which Mrs. Stopsel always made one of the party, it was then as if some beneficent genius had transformed her desert into something very delightful—a kind of real happy valley—where she could hear the voice best loved, and see the face so dear. "My dear, dear mother, my sweet sister, oh that you were here!" was on these occasions the only desire that arose in her heart.

Almost every day did she, and very often Reginald, through Mr. Morton, write to this mother, who had made so great an effort for their sakes; and frequent were the short replies sent through the same channel; or if he were absent, they were posted by Mrs. Templeton—so well had she learned out of the book of old experience. And when these precious tokens came, how bitterly did Helen sometimes weep—though not for worlds would she have had Reginald know of her tears—but the very means by which their correspondence was carried on, seemed perpetually to remind her of what she had been forced to do—and she would ask, "Why had she been so harshly, so unjustly treated, that the only escape from what, to her, would have been real ignominy, was to brave what many would condemn most severely?"

She might have married a man she did not love, one indeed, whose character, though not exactly bad, possessed no quality with which she could sympathize—she might have done this, even while loving another, and the world would have called her a sensible girl, who had not weakly yielded to a romantic attachment. Now, though hallowed by her mother's sanction, her marriage would be called—odious words—a run-away match.

But here again the good genius would appear, and his arguments were so conclusive when he named Reginald, that she dried her eyes, and met him with a smile.

It is astonishing how discontented and fastidious Ashley had lately become—the rooms which he had pronounced so comfortable, while Reginald was the sole occupant, were, in his eyes, strangely altered—for scarcely a day passed without some exchange or addition—and he was now racking his brain with some architectural contrivance, which would enable him to introduce a piano into their rather limited quarters; when Gretchen and he had a long conference together one evening, which suddenly put a stop to all further changes.

Helen received a small part of her wardrobe soon after her departure—the remainder, with many useful articles from the Priory, which strictly belonged to her, were forwarded after her marriage. Mrs. Templeton, aided by Dawson, had effected this transmission—there was neither leave asked nor concealment affected—but they were packed and sent; whether the Colonel knew it or not, did not transpire—perhaps to have interfered with this, now that all interference with his daughter was useless, would have been a petty spite, of which even he was incapable.

A few days before that appointed for their marriage, "Helen," said Reginald, when they were alone, an unusual event, "where shall we go, dearest, to spend the first week of our honeymoon?"

"Must we go anywhere away?" she asked.

"Not *must*, but I have arranged for a week's holiday—I can not spare a longer time."

"Then, dear Reginald, let us go to that pretty village near Hastings, on the coast—I remember driving to it once with Mrs. Loftus, when we were all there for change of air."

"Be it so—and we will start from the church-door. Helen," he said, after a pause, "if I have said but little of the circumstances into which very peculiar events have forced us, it is because I feel them too deeply to trust myself with any allusion; and because I also feared to do or say any thing that might agitate or distress you—you have understood this?"

"As well as if you had repeatedly spoken, Reginald—I am quite reconciled to all that has happened—why should I hesitate to say it? for without it, I never should have been your happy wife."

"Now blessings on your dear head," replied he, much touched at this mark of confidence and affection, "for that sweet avowal. Ah! Helen, if health and life be granted, how joyfully shall I labor to show my gratitude for what you will be to me—and, after all, we are not so poor as many—for your mother's gift supplies all that we shall actually spend, and my generous friends will not hear me, when I talk of relinquishing their aid toward my legal expenses."

"With our kind Gretchen to teach me, I shall soon learn to play Madame L'Econome, so as to astonish you."

"That you do already—so you may safely remain stationary in your excellence, for I can not love or admire you more, do what you will."

"We shall see," she replied.

Mr. Turner, the eminent lawyer with whom Ashley and Reginald read, had necessarily learned much of the latter's history; and as time made him better acquainted with the worth of the two friends, his interest in their welfare increased, so much so, that he seized every opportunity for giving them all the advantages his talents and position afforded.

Considering him, as he had every right to do, a sincere friend, Reginald had frankly informed him of the novel circumstances in which Helen's claim had placed him.

"Well, then, your first step will be to marry this young lady?"

"Of course—directly I can."

"Do you think she would like to receive any of your friends, who have not the pleasure of yet knowing her, before that event takes place? If so, my sister—*I* never had time to fall in love and marry, I was too busy elbowing my way through life—but my sister, as fine a specimen of an old maid as ever was—but you are acquainted with her—worth a whole zenana of silly wives—will have great pleasure in calling on her."

"Those who visit you are not likely to overlook Miss Turner. As to Ashley, I believe he is half in love with her."

"No—you don't say so—the sly dog—and if he were to offer, depend upon it he would be accepted—so I must look sharp after my housekeeper."

"I strongly advise it—but though I thank you for your kindness, at present, Miss Templeton shrinks from all society; but when we return—for I mean to steal a week—we shall feel very much gratified at any attention Miss Turner may show us."

"And who gives this pretty thing away? for pretty of course she is?"

Reginald smiled. "Ashley claims that privilege."

"Very well; and now that you have won her, my young friend, be kind and gentle to her; they are tender and loving creatures, and God help them when man does not."

It is the morning of Helen's wedding-day, and there she sits in her room, looking so beautiful, and waiting the arrival of Reginald and Ashley. There is the carriage with them, and Gretchen, half smiles, half tears, enters in her appropriate, but unostentatious, dress of gray silk, Reginald's gift.

"Are they come?" said Helen.

"Yes, my darling, and I am here to fetch you down."

Calmly Helen followed her, and on entering the parlor, gave a hand to each of them; and then taking Reginald's arm, advanced toward the carriage, followed by Ashley and Gretchen.

"Do you remember," asked Ashley of Reginald, "one day, when I threatened to give you Helen, to remove some of your odd notions?"

"Yes," was the reply; "but though very differently placed then, was I half so happy?"

The ceremony is over—they leave their tried friends at the church-door, so it had been arranged. "My wife," said Reginald, tenderly embracing Helen. "My dear, dear husband," was the quiet reply.

"And now Mrs. Stopsel," said Ashley, when after a silent walk they reached the cottage, "we have not a moment to lose, if we would succeed in carrying out our little surprise. I fear we must limit ourselves to white-washing and papering, but with some simple furniture in good taste I am sure every one will pronounce the idea a good one." But in order that we may give an opinion, it is necessary to explain.

The cottage occupied by Stopsel and his wife was one of those suburban villas, as the advertising sheet phrases it—cottage is the proper term—with which the environs of London abound; it stood detached in its own small garden, with rooms on each side of the entrance. On one side was Gretchen's parlor, behind that her kitchen; on the other side was a tolerably sized room, looking back and front; above these were the same number of bed-rooms, with a tiny dressing-room over the tiny hall.

The original proprietor had probably possessed that luxury of ambitious London tradesmen, a one-horse chaise, for there was accommodation for both. The last occupant had been an artist—of course the stable and chaise-house, as such, were useless to him; but he had turned the latter into a painting-room, lighted from the roof, and though the change was done economically, the result was a very snug and cosy studio—but the access was from the garden, and during the time the Stopsels had lived there, it was used entirely as a lumber-room.

On this Ashley had cast eyes of desire; a door could so easily be opened from the present large sitting-room into it—and though this would make a sort of passage-way of the former, so much would be gained by the addition of another apartment, that that objection had but little weight.

This, therefore, was to be dedicated to Helen and her piano—and as Ashley spent money as if he had found Fortunatus' purse, when cleaned, papered, and furnished, it looked so pretty as to bid fair to become a great favorite.

And so Ashley's whim was indulged, and when the absentees returned, he was richly repaid by the unqualified admiration they expressed.

"This, dear Helen," said Ashley, "is my *cadeau de mariage;* and this," saluting her, "is my reward."

"Oh, Reginald, oh, Ashley," she replied, turning her sweet face from one to the other, "how rich we are in the best of treasures—dear husband and dear brother, in gaining one I have gained both."

And how eloquent was her next letter to her mother, when, speaking of her happiness, alloyed only by separation from her and Constance, she dwelt in glowing terms on Ashley's kindness, Ashley's generosity; till Mrs. Templeton, who read the letter to Constance, remarked, "Ashley, almost as often as Reginald."

CHAPTER XLIV.

"Le ciel dont nous voyons que l'ordre est tout puissant,
Pour différens emplois nous fabrique en naissant;
Et tout esprit n'est pas composé d'une étoffe,
Qui se trouve taillée à faire un philosophe.
Le mien est fait, ma sœur, pour aller terre à terre."
MOLIÈRE.

"And it is then true that you have accepted Lord Hurstwood?" said her mother, when Cecilia told her of his offer.

"Yes, mamma, and I hope neither you nor papa will see cause to reject him."

"You know but little of his character or temper, Cecilia," said her mother, looking unusually grave; "and I own I have been accustomed to rank him among those who are rather lax in their principles on many subjects."

"I have no doubt but that, while he was young, he was led by the fashion; but when we were in Italy, the theater of his early diplomatic career, he was always spoken of with respect—certainly not as free from all vice—but as one whose conduct had never given rise to any one of those terrible scandals which disgrace the lives of many of his cotemporaries. As to his temper, I sincerely believe that to be excellent—for he was much at the Priory, and there were many occasions when, I must say, I think uncle Lionel rather tried it."

"Well, my dear, you have plenty of sense, and have a right to judge for yourself in this matter. In point of rank and wealth this is beyond our utmost ambition; and if you think you can be happy, you have our consent and blessing."

"I have no doubt of being happy as Lord Hurstwood's wife," she replied, confidently, "though many would not feel so secure. I am not romantic—he is amiable; for, with respect to Helen, I think he was shamefully ill-used. I am no longer in my first youth—charming sixteen is now seen from a distant point of view," continued she, laughing; "and to tell you the truth, dear mamma, I have lately thought a good deal about my future prospects. Were I not the *Honorable* Miss Grantham, it would be very different, for I have sufficient sense and moderation to reduce my wants to my means; and, as a poor man's child, could live on very scanty ones, or work in order to increase them; but a poor nobleman's daughter is so different—the shackles of rank interfere with free dom of action, turn which way you will; and I should not like to eke out a slender income, by annually visiting from one relative or friend to another, till I become a new kind of income-tax."

"That is true, Cecilia; and though Henry has acted most generously, and never forgets either you or his brothers—for Alfred still needs help—his own family have claims upon him."

"Henry is a real nobleman," was the sister's energetic reply. "You sigh, dear mamma, but I assure you, without cause; I am neither a victim nor a sacrifice. Think how much better off I am than many girls in my station. I by no means dislike Lord Hurstwood—on the contrary, I believe I could very easily love him; and when I think how often I have seen you look grave and careful, when any extraordinary expense has been needful, surely you must be glad to know that this, at least, will not be my trial."

"Indeed, my dear, I certainly do not wish you to have the anxieties I have had; they have sometimes, perhaps, made me over-bold in asking favors for my children; and your affectionate and energetic character will find a more suitable sphere of action among family claims than in single blessedness; still there is your aunt Lucy, of a noble family like yourself, and yet unmarried."

"The cases are not similar; aunt Lucy has fortune enough to live quite independently, indeed, to spare for others, as we have good reason to know; and then, from the fact, that she has refused several excellent offers, preferring to remain faithful to the memory of her gallant lover, she has become a sort of romance, such as I never could become. Now I firmly intend to do my duty by Lord Hurstwood, and make him as happy as I can. I am grateful to him, and I shall let him see it."

"You are right, my dear," said her mother, stifling a sigh, "happy you must make any one you live with; and such gratitude as yours is no bad substitute for love."

And when Lord Hurstwood came, he was very soon most favorably impressed with all he saw in the family of his bride-elect, and in his turn was equally well received. Under such circumstances his suit prospered; the preparations for the wedding were hastened as much as possible; and in less than two months after her quiet marriage, Helen read an account of her cousin's splendid nuptials, in the paper, with a paragraph especially dedicated to description and millinery—among the list of company were the names of the two chief bridesmaids, Miss Sinclair and Miss Templeton, relatives, so the paper said, of the beautiful bride.

Mrs. Templeton, with Constance and Laurette, remained for a week at Grantham after the wedding. Lord and Lady Hurstwood went to a small property his Lordship had in Wales; and they meant, on their return to the Hall, to give a series of parties.

In order to be ready for a full share in these, by being somewhere at Seabrooke, Laurette took this opportunity of spending the interval with the Westroughs. It was further settled, that they should all travel north when Hubert departed, for she had made such a point of the Templetons visiting Scotland, that she obtained her uncle's consent, and silenced her aunt's objections by insisting so much on the benefit they would all derive, that, at last, Mrs. Templeton was induced to think it her duty to give Constance an opportunity of seeing a little more of society before she married.

This visit to Grantham, the first she had made for years, had much gratified Mrs. Templeton; and coming as it did, when her health had been so shaken by recent trials, its beneficial effects went far to strengthen the arguments Laurette brought forward, and reconciled her to a further journey. Besides, the bustle and excitement of Cecilia's marriage, which forced her thoughts into a fresh and cheerful channel, were of permanent advantage.

Lady Grantham, who, in the midst of so much to claim her exclusive attention, never forgot others, learned from her sister-in-law many particulars that deeply affected and interested her, and though, of course, the part Lord Hurstwood

had had in the affair was lightly and delicately alluded to; and though there was no confidence respecting the steps she herself had taken in Helen's flight, this was so evident to her Ladyship, that, when she subsequently fulfilled her mise to see Helen, she frankly alluded to it.

Lord Granthan offered his services as mediator ween Colonel Templeton and the young couple; at his sister declined, for the same reasons which had induced her to refuse Doctor Vernon's interference—namely, her conviction that it would be useless, and might be injurious. At present, she could correspond with Helen—she could also, through Mrs. Vernon, who sometimes took a peep at Ashley and London, have those personal reports which she so pined to verify with her own eyes; but fierce and vehement as had been her husband's denunciations against any who presumed to disobey his prohibition, he had been contented with apparent submission; and with a levity which characterized him, had probably ceased to remember or care for the chasm which his violence had made in their small circle. Therefore his wife said, "Let me not risk what I have in trying to obtain more. Helen is happy, and I am learning to be resigned."

The return of the Lord and Lady to Hurstwood was preparatory to a series of such gayeties as had not enlivened the neighborhood for years. Lady Dallas said she was ready to cry because Ada, her eldest daughter, was not old enough to share in them - but apparently she reconsidered the matter, and enjoyed herself enough for both.

The hall was filled with noble and fashionable guests, ready to join in any scheme of pleasure and amusement, and amiable to extract both out of all that was offered.

Nothing could exceed the polished courtesy of his Lordship—nothing disturbed or ruffled the sweet temper of her Ladyship or banished her charming smile—they both seemed as happy as their best friends could desire; and their popularity lost nothing by the frank condescension of their manner.

The Forresters, careless of wealth or new titles, were worshipers of old nobility; and as the Hurstwood name had become, from first to last, antique enough even for them, a feeble ray of this splendor fell on Constance; and the cousin of Lady Hurstwood was allowed to hide the sister of the run-away Helen.

Hubert had made various excuses for delaying his departure, to which Mr. Morton had kindly yielded; but when he saw that indulgence led only to further delay, he said that either Hubert must accompany Victor at once. or the latter must sail without him. This, and Victor's profound remark, that the sooner he left the sooner he would return, decided the matter; and a few months after their engagement, Hubert and Constance parted—but not before arrangements had been made for a regular correspondence—at which Mr. Morton laughed, dryly remarking, that in addition to the uncertainty of winds and waves, must be added that of scarcely knowing their own destination till they reached it—for Victor's object was not entirely pleasure—he was intrusted with some important commissions from Mr. Morton, with which his mercantile career would terminate.

Cecilia very much wished that Constance would spend a short time with her after Hubert's departure, for as the Hall was now thinned of its late gay and festive throng, she could devote herself more exclusively to her amusement; but she never could be persuaded to leave her mother, though the latter seconded Cecilia's kind invitation. "I will come over as soon as you like, for the day," said she; "but I can not leave mamma to the care of any one else—not even the kind Rectorites."

Claiming, therefore, this promise, Cecilia one day drove out to fetch her, and on their return noticed, at one of the lodge-gates, a small pony-chaise. Supposing, if she supposed at all about what did not concern her, that it belonged to some one there on business, she passed on, and about five minutes' drive brought within their view the figure of some one, very smartly dressed, walking in the direction of the flower-garden.

"Who is that," asked Cecilia, "who seems to know the place better than the regulations?"

But Constance, who did not recognize the gay shawl and tasty bonnet, shook her head.

"It is Miss Mordaunt, my Lady," said the groom, in reply to her Ladyship's look.

"Ride on then." was the order, given very coolly, "and inform her that this is private property, and show her the warning against intruders, as you see her out."

Juliet, it was really she whose artless simplicity had exposed her to this rebuff, heard the order with burning indignation; and her face became crimson as she also heard the quick canter of the groom hastening to obey.

"Beg pardon, Miss, but this is private property," said he, civilly.

And there being no alternative but for her to retrace her steps, she turned to do so, swelling with mortification and rage; and thus saw who was the companion of the Lady Paramount, and the witness of her humiliation. If she could have cast Constance under the wheels of her cousin's elegant equipage, or under those of her own little vehicle, it was evident that she would have done it with the pleasure or indifference of a Tullia, so malignant was the glance she darted—as, closely followed by the groom, she swept by.

Wholly indifferent to her love or hate, Lady Hurstwood, without vouchsafing the least remark, calmly drove on—not so the gentle Juliet. The pretty pony, a great favorite with Mrs. Captain, was made to feel the young lady's woes, by sundry lashes and switches, till lashed and switched beyond even a pony's endurance, he flew along so as to leave no cause for urging; and Juliet, now rising to lash out the fury she had lashed in, and to beat him into a sober pace, was jerked out—and while the lad who was with her fell into some soft mud, and escaped with a whole skin but torn habiliments. she not only spoiled her gay attire, but for a long time her pretty face, which had an ugly wound on the cheek, was obliged to be eclipsed by a profusion of ringlets—too profuse to be becoming.

Nor was this all; for while her tender mother was busy plastering up the wound and bathing the bruises, she, who had learned from her muddy servant what had happened, seized the opportunity of administering a little healing to the mind and

feelings which were evidently ill disposed and out of order; or this model young lady would never have exposed herself to an ignominious ejectment as a trespasser; but, like medicine invariably, this was so unpalatable, that the patient was refractory, and refused to swallow it quietly; and was then threatened, like a naughty child, with her uncle's displeasure—which proved no empty threat, but a very unpleasant reality, so that for some time the agent's abode was not wholly tenanted by peace and love—for while mother and daughter, "like sweet *belles* jangling out of tune," carried on their wordy warfare, "fell discord reigned, and fury dire."

Juliet, who, by some process of ratiocination peculiar to those who are pupils of the green-eyed monster, considered Constance as the cause of this disgrace, secretly vowed to visit all these mishaps on her unconscious head. She had always hated her with a vindictive and peculiar hatred; and now this rival—yes, such was her insane presumption—though partly Hubert's fault—this successful rival, who had witnessed the insult, should pay dearly for all she now suffered.

Self-willed and daring, however, as she was, Juliet would hardly have ventured on such a proceeding as that of intruding on the Hurstwood grounds, had she not heard that the noble owners had gone to spend the day at some distance—for she had both sense and pride enough to avoid his Lordship after the unceremonious stop he had put to their floricultural meetings—and it was by the invitation of the head gardener's son, who gave her the information, that she had taken this occasion to go for some flowers and fruit which he had also promised her. But Lord Hurstwood had gone alone—her Ladyship, as we see, went to the Priory for Constance.

Nor was this the only indignity the roving habits of those young scions of the Mordaunt family brought on themselves.

Augustus, whose education was carried on in France, had returned to Seabrooke for a long holiday. He had always been greatly disliked, on account of his impudent air of assumption, his mischievous propensities, and many other habits, the result of his mother's foolish indulgence.

Gradually Mrs. Captain's original popularity faded away, and there were now very few in the village who cared to be on terms of intimacy with her. But as she often had very fine friends from London, whom she visited in return, this, she did not pine about. Augustus soon found out his sister's secrets, among others, her clandestine and frequent drives to the Hall; and threatening to tell his mother of this, and slyly alluding to Hubert also, she fell into his power, which, as was to be expected, he used like a tyrant. He made her introduce him to the Hall, meaning the lodges and garden, and once there, he was soon intimate with the stable-yard and its inhabitants, horses, dogs, men, and boys.

One of the men had promised to give him a capital little terrier, and Augustus was frequently there to watch and overlook the education of the little animal; but when the family returned, he received a hint to make himself scarce.

Now as the sisters three ordained, a few days after Juliet's expulsion, which she had entreated her mother not to mention to him, he was lounging along the Hurstwood private drive, whistling, with his hands in his pockets, in rather a low, raffish style, and making his way toward the stables, when the trot of horses' feet warned him that he had chosen an unfavorable time for attending the quadruped school. He turned his head and saw her Ladyship's little park phaeton advancing at a smart pace, and turning a corner, which would bring him in full sight. Quick as thought, he darted under a wide-spreading tree; but my lady's eyes were as quick as his feet—she had seen him through a sudden opening; and really thinking he was some mischievous boy who had come after the birds, which she had given strict orders to have unmolested, she drove to the spot, where the supposed delinquent fancied himself safely concealed, and handing her whip to the servant who attended her desired him to make the offender feel her verbal commands, as he had not attended to the painted ones

The man who related this and the former scene, in which he had also taken part, to his fellow-servants and a few chance listeners, declared "he was ready to burst with inside laughter to see her Ladyship handling the ribbons so coolly and cleverly, while he turned out the agent's fine-gentleman nephew, who ran like lightning, when he cracked the whip, just," he said, with a knowing wink, and laying his finger along his nose, "to obey my lady;" but some knew better—and that he was not sorry to pay an installment of a grudge he owed the agent for by-gone favors.

Be this as it may, Augustus took to his heels, inwardly vowing he would never be so caught again; while still all-unconscious that she had offered a fresh affront to the Mordaunt escutcheon, Lady Hurstwood drove about park and country, looking so handsome and so happy, that many who had shaken their heads when they heard of the projected marriage, were now among the loudest to declare they had always thought she was just the wife to suit his Lordship, and he the husband to suit her.

CHAPTER XLV.

"Why, how now, Madam Flirt?
If you must thus chatter,
And are for flinging dirt,
Let's try who bes can spatter,
Madam Flirt?"
Beggar's Opera.

Now Mrs. Sims kept the little haberdashery shop at Seabrooke, whence emanated almost all the finery and fashion worn by those of the feminine gender in the village who ranked below the "county families." Mrs. Curtis, the doctor's wife, for instance, was a constant customer; all the substantial and wealthy farmers' wives patronized her wares; and as she was also mother to the only dressmaker the place boasted of, she was a person who thought she had a right to hold up her head with the best.

Her younger daughter, Betsey, helped in the shop, as well as in the work-room. Ann, or as

she thought proper to be called since her visit to London, for the purpose of being "finished off," Miss Aunie, presided over the millinery and gown department, and altogether they were an industrious and very respectable family.

There was always a kind of deferential manner observed by them toward the housekeepers and ladies' maids of the "families" and their guests; for the patronage of these prime ministers was well worth securing—as it frequently gave them the honor of a visit from the ladies themselves; while Mrs. and Miss Vernon and the Priory young ladies, who often spent money there, were cited by the whole family as "your real nobility—none of your uppish sort, who are afraid of being civil to those of a lower rank than themselves."

When first Mrs. Captain Mordaunt and all her grand silks and fashions appeared, she created as much commotion and sensation in this little village sphere as the discovery of a new planet among savants, and as her aim was to become popular, so it was her cue to be affable, gracious, condescending, and chatty. She occasionally showed Ann Sims her dresses and finery, before she permitted the profane eyes of the public to have that pleasure; all the wealth of Juliet's wardrobe was also spread out before her admiring gaze; and in return, the latter, who, though well supplied with money, never had any to spare, would often have a ribbon or neckerchief a real bargain, now and then, indeed, a present.

Gradually the intimacy increased—and when it reached the zenith, like other more movable things, gradually it declined.

Mrs. Sims, it is true, kept up an appearance of civility, quoting a proverb to the butcher's wife, her great crony, about "holding a candle to somebody—" the rest was lost in nods and winks, which the butcher's wife seemed fully to comprehend. But she no longer allowed Betsey to walk about with Juliet, nor Ann to take tea so often with Mrs. Captain; adroitly freeing herself from the dilemma, by saying, her girls had their *honest* living to gain, and must not be spoiled by associating with those who were different from them; all which excuses were graciously accepted, and the little equivoque interpreted as a compliment—till, after a long absence, Mrs. Captain found, on her return with Juliet, that her popularity had suffered—her influence was on the wane—she was no longer booked to win on the favorite—in short, people looked askance.

Various causes had combined to produce this effect—rumors of a very unfavorable character were rife; and Colonel Templeton's frequent visits had become the talk of all—the agent was disliked for his conduct about the farms, and other acts of petty tyranny and insolence. Augustus, who had been spending his holidays there, was the very head and front of all the low mischief that took place. Juliet angled too openly for Victor or Hubert, and was pronounced a bold, confident minx by all prudent mothers, in the hearing of their daughters; and above all, and to crown all, Mrs. Captain, just before her departure, had had some very fine friends, very fine indeed, staying with her, and she had neither called on any one with them, nor invited any one to call on them; though they went driving about, day after day, who but they? So coolness grew to silent contempt, and that at length burst into speaking impertinence—the tongue is truly an unruly member, especially a woman's—and looks and tossings of the head spoke with an eloquence peculiar to themselves; and there wanted now but one move to cry "checkmate," and open a breach that could never be closed—it was the few last grains which broke the camel's back—the rose-leaf which made the cup run over; and when things are thus over-ripe, the gentlest zephyr shakes them down.

So it happened, that when Mrs. Captain entered the little shop, about a week after Augustus had fled from the crack of the whip, Mrs. Sims, at first, hardly recognized her!

"Oh! Mrs. Mordaunt," she said, at length, looking over her spectacles, but still not rising—but that might be because Betsey was at her post, and it would be needless for two to wait on one customer. "And what can we possibly show *you?*" a slight emphasis, in a very dry tone.

Now all this was remarkably ungrateful of Mrs. Sims, for Mrs. Captain had come for some common calico, which she knew she should find there as cheap and good as in any great town—besides, she began to feel that the loss of her popularity was not an affair to be pooh-poohed as if she had mislaid an old glove—and she determined to see what she could do so as to regain it—at any rate, in part. For this purpose she had arranged a round of shoppings which should bring her into contact with many of her former worshipers, whom she resolved, by wheedling or bullying, by flattering or frightening, to bring back to the old faith.

She therefore had, in a most amiable mood, entered the shop of her once most bigoted convert, Mrs. Sims. But, alas! how little encouragement does virtue receive! a melancholy truth, as she was destined to experience; for, justly provoked at this unbecoming behavior in a paltry village shopkeeper—she cast her good intentions to the winds and took her revenge instead.

"I dare say I have come on a hopeless errand," she said with a scornful smile, while her large bright eyes looked disdainfully around, "for I was silly enough to think I might, by chance, match this ribbon," daintily touching the strings of her fashionable bonnet.

"Betsey," said her mother, coloring, and speaking sharply, "hand down those ribbons Juliet was pulling about the other day, though she could not afford to buy any."

"Do you mean Miss Mordaunt?" asked Mrs. Captain, with assumed indifference and calmness.

"Yes, I mean your girl, your daughter, I suppose, Juliet?"

"You are more free than welcome," was the dignified rebuke; "the day, I think, is long long enough for Miss Juliet Mordaunt."

"I do not know that it is, unless I choose to think so as well," was the tart reply; "at any rate, Lord Hurstwood's grooms do not think so."

"Woman, are you mad?" cried the incensed half of the defunct hero, her black eyes glaring.

"No," replied Mrs. Sims, half closing hers, pursing up her mouth, and nodding her head

with short and quick nods, like some China Joss in a passion—"neither mad nor bad;" and she then tossed her head back, and drew her breath with a significant "hem!" as much as to say, "rhyme for you now, presently, if you provoke me, you shall have reason;" and, almost restored to her usual good temper by the discovery of this latent talent for poetry, which surprised her as much as M. Jourdain was, when he found he had unknowingly been talking prose all his life, she repeated: "Neither mad nor bad—nor my daughters either. Thank goodness! *I* run no risk of the ducking-stool, nor my girls of being horsewhipped out of the Hall grounds, as your fine miss was one day—and your nest-stealing boy the next."

"Now this passes patience," began Mrs. Captain; but Mrs. Sims, to use her own expression when relating the scene, was up, both figuratively and literally, as, walking from behind the counter, the better to confront her antagonist, she said, "It had not need—for you will want a pretty large stock of that same commodity, Mrs. What's-your-name, before you and yours have run out your rigs—look after your brazen baggage at home, and stop her from looking after all the men, from the young 'squire of the Hill, to the horse-boy at the Hall—look after that rogue in the shell, your impudent varlet of a son. Ask what is thought of you and your master, and you will need plenty of paticnce—patience, indeed"—the very word was suggestive of her own waste of this virtue—"and I tell you what, get out of my honest, decent place directly, and never show your impudent face here to an honest man's honest widow and her decent girls, or I'll send for the beadle to turn you out."

It would be impossible for words to convey a just idea of the rage which literally made Mrs. Captain speechless during this long and remorseless harangue; she pressed with such unconscious, but uncontrollable violence on the top of a small glass case, which contained some choice specimens of the trade, that she crushed it right through, severely wounding her hand. Then, roused by the pain to recollection, and the use of her tongue, and bursting with passion, she glared at the fiery little shopkeeper, and shaking her fist, said, with a look that would have struck her down, could looks ever do so—"Bitterly shall you rue this insolence, you detestable, trumpery old woman! I'll have my foot on your neck yet;" and she banged the door with such fury, that the meek little bell, which rarely emitted more than a very humble tinkle, was so terrified at its own unusual clamor, that it shook for more than five minutes after the fierce assault it had sustained; during which time the roused Amazon had hastened home, and vented her fury on all who approached, and especially on Juliet, whom she considered the chief cause of this audacious attack.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"The blackest ink of Fate was sure my lot,
And when she writ my name, she made a blot."
The Rehearsal.

How truly might Helen tell her mother that there was but one cloud in her bright sky, and that was, that they never met.

How industrious was this sweet young wife about her small domain—how eager to become acquainted with all the mysteries of housekeeping—how anxious to arrange every thing for Reginald's comfort—dear Reginald! how was it possible to do too much for him? She only feared he never could understand how deeply, how devotedly she loved him. And then the pretty little air of independence with which she transacted her affairs, and the look of experience she tried to assume while supplying the household wants—sometimes, spite of herself, obliged to refer to Gretchen—and above all, the demure matronly sternness she would affect, when she allowed herself the pleasure of walking out alone, to meet that husband so beloved, when he returned home: and the handsome face, with its deep loving eyes that then met her, and richly repaid her all, with a look and smile that told of undiminished affection.

Ah! mother! ah! Constance! all this *was* a loss to you.

Ashley was their frequent guest—indeed, he said he was so happy when with them, that they must turn him out when he came too often.

"Too often, brother Ashley!" said Helen; "what do you take us for, that you talk such nonsense?"

"Not such nonsense as Reginald was talking as he came hither; but of this, Helen, you shall be judge. You need not look ready to challenge me," he continued, as Reginald made a gesture of impatience; "this then it is. He has received an invitation from Mr. Lester, the publisher, to meet a few literary men at dinner, and meditates a refusal, because you can not accompany him."

"It is rather difficult, dear Helen," said Reginald, "to make all this quite clear to you—but Ashley is too precipitate in saying I meditated a refusal; I merely hesitated till I could consult you."

"If you hesitated because you doubted my cheerful acquiescence in any plan you think right, hesitate no longer. I am the wife of a professional and literary man," she said, with a look of pride exceedingly becoming, so thought Reginald; "and it would be as absurd for me to think of going with you to every dinner-party, as to go with you to Westminster Hall or the printing-office. No, dear husband, let me help, not mar, your prospects."

"Help, you most assuredly do," was his reply, "and therefore I shall go."

True to his promise, Mr. Turner expressed a wish to his sister that she would call on Mrs. West, a wish she lost no time in gratifying: and on her return gave him such an account of the vision of beauty she had seen, that he laughingly told this to Reginald, and requested permission to pay his respects to this fair prize also—a permission the proud husband readily gave; and as the discerning old gentleman was as much pleased with her intelligence, as his sister with her beauty, a most friendly succession of calls followed; and though Helen, on many accounts, declined entering much into society, she was pleased to have secured so sensible an acquaintance as Miss Turner proved to be.

The Westroughs, who had made common cause

with Reginald, when Lord Ernest's marriage had so suddenly blighted his prospects, were particularly friendly.

When parliamentary duties required his Lordship to be near London, they resided at Hendon, on account of the delicate health of Lady Westrough and one of her daughters. The latter, good-tempered girls, often drove over to fetch Helen to spend the morning at their pretty villa, whence she always returned loaded with fruit and flowers.

The youngest was the invalid; the second, with whom, at one time, it was hoped Reginald might be smitten, was now engaged to a middle-aged but wealthy Baronet; the eldest, Lady Louisa, rumor said, had been slighted by one who had professed love—she was thirty; but, spite of her age and disappointment, was cheerful and amiable, and especially disposed to show Helen any attentions the latter might find agreeable.

"I have had a visit from Stacey," said Ashley, one day, to Reginald, when the latter returned from an interview with Mr. Lester.

"And what has the man of genius been doing all this time?"

"You remember my telling you that I called at Kensington a few weeks after we dined with him—but he had not returned from his noble friend's house. As it is too far to go merely for the ceremony of leaving a card, I wrote to say I should be glad to know when he returned, as I had a few friends to whom I should like to introduce him; but as my note remained unanswered, I concluded they were still away—indeed, your affairs so claimed attention, that I rarely thought of him. This morning he called; they have changed their residence, and have temporary lodgings near Portman Square. But I can not help fearing that all is not right with him. Stacey never asked me to call—seemed dreadfully out of spirits, and when I asked after Mrs. Stacey, he replied, 'Oh, poor Susan is not very well;' altogether, I do not like the look of it."

"What is to be done?" asked Reginald.

"I hardly know; he, however, promised to call or write when they were settled; but I have a suspicion, which makes me uncomfortable about the gay, thoughtless fellow."

"I shall see Lester again before I go home," said Reginald; "of course I shall not inquire; but he may say something, as I know Stacey owes him several articles for his magazine, and the conclusion of a poem began months ago. Stacey has had the money, but how or when Lester will have the rhyme is another and doubtful matter; and I know he is rather irritated at having so often to apologize to the public for a delay in the conclusion of more than one contribution."

Ashley was quite right in his suspicions—Stacey and his wife paid a round of visits to one fashionable mansion after another, till both felt the necessity of returning to replenish their purse and renew their finery; though how this was to be done, neither of them well knew; and on reaching the villa the difficulty was rather alarmingly increased, for they found a man in possession, and another ready for Stacey, who was, in a summary manner, conveyed to the lock-up house, till the debt for which he was arrested should be paid.

The landlord had written several letters demanding payment of the rent, of which now nearly three months was due; these Stacey said he had never received, though it was difficult to convince a man of regular business habits that such was the truth. Probably they had been forwarded; but the movements of the Staceys were so uncertain, that even that was doubtful. There was little in the villa that did not already belong to the landlord—tradesmen all round now rose *en masse;* the livery-stable keeper was furious, and poor Mrs. Stacey, terrified and weeping, accompanied her husband, till some other shelter could be provided.

He wrote to some of his friends who were in town—to this appeal some, once more, responded; a compromise was effected, a second floor engaged, and the rent paid in advance. They had been there a fortnight, and Stacey was now really busy and in earnest; having already propitiated the justly angry publisher by completing one of the unfinished articles.

Such, in substance, was Mr. Lester's report, which he felt it no breach of confidence to make to Reginald; but he did not then know that Mrs. Stacey, ill and frightened at the new scene of life in which she had to sustain a sad part, had been confined that very day, and so unexpectedly, that she and her infant were but very scantily supplied with what both so much needed.

This additional information Ashley learned the next morning from Stacey, who, really fond of his wife, came to him in a state bordering on distraction. Ashley, always prompt in kindness, placed a check in Stacey's hand, went to Mr. Turner, and briefly saying that Miss Turner's help was now sadly needed, asked permission to apply to her in this emergency.

"Go to her yourself; I have hardly time to speak to you just now," he replied, scarcely raising his eyes from a paper he was reading.

And Ashley did go; and before night another room—it was but an attic—was prepared, a nurse engaged, and several other comforts supplied, "till," as Miss Turner said, "they could see their way."

Stacey, poor fellow, worked unremittingly; and though he said, with tears in his eyes, that sorrow and anxiety left no room for wit, he proved that the two former—unwelcome guests though they be in a man's bosom—could spur and stimulate him to some purpose; and that if they bullied and hectored so as to scare wit and humor, they were rare magnets in attracting industry and perseverance.

Lester, when he saw the results, swore a round oath that it was a shame talent and genius, which could delight the literary and intellectual, should be wasted upon empty-headed, though noble fools; and he expressed an earnest hope that Stacey had at length discovered his real strength, and the best way of rendering it profitable.

When Helen heard this sad history, she immediately offered her services, which were accepted, but limited by Miss Turner to such help as her skillful needle afforded, in preparing articles of clothing for the mother and babe.

"My dear Mrs. West, your presence can do no good at this moment; besides," she continued, "this is one of those cases in which we are in

great danger of allowing our benevolence to frustrate its own designs—this is one of the dilemmas of genius—more difficult to manage than a case of lunacy. I have heard the whole from Mr. Vernon, and we agree admirably as to what is our wisest course. *Just now*," with emphasis, "Mr. Stacey has a lucid interval, and it is astonishing what he has done. Have you read his little poem, 'On my First-born,' and the exquisite manner in which he works out his motto, 'Born to sorrow, as the sparks fly upward?'"

"I have," replied Helen, tears springing to her eyes as she remembered it well; "it speaks many a mournful and many a healthy truth, expressed with a terseness and vigor which alike banish all morbid sentiment, though imagination and grace are evident in every line. Surely, from a mind capable of what he has lately done, we may hope for great things still."

"I wish I had a little more of that animating feeling, as regards the stability and perseverance of this gifted author," said Miss Turner; "but—well, we must wait patiently. Two such friends as Mr. West and Mr. Vernon are, to him, worth the whole army of the aristocracy. Not that I have any disrespectful prejudice against nobility; on the contrary, it contains names which I highly esteem. What I mean is, that, unfortunately, Mr. Stacey's acquaintance with title and rank will, I fear, always exercise an injurious influence over him; he has too much vanity, and too little pride and self-respect to be safely trusted among merely noble associates. In language, he is self-sufficient and self-reliant; not so in action. He has not enough moral independence; so that were he to mingle with the most learned and sensible of those who adorn our peerage, he would be trying to convert them into patrons and bestowers of that place and fame which he should resolve to owe only to himself. But while I have been haranguing, you have been making up a most useful parcel, for which I thank you in the name of those who can not."

CHAPTER XLVII.

"He has brought with him such an inclination to talebearing, that he disturbs both himself and all the neighborhood."—*Spectator*.

STACEY honorably kept his promise, and worked bravely at his duties, till his wife was so far recovered as to bear removing to more comfortable quarters. Helen proposed that a small house near theirs should be prepared as their residence; and after discussing the matter with Miss Turner, it was agreed that Stacey should come and look at it. The rent was very moderate, and one respectable servant, with a young girl for the baby, could easily do all that their scanty means required. He came, and was delighted with the sweet air and lovely prospect; and well he might be, poor fellow, after having for weeks been the occupant of a London attic, which had been both bedroom and study. A quarter's rent was paid in advance, and all was to be ready for wife and baby in the course of the next day. This Helen undertook to see after.

"Good heavens!" said he to Ashley, when they left her, scarcely, even in her presence, able to restrain his enthusiastic admiration, "what a miracle of beauty Mrs. West is! She shall be my Muse, my Inspiration; when I am dull and stupid I shall merely go 'and gaze upon her beauty, nothing more.' Her eyes will serve me instead of a Pegasus, to set the streams of Hippocrene flowing in murmurs sweet, graceful, and pure as herself. I hear," he added after a pause, "that she has a sister—do they resemble each other?"

"Only in being both beautiful—some give the preference to Miss Templeton," replied Ashley, briefly; and, changing the subject, he said, "Do not let Mrs. Stacey delay her removal after the morning, as Mrs. West intimated she would be there to receive her."

And when, in accordance with this injunction, they arrived early, there was Helen to meet them; and she had so decked and arrayed the little parlor, and received them so sweetly, that the poor mother, still weak, had a violent fit of weeping, which she, however, declared had done her a great deal of good.

Something, at any rate, had done good, both to her and her delicate nursling, for in the course of a few weeks they looked quite bright and healthy; and again the stimulus of vanity being given to her husband, aided by a few pinches from necessity, he worked on so steadily and successfully as to encourage his friends to hope, not only that he would easily weather this storm, but that he would never risk encountering such another.

About this time Ashley announced his intention of going to Seabrooke; they had been expecting him so long and so often, he would no longer defer giving himself this pleasure.

"Oh, Ashley," said Helen, when she heard of this, "just to fix on this time, when mamma and Constance are at Craigalan. Why did you not go before?"

"Because I could not," he replied; "and because, as they are away, the stronger reason that I should go, and, by my humble presence, try in some degree to compensate for their absence."

And, to the great joy of all at the Rectory, he remained there several weeks, during which time he heard from various quarters many things which gave him ample materials for thought. Indeed, the very day after his arrival, as he went to call on the families with whom he was intimate, a heavy shower of news fell on him.

During breakfast, he had heard from his father that the Priory estate had been cleared of every bit of timber that could be cut, and that lately the Colonel, it was whispered, had been borrowing largely, for which, if true, the Doctor said, he must be paying dear, on account of the tenure by which he held the property. Cooper was universally disliked; and from expressions which Mr. Morton had repeatedly let fall or openly used, there was no doubt but that the whole family were disreputable people.

Caroline added, it was the talk of the village that Juliet and the boy had, by order of Lady Hurstwood, been threatened with a horsewhipping if again found trespassing about the Hall; and though she did not believe in the report of the threat, she knew from Constance that her cousin

had sent her groom to see the girl safe out at the lodge.

Lady Dallas told him, as a great secret, that it was hinted very broadly, Hubert Forrester and the young beauty at the agent's were very friendly!

"Impossible," cried Ashley, his handsome face wearing a look not usually seen there—"engaged to—to another—it is impossible!"

"Perhaps it is," she said, and then went on to prove that it was not, by adding, "I only know that Mr. Victor Morton expressed a strong wish that Forrester would start before mischief came of delay; but for further particulars I must refer you to Caroline, to whom, *of course*, he would be more communicative than to any one else."

Pretty pickings there for one day's work—and yet they are not all.

He called at Forest Hill, where he was as cordially received as he was at their town residence, whenever Mr. Forrester felt it necessary to be there, during the session of Parliament; but here he found insinuations, rather than assertions, against Colonel Templeton. Mr. Forrester also, in the course of conversation, intimated that he disliked early marriages; in this he was consistent, for he had waited till he was forty before he found his Eve; and he now declared that, much as he and Mrs. Forrester felt at parting from Hubert, they had become quite reconciled to the separation, as it gave him an opportunity of seeing life before he settled at Hargraves.

And when, with his wallet full of these scraps, Ashley returned to the Rectory, he resolved to arrange his fragments, and see what his mother and Caroline could add thereto.

First, he had a very particular motive, but of this he said nothing, to learn all he could that related to Hubert's conduct with regard to Juliet; he owned that he could not believe half that he heard, still there was enough left for suspicion; and this justified him in desiring to know, if possible, the truth; and he related the contributiou Lady Dallas had given.

Caroline blushed violently as her brother repeated the inuendo—and when his look expressed surprise at her emotion, she drew nearer to him, and putting his arm around her, laid her head on his shoulder.

"Presently," said she; "and now, mamma, tell him what Mr. Morton said."

"He told us," said Mrs. Vernon, "that soon after his son's second and final return from Germany, Cooper had, on several occasions, met him, and under some pretext or another—at one time to show him a foreign curiosity, at another to ask him to translate a German letter—had invited him to his house, where he was introduced to Mrs. Captain Mordaunt and her daughter. That something, Mr. Morton did not say what, induced Victor to mention this to his father. The result was, that, by his advice, he ceased to call at Cooper's. In short, Ashley, to quote Mr. Morton's words, there seems, no doubt, a scheme was on foot to entrap Victor, his father's reputed fortune being the temptation, and the son's open, but fearless and frank manners, giving hope of success. What I am now going to add is little more than surmise. Failing in this plot, probably Hubert was the next to be tried."

"Nothing venture, nothing have," said Ashley.

"Exactly so; and here they seemed more likely of success, from the character of their intended prey. Hubert has absolutely no knowledge of life or the world. All he has seen of either was during his short tour in Germany with Victor, and his equally short residence at Oxford. You know that he is gay to giddiness—sweet tempered—and easily duped—and, I fear, both vain and irresolute."

"Ah, Constance!" burst from Ashley's lips.

But his mother, without remarking it, proceeded: "Let us, however, be just; I believe that since his engagement to Constance, he has rarely been to Cooper's, though this girl has constantly been contriving to meet him; she is now at Paris with her mother—at least, so it is said."

There was a long pause; at last Ashley said calmly, and Heaven knows what it cost him to do so, "I can not excuse Hubert, even assuming that this conduct has no deeper meaning than we are disposed to give it—still it is much to know that lately he has become aware of what is due to propriety and honor; but, mother, do the Forresters really approve of this engagement?"

"I hardly know how to reply; but from various observations I have been almost forced to make, I fancy not; Mr. Forrester has never been cordial with the Colonel, and has been sadly prejudiced against them all, since poor dear Helen left home."

"Helen," said Ashley, and now he really gave way to his feelings; "Helen, poor, persecuted girl! why, if Reginald had been away, or ill, or by any means unable to have saved her, I myself would have snatched her from Lord Hurstwood rather than have permitted such a cruel deed."

"And married her yourself, my son?"

"No, mother," he replied; and the tone and the look forbade all further jesting.

"And now, what is this about our dear Carry?" and the brother's voice this time was gentle and musical, and the noble face wore a touching expression, it looked so fond and tender.

"Ah, Ashley," said his sister, "can not you guess?"

"Well, I will try—the young hermit has fallen in love, and taught our sister to do the same."

"Yes," she said, "and papa and mamma have given their consent; and, Ashley, you give yours also, do you not?"

"Right willingly; only we shall not like to have you carried all over the world with this good-looking rover—or settled away from us on the Norfolk property."

"It will not be either," said Mrs. Vernon, "and that assurance removes the only difficulty. Mr. Morton means them to remain here, not at the Hermitage, so you need not laugh at the idea of three making a crowd; but he thinks of buying Bridgend, which is not many miles off, and there they will be fixed—but not yet—Victor will be away at least two years."

"Then this induced my father to urge me so strongly to come down without delay?"

"It did—a very long letter from Mr. Morton will explain all to you; last night he could not enter on the subject, and to-day, at Caroline's request, it was to have been delayed till evening; but now you know the great fact, Caroline will like to tell you the particulars."

"No, mamma, I should much prefer that you would."

"Very well, my dear; only instead of Ashley having a story of the true orthodox size, in three volumes, he will have a very slender pamphlet. But to commence. Not very long before Victor left for his present voyage, both the Doctor and myself fancied, that unless Caroline felt something more than kindness and friendship for him, his departure could not be too much hastened; but as this drew near, we became a little anxious about her. Do not interrupt me, my dear, your dignity is safe in my hands. At length Hubert and Victor set off, accompanied by Mr. Morton. A week ago, a long letter arrived from the latter, dated Lisbon; in it he formerly requests us to sanction his son's addresses to our daughter. Victor, it seems, could no longer keep his secret; he began to fear all manner of dangers, and in a letter, inclosed in his father's, he tells us all we before suspected—and tells it so well, that I believe—is it not so, Caroline?—we shall all consent."

"But why not propose before he left?"

"Because he heard us, as well as his father, express ourselves very strongly against long engagements, after we had been talking of Hubert and Constance, when I said I was sorry one so young as she, and who knew so little of society, should enter it so shackled. I wonder when we shall be cured of making rash speeches, for behold me, voluntarily, in precisely the situation I deprecated."

"Caroline," said Ashley, "I am very much pleased with the brother-in-law you destine to give me; and so I shall write and tell him."

"Dear Ashley, how kind you always are; but I shall soon be coming to see you in London. Mamma will take me to Mr. Morton's sister-in-law and his two daughters, and we are promising ourselves the great delight of often meeting Helen, and Mrs. Loftus, who has just returned from visiting Charles and Fanny."

"That will be charming, indeed," said he; and then he began to give them a full account of Reginald and Helen, their sayings and doings, of which his hearers could not have too much.

"Does my father visit much at Hurstwood?" asked Ashley, turning the conversation.

"Yes," replied his mother, smiling at the significance of his tone, "and so must his son Ashley. Nothing can be more kind and polite than they are, and Mrs. Templeton has so completely exonerated Lord Hurstwood, as to make him appear to have been more sinned against than sinning—at least, it is evident that is the view she wishes her friends to take; and I own that I should regret having an opinion that obliged us to refuse their friendly overtures. Cecilia is much too excellent for us to be comfortable in the belief that she has married one we could not tolerate."

"I much more than tolerate Lord Hurstwood," said Caroline; "he is both so gentle and gentlemanlike to his wife—and I believe the wildest wish she could imagine would be gratified with pleasure and eagerness—I think she is more charming than ever."

"To-morrow, then, we will ride over, and you shall introduce me."

This was done, and Ashley saw nothing to controvert his sister's opinion. An early day was then fixed for them to come over and lunch, and when this was settled, Lady Hurstwood said, "My dear Lord, I am going to walk with Mr. Vernon to my new flower-garden—the chaise shall follow us, and then he can drive me to your ingenious device in rock work. Caroline, take care of his Lordship, who, in return, will show you some beautiful intaglios and mosaics he collected when in Italy."

And then, arm-in-arm with Ashley, she gayly led him to her beautiful garden, and made him tell her all that the time would allow her to hear about Helen, for whom she expressed the most affectionate interest.

"I know," she said, when he had concluded, "that my aunt Ellinor corresponds with her, but still, Mr. Vernon, how dreadful never to have met for so many months."

"It is sad," he replied, "but Mrs. Templeton values too greatly what she calls this connived-at exchange of letters, to provoke a prohibition by grasping after more; so we must leave it to time."

"I anticipate some favorable result from Constance's marriage, who might make the reconciliation a condition—what think you?"

But he seemed not to have heard her, and remarked, that he had had no idea the views from the Hall grounds were so extensive and beautiful.

A dinner party at Hurstwood gave him a still more favorable impression of his noble host, and convinced him that in choosing her Ladyship to wear the rejected coronet he had done wisely; and had he asked either of them a question, usually so dangerous, as to whether they could confirm this opinion, both would have replied in the affirmative.

Cecilia's good sense, her truth of character and word, became daily more valuable and refreshing to one whose life had been spent in the petty and paltry intrigues of continental courts;—whose mind had been taught to move through the sinuositics of diplomatic labyrinths, and who had been accustomed to see the whole drama of state-craft performed by complex machinery, secret springs, hidden agencies, and masked actors. He was charmed with her frank, confiding nature—he was proud of his handsome and dignified wife. Nor any the less so, for having won her easily—it spoke well for his powers of conquest—while his boundless generosity and indulgence, which at first won her ready gratitude, at length awoke her love.

And Ashley, when he left Seabrooke, and was once more stirring his tea in the little cottage, drew from his store various stray scraps of news which made them all glad—among the rest, the picture he drew of Cecilia and her future was commented on with real pleasure.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"Il est aussi facile de se tromper soi-même sans s'en apercevoir qu'il est difficile de tromper les autres sans qu'ils s'en aperçoivent."—La Rochefoucauld.

While the Templetons were in Scotland, where every day brought some fresh scheme of pleasure and amusement, an event occurred which openly

drew the attention of Reginald to a subject that often secretly occupied his thoughts—namely, Old Court.

For months it had given no more sign of life or movement than if it had been Tadmor in the Desert. Occasionally the Westroughs named it to Helen with no very respectful or friendly tone; for Lady Anne, the bride-elect, considered herself defrauded and swindled out of five thousand pounds, which her uncle Ernest had always promised to any of his nieces on their marriage. "Now," she said, "the harpies who reign there will take care to intercept all such acceptable waifs."

Reginald had written to announce his marriage—but no reply was sent—not even a line from old Roberts.

And now, behold! when conjecture had grown weary and curiosity faded away, on returning from a London shopping expedition with one of her daughters, Lady Westrough was astonished to find cards, "Lady Ernest West," "Mrs. Melville," and the direction in a fashionable quarter of the metropolis.

"What is the meaning of this?" she asked, and learned from Lady Ella, the invalid, that two ladies had called, and hearing that she was at home, had sent their cards, and asked if they could have the pleasure of seeing her. This, on the plea of ill health, she had declined; they then left cards for Lord and Lady Westrough, and having inquired when her Ladyship was usually at home, had driven away.

"I am always out." was her Ladyship's command to the servant, as she pointed to the cards, "when these people call;" which they did a few days after.

All this was duly reported to Helen when they next met, embellished with various piquant remarks, which none but vexed ladies can make; she begged for a card to show Reginald, not, as she laughingly remarked, that he might call and pay their debts, but because she thought he ought to inquire whether Lord Ernest were with them.

Reginald, after naming this to Ashley, thought himself justified in making some inquiries in the neighborhood of the ladies' residence, and learned that, except servants, Lady Ernest and her mother were alone. He conjectured that her Ladyship had come to town for medical advice, as she was near her confinement.

"There is some scheme on foot here," said Ashley; "I do not like this arrangement; let me name it to Mr. Turner, and hear what he says."

"If not troubling him, I should be very glad of his opinion."

"No trouble; I am sure he will like it."

And the next day Ashley said, "I am always intruding my affairs on you, sir."

"Your friends' affairs you mean; which of them now?"

"Mr. West's."

"Ah! indeed—what of him? and how can I help?"

"It is a long story," said Ashley.

"Then begin at once, while I have leisure to listen," said Mr. Turner.

Thereupon Ashley entered into the particulars of Reginald's expectations, till he came to the arrival of Mrs. Melville and her daughter in London.

When he concluded, Mr Turner remarked: "It may be all right—previous circumstances, however, will justify you in acting as if it were not; at least, till you are convinced to the contrary. Will Mr. West leave it to us? for I expect, if we take him to our councils, he will be refractory—what say you?"

"I think you are right, so I shall venture at once to banish him."

"Very well—we must send down directly to Old Court. I know the very man—next, we must learn who is the medical man—and what sort of an establishment there is with the ladies in town—here again I can help you;" and almost as he spoke he had written two short notes, sealed and directed them

"I am to dine to-day with the chief justice," said Mr. Turner; "will you breakfast with me to-morrow at eight precisely?"

"I will be punctual."

"Very well—now I am busy."

At eight, Ashley was in Bedford Square, seated at a well-spread breakfast-table, the pleasant figure of Miss Turner presiding, whose eyes were fixed on her brother's face, as he conversed earnestly with Ashley.

"Is Mr. Tebbat here?" he asked of a servant, whom the bell had just summoned; "if so, send him up directly."

"Now, Mr. Tebbat, here are your instructions," said Mr. Turner to a person who had very quietly entered, and remained standing. Ashley was puzzled as he looked at the man, and felt that, had he been desired to describe him, it could have been only by negatives—no phrase suggested itself so appropriate as this: "he seems to be not anything."

"You will not, on any account, be tempted to exceed them," pursued the lawyer; "there is quite scope enough for your ingenuity."

The negative took the paper and rapidly glanced it over.

"Do you understand?"

"Quite, sir;" but he was no longer a catalogue of negatives; both voice and eye were, very decidedly and distinctly, affirmative.

"Then put the paper in that book, where there is money, and lose no time—good-morning."

"Has Styles been here this morning, John?"

"Yes, sir, he said he would walk round the Square, when I told him you were engaged; but I think that is his knock; will you see him now, sir?"

"Bring him up at once;" and enter Mr. Styles, a dapper, neat little man, with a roguish pair of black eyes, and a pleasant little smile; altogether, a little fellow who looked as if for sixpence he would make love to half the housemaids, or cooks either, in the Square—one of those winking, smirking, hat-on-one-side men, who are regular incendiaries among the combustible hearts of the aforesaid species.

"I wish to have these questions answered," said Mr. Turner; and the bright eyes of this Antinous of the area and nursery ran over the list before you could say Jack Robinson.

"Very good, sir; give me a few evenings, I can hardly do it in less."

"Oh, you may have a week, if it will amuse you more."

"Very good, sir," laughing, and showing a fine set of teeth.

"I always breakfast about this time, so you are sure to find me."

"Very good, sir. I wish you good-morning, sir!" with a bow, which included them all; and, with something like grace, he withdrew, but not before his bright eyes had taken a daguerreotype of Ashley.

"He was an actor," said Mr. Turner, in reply to his young friend's look; "so he is now, when he can find an engagement."

"I suppose the Lothario of the piece," observed Ashley.

"Most likely; he is not a bad fellow—but he is vain and quarrelsome, and that keeps him poor. He will sit up half the night to copy old Grey's atrocious hieroglyphics, and then spend the money on a gay waistcoat."

"And the other?"

"Oh, not so good!—but he owes me a debt for help in need, and is grateful when he is not drunk; even then he is trustworthy."

Both agents succeeded marvelously well, because each kept to his usual character—one as a lounging, idle rambler, the other as lover to the lady's-maid and two house-maids. The cook, an old stager, let with the house, knew nothing of her employers worth learning, and was not, therefore, left like Ariadne, or Dido, or any other of the fair deceived, to bewail the false words of the false man

The report of Tebbat was to this effect: He went, as ordered, to Old Court, and, of course, took up his quarters at the public-house. He then began his inquiries, and learned that Lord Ernest had remained much as when we last peeped at him; even the news of Reginald's marriage had failed to disturb the monotony of his existence. If, however, Reginald had not informed Roberts of this important event, it is very unlikely his uncle would ever have heard of it, as the letter to him had never come to hand—that is, to *his* hand; it had probably been lost, through that dreadfully careless medium, the post-office. But Roberts fetched all his little correspondence himself from the small public, and secured the delivery; and there it was that Tebbat became acquainted with him. His Lordship drove out for about an hour every day, and sometimes saw his own doctor—sometimes the clergyman dined with him; but that was all the variety. Now it must be admitted that this dull and dreary life was most aggravating to a young person like her Ladyship, and a woman like her mother, whose talents so eminently fitted her for an active and bustling, if not a useful, position in society; and when Mrs. Melville hinted to her noble son-in-law that Ernesta required medical watching, he said, "Send for Edwards;" and when she slightly turned up her nose at Edwards, he said, "Send for any one you like;" but there was no one within sending-distance whom she did like, for this was not her aim.

In short—but this she did not tell him—Ernesta had been rebellious; she had threatened to kill herself—to run away—any thing but endure this horrible style of living; and her mother had only been able to pacify her by promising a visit to town, where she proposed that she should be confined; after which it would be a round of gayety, parties, and dress.

When Lord Ernest was made to understand that his wife and wife's mother wished to go to London, he readily gave his consent; but when, for the sake of appearances, she hinted that he should accompany them, it was another matter. He would not go without Old Court; but they could not take Old Court—*ergo*, he could not go; they must leave him—and they did.

Mrs. Melville had many reasons for indulging her daughter in this visit to London. She could not be blind to the fact, that the poor girl was looking wretchedly ill; it was of the utmost importance to the furtherance of her plans that her expected grandchild should be strong and healthy: she hated Old Court, as a residence, as much as Ernesta; she also intended to try if she could not, by a *coup de main*, beat down the reserves and prejudices of the Westrough family and their connections, as well as beat up the quarters of former patronesses and benefactors, some of whom, she had good reason to know, would never withstand the combined force of title, a handsome equipage, and a fashionable residence.

But the Westroughs presented such an impenetrable front, that she could not break through it—the connections had either a title, a carriage, or a fashionable house of their own, so hers were of no avail; and thus discomfited and driven from the main body, she fell back on her old allies.

And here her plan seemed more promising for success. Like Sancho, she fancied she had at last attained her government—is there a Dr. Snatch-away at every court?—Wait.

Among the odds and ends picked up by those sharp-sighted, industrious chiffoniers, Messrs. Tebbat and Styles, there was one stray atom upon which both pounced, as if well worth throwing into their basket.

At the small public where Tebbat fixed himself, as he said, for the purpose of *angling*, though the trout-stream was miles away, a young man had frequently taken lodgings for weeks together; perhaps said the landlady, from whom, in the course of gossip, he learned this, he was an artist, though she had never seen any of his drawings—or a poacher; at any rate, as she very sagaciously observed, he must be something—and he seemed to have a particular admiration for Old Court. He had first appeared when Mrs. Melville and her daughter went there, and had been in the neighborhood very often since the marriage of the latter.

Here Styles stepped forth with a piece he had found, and dove-tailing it with the last, it assumed a sort of shape. From the lady's-maid he learned that this was a poor relative whom her lady often helped with small sums of money, unknown to the old one—a classic *soubriquet* by which Mrs. Melville was designated. He was now in town, waiting for some appointment Lady Ernest was to obtain for him, through the influence of her powerful relations.

And is that the nurse?" asked Styles, alluding to a woman in an interesting state, who was domesticated at the hired house.

"Yes, she expects to be confined shortly before my lady, and is to take the young heir"—(heir, of

course, said the inquisitive little man to himself) —"from its birth—her own baby will be brought up by hand, out of the house."

"And the other nurse, where is she?"

"Lor, what does it matter to you?"

"Oh, nothing, I was only thinking when we are married—" a gentle squeeze, and a smart slap in the face for his impudence, administered by her fair hand, was the reply.

And the next day, meeting the upper housemaid "quite promiscus," by appointment, he escorted her on her errand, and suddenly discovering that he was by no means well, asked who attended at her house, remarking, "Of course, he is one of the nobs, a regular big-wig?"

"Indeed he is no such thing," she replied, with a disdainful toss of her floral head; "for a more sneaking, mean little fellow I never saw, and no one seems to know where he comes from."

"Oh, indeed! then I suppose he does not come often?"

"Oh yes he does, every other day, as punctually at one as luncheon does—but I did not come here to be bothered about such as him, with his dirty wristbands and shabby hat;" and Styles, finding he was not likely to gain more useful knowledge at present, soon found means to take the monkey off the back of his Dulcinea, and said—"Now I must, though reluctantly, say farewell—but first tell me when we are to go to the play together?"

"Oh, when you come to fetch me," she replied coquettishly, and hurrying round the corner.

And exactly at one was Mr. Styles on the lookout, nor did he cease to look till he watched the sneaking, mean little fellow in—and out too—nor was he satisfied with his gaze till he had the pleasure of seeing him safe to a shabby little place on the skirts of London, and ascertained that he was the man who answered to the name on the surgery door.

Tebbat added to his previous information, that Roberts seemed quite ignorant any one had meetings with the young lady. He, however, complained bitterly of the discomfort Mrs. Melville had introduced into their peaceful household; and, without ceremony, called her "artful old jade," whenever he mentioned her.

"And what do you make of this?" asked Mr. Turner of Reginald, when with Ashley's help he had arranged all his information.

"I fear," was his reply, "that Mrs. Melville merits Roberts' ungallant designation."

"That I think is pretty clear, and we must watch her, or we shall, perhaps, have more sons and heirs than Providence intended."

Subsequent discoveries and confessions proved that a scheme, somewhat to that effect, had been concocted by the wily mother, who knew that the birth of an heir could alone secure her sway, and probably make such a change in all the arrangements at Old Court as would help to reconcile the refractory Ernesta to her fate.

Accident, however, frustrated all—"the best-laid schemes o' men and mice gang aft agley."

Mrs. Melville, who had succeeded in part of her design, that of dazzling some of her former patronesses, but who was prevented, by her daughter's state of health, from making much display at her handsome house, in compensation for this was never weary of exhibiting her elegant equipage, and in her turn assuming airs of protection and patronage, would frequently call in state and style on her old acquaintance, and condescendingly offer them a seat in the well-appointed carriage.

She was one day indulging this benevolent feeling, and conveying a lady to Kensington, when a sudden scream from the latter caused her to turn her head, and she beheld a riderless horse dashing furiously toward them.

The coachman, who would have been quite equal to this emergency had he been left to himself, distracted by the screams of the lady, and the contradictory orders of Mrs. Melville, lashed one of his horses, a spirited animal, which reared, as she was standing, and threw her across the carriage.

Ernesta, who had sat pale and motionless, alarmed at this, fainted; and when all danger from the runaway horse was long over, she was hastily driven to the first doctor's for aid, and scarcely had she so far recovered as to reach home, than she gave birth to a little girl, who breathed for a few hours only; while the young mother lay for weeks in a most alarming state, and two months elapsed before she could be removed to Old Court, where her husband still obstinately persisted in remaining, in spite of Mrs. Melville's earnest entreaties that he would join them.

Instead of attending to this, he wrote to his lawyer to see that all they needed was abundantly supplied, to pay all the bills, and when Lady Ernest was able to travel, to arrange for her return home.

News of this disaster, and all its concomitants, was brought by Styles, who added, that a new actor had appeared on the scene. This was one of those foul blots on an honorable profession, who never find any job too dirty for their unwashed consciences, or too dishonorable for their callous feelings.

And now Mr. Turner himself interfered. He called on the respectable gentleman who acted for Lord Ernest, and told him what he actually knew, what he also suspected—but he was very plainly told nothing could be done till his Lordship was roused to action—only it was well to watch the enemy, and by threats terrify her from plunging deeper into intrigue and danger; and acting upon this, Mr Turner, in the character of friend to the heir-at-law, wrote to inform her that her machinations were all known to Lord Ernest's family—her plot with the pettifogger, as well as that with the quack. But in relating his interview with Mr. Manning to Ashley, Mr. Turner remarked—"I suspect that I did not tell him much news—and more, that he has by some means got this Jezebel in his power."

So, back went Mrs. Melville, fully resolved that the next heir should be born at Old Court But Ernesta was long before she recovered either health or spirits, while the sight of her mother seemed to fill her with dread as well as dislike; so that she often asked the ancient housekeeper to remain with her, when she peevishly refused admittance to her mother.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"The chains of earth's immurement
Fell from Ianthe's spirit;
They shrank and brake like bandages of straw
Beneath a waken'd giant's strength.
She knew her glorious change." SHELLEY.

AND now the London season approaches, and the papers announce a drawing-room, the first that has been held since Cecilia's marriage; and Lord and Lady Hurstwood arrive to take possession of their town-house, which has been refurnished, with all the splendor becoming their rank and wealth.

And very busy they both are about this drawing-room—for if my lady holds a committee of taste with the court milliner, my lord does the same with the jeweler; and very important he seems to think the subject, judging from his regardless-of-expense orders.

And eminently successful did the result of his consultations prove, when his bride was presented, by his stately relative, the Dowager Duchess of Isleford—for Lady Hurstwood's diamonds were pronounced unrivaled both for taste and value.

Nor was there much difference of opinion about the fair wearer, who was voted the great star of this courtly performance, to the infinite satisfaction of her lord.

"I can tell you, you had a loss," said a brother officer to Captain Mortimer; "the drawing-room was superb."

"So every one says; but I was detained on business at the Horse Guards—not that I care much about these things," said he, yawning, and affecting a *blasé* air; "one pretty much resembles another. But they all report that Lady Hurstwood, or Lady Hurstwood's diamonds, outheroded Herod."

"It was both—upon my soul, I never saw a finer or more dignified woman. Old Hurst has jockeyed famously to have won this prize."

"Halt, there!" said a fine-looking, middle-aged man, who was of the party. "What do you lads mean by old? Why, a fellow is not of age till he is thirty, nor does he come to years of discretion till ten years later. Hurstwood is my junior, and I am only fifty."

"Juvenility is a matter of fancy," replied the first speaker, with a laugh. "Sydney Staples seems to like a long figure in years, as well as in fortune—he already complains that he sold himself a dead bargain."

"Like him; but some one told me that a royal academician is regularly engaged and paid to keep Mrs. Syd's countenance in repair."

"She is right to put a good face on her marriage," was the retort; "if she could paint out Sydney's debts as well as her wrinkles, she might take out a patent. I am sorry to use such a word, but it was absolutely disgusting to see this made-up old Sycorax daubed like some hideous figure-head on a Dutch craft."

"Still, she is to be pitied," said Lord Hurstwood's senior. "Sydney Staples has neither principle nor mercy—and he will soon run through her vast property."

"Well, that is her concern—she married him for his rank and good looks, which will last longer than her money. But what is this Mother Bunch tale about Templeton's little girl! do you know, Morty?"

"Oh! yes—old Hurst—well, then, young Hurst, it seems, went prowling about the country for a wife, and saw this little creature, whereupon he came, saying, 'fee, faw, fum,' and the poor child, with her pinafore at her eyes, and her mouth full of bread-and-butter—these girls are everlastingly eating it—ran roaring away from the ogre, in the utmost terror, and meeting the parish clerk, or something of the same kind, went slap off with him."

"Quite a Templeton trick," remarked the officer; "her grandmother did the same, only she jilted a worthy squire in some out-of-the-way place. And what said Templeton when the young chip started off?"

"Said? not much—but he swore awfully, raged like a stung bear, beat his wife and the other girl, broke some china and furniture, drank lots of wine, and was carried to bed."

"I wish, Mortimer, you would condescend and talk sense, when you converse with any one who can understand it."

"Ah! but that is so rare, for he is sadly addicted to soliloquizing," slyly remarked the brother-in-arms, and then he continued: "Old Chilvers, I hear, is really dying this time."

"It is true—there is no hope—and, by Jove!" said Mortimer, "when one thinks of the miserable artificial life he led, it must be almost a comfort to him to have any thing so real about him as death. I vow when I think of him, and what his vanity and selfishness end in, I am ready to ask the first pretty girl I meet to have compassion on me, and save me from such a fate, by marrying me."

"Better ask your fair cousin," advised the elderly speaker; "report, however, says that you have, and you look guilty. Well, if so, I wish you joy. I married before I was five-and-twenty, with an abundance of nothing but love to begin housekeeping with—but the experiment answered so well, I mean my boys to do the same, if they like, so adieu."

"All very fine for him!" said the officer; "but such women as his wife are not quite so plentiful as blackberries."

Greatly as both Mrs. Templeton and Constance had enjoyed their visit to Scotland, and much as they felt the kindness the Sinclairs had shown, in omitting nothing that could interest them, they both felt glad when they left Edinburgh, where they had remained with some other friends more than a month; and, accompanied by their hospitable relatives, set out for England, whither the Colonel had preceded them.

Though to Mrs. Templeton the Priory, spite of the beauty with which both nature and art combined to clothe it, had few associations connected with happiness or even pleasure, she longed to return to it; for there alone could she contrive to correspond with the banished one, as their uncertain movements, while in the north, had greatly interfered with this; and she felt that one gratification, at least, would be hers, when again settled at Seabrooke.

Nor was Laurette less anxious once more to be at head-quarters, to see what could be done with the fragments of hope, which had been so ruth-

lessly dashed to the earth by Hubert's engagement. It had been arranged by her parents that she should pay a round of visits among her English friends, ending with the marriage of Constance, which it was presumed would take place soon after Hubert's return; Sir Archibald frankly expressing his hope, that she would then choose a husband from several admirers whom she coquettishly kept in suspense, dismiss the rest, and settle, like a douce lassie, into the duties of a happy and sensible wife.

How far was this common-place humdrum finale —at least, as her father meant it—from her intentions! as if, among those on whom she condescended to bestow her smiles, and to whom she doled out barely enough graciousness to keep their hopes alive, there was one who could compare with him who despised the love she had unsought given him.

Hubert, the invincible Hubert, at least toward her, was still the idol she worshiped. Hubert, in love with, engaged to, Constance, was the one she yet hoped to bring to her feet; and difficult as this seemed, she resolved to neglect no means by which it might be effected.

Her infatuation had in no degree blinded her to his faults—these she meant to render subservient to her purpose—his weakness would be her strength; his irresolution rendered her more determined; for these gave her hope—she remembered, and quoted to herself, the saying, that the strong mind governs the weak, and took courage. Had she known more of the world, she would have found that this is very far from being always true.

She had, besides, been so much at Forest Hill, and had had such favorable opportunities of studying and becoming acquainted with his character, that she fancied she knew it thoroughly, and that, skillfully managed, the materials were well adapted to insure success—especially if she also levied such contributions from the weaknesses of his parents as she possessed the art to extract—and taking this view of her case, Laurette decided that it was far from being desperate.

Constance she had never much liked; and as her extraordinary beauty had at one time excited her envy, so now, to a greater extent, did her superior intellect; it was rivaling her where she had thought herself most secure—it was infringing on what she felt was her best claim to admiration—it was therefore unpardonable.

When Constance had so earnestly pleaded for permission to return home with Helen, she had made the girlish promise of continuing her studies, and she fully intended to do all she promised. But events soon thickened powerfully and closely around her, which rendered all these fair resolutions of no effect,—at least in the manner she intended.

Constance was now to go through that course of instruction which none may altogether escape. She was to become a pupil in the university of the world—she was to listen to the harsh teachings of circumstances—to read the bitter experiences and learn the painful lessons of life; and, in recompense, she was to gain self-knowledge, self-guidance, self-respect—she was to acquire a consciousness of her own resources and powers, and of the solemn responsibility for the use she made of them; to find that trials may be made blessings and losses gains; and feeling that her own faults and failings needed forbearance, to be ever ready to extend this to others.

This was the training and discipline to which Constance had been subjected; and to which her loving, noble heart, her imaginative and poetic mind rendered her, at first, refractory.

Her sense of justice was wounded and roused, almost to passionate impatience, when she understood the situation in which her worshiped mother was placed; her brave spirit rose in rebellion against the petty tyranny and overbearing conduct of her father; as she gradually became conscious that the yoke was pressing on herself, she struggled violently against it; and when her sister, her gentle Helen, was so sorely tried, nothing but the assurance that open defiance would only aggravate the evil, restrained the strong expression of her indignation. Happily, however, her love and good sense here made her reasonable. She felt that she no longer loved her father, and oh! the pang this conviction gave her; still, in the character of parent, he had a claim on her outward respect, and with her mother's beautiful and consistent behavior ever at hand to guide and strengthen her, she resolved that no word should ever escape her unbecoming the duty of a child.

It was in this stage of her moral training, which had made her "older than her looks," that she was formally introduced at Lady Hurstwood's wedding; and it was then that the advantages of associating with well-cultivated minds began to influence her own. She listened and learned; she looked around and took in knowledge—as her intellect came in contact with the intelligence of others, she became aware of her strength, and used it; or discovered her deficiencies, and endeavored to supply them. The poetry of her nature, which had hitherto dwelt solely on evident and material beauty, now felt it where the cold and passionless never can. She "heard the voice they did not hear," which spoke to her of grandeur and sublimity—of truth and justice—of duty and patience; she "saw the hand they did not see," which beckoned her on in the pursuit of all that can elevate and ennoble. To her there was poetry in every thing great, generous, and unselfish—her sympathy was kindled, and beheld heroism in patient suffering—even in patient toil; and as she yielded to all these stirring influences, her true and lovely face was indeed the tablet on which might be read thoughts the highest and purest that humanity owns.

The visit to the Sinclairs had tended greatly to perfect this quiet process of intellectual and moral advancement. Nature, in her grandest and most sublime aspect, had there presented herself to a fervent admirer; and society, which sent some of its most cultivated and learned members as ever-welcome guests to Craigalan, found one who duly appreciated their worth, and its advantage to herself; so that, in almost every respect, to her mother and herself, time had lately shown his bird-of-paradise wings, as hours and days flew so pleasantly away. But there is ever some alloy; and they both thought of Helen, and sighed that she could not enjoy all this with them.

When the excitement of their return had subsided, Constance began to feel a little anxious

about the arrival of letters from Hubert; some time had elapsed, and no direct news from him had been received.

Mr. Morton had accompanied his young friends as far as Seville, when they had left him, and proceeded to Naples. Here Hubert met with some agreeable English acquaintances, who wished to persuade him and Victor to remain for a long visit. This, Victor would have been quite as willing to do as Hubert; but he reminded his friend that he had business of importance to transact for his father in Cyprus, which he could not postpone, and therefore proposed that they should return to Naples when this was over. "Business first, pleasure after," said he; and he was much astonished when, after having delayed some days, Hubert proposed to remain where he was, and there await his companion's return.

Of course, to this, no objection could be made; and young Morton, who possessed, perhaps rather in excess the qualities Hubert so much wanted—decision and firmness—set sail that same evening.

In his letter to Caroline Vernon, with whom he had obtained permission to correspond, and of which he had availed himself very liberally, when alluding to the separation, he merely said he had left Hubert at Naples; for he had particular reasons for avoiding all mention of aught beyond.

But every one was not so scrupulous, nor is it needful that we should be.

Both Hubert and Victor had quickly obtained that share of popularity at Naples, which good introductions, good fortunes, good looks, and agreeable manners are sure to obtain for their possessors. If Victor were the cynosure of English eyes, Hubert had more than compensation in the almost furor his peculiar style of face and figure excited among the Neapolitan beauties, who, like most people, attached a factitious value to rarity.

His was the kind of complexion we should give the Apollo statue, if we ever associated it with the idea of color; and, like that glorious inspiration, Hubert's cast of features was slightly effeminate, but redeemed from this defect by his frank and manly bearing. Elegant, instead of noble, was the term that would have best described him; and when to this natural beauty we add the fascination of a smile few could withstand, and a voice of exquisite harmony and modulation, it will not be wrong to call him rather a dangerous fellow.

Such, at any rate, many a lovely daughter of Italy thought him—such, one found him. And it was not without a sigh for her, for Hubert, for Constance, whom, as Caroline's dearest friend, Victor greatly esteemed, that he sailed away alone.

This will, perhaps, explain why Constance had lately been anxious for a letter from Italy: she knew that Hubert was no longer hindered by the difficulty of writing while at sea; he was now stationary—or, at most, only going to Rome, and yet his correspondence was any thing but regular lengthy. He seemed to encounter epistolary impediments on land which Victor never met with on water—for *he* wrote when Hubert could not, or, most certainly, did not.

"Constance, have you heard from Italy lately?" inquired Laurette, about a fortnight after their arrival at the Priory.

"Not very lately," was the reply, and she blushed to think such was the case; "perhaps the letters have not been regularly forwarded from Scotland," she added, in the desperate hope that Laurette would think the same.

"Mamma's and mine have all arrived, and so have papa's, as I saw him take a goodly number away redirected only this morning; besides, we have been here a fortnight or more," she continued, maliciously, and determined that this subterfuge should not save her cousin. "But I thought you could not have heard, or you would have mentioned it, that Hubert had joined a party in an exploring visit to Sicily."

"Indeed!" said Constance, now thoroughly surprised; "how did you hear that?"

"A friend of mine, who has lately married, has been traveling with her husband in Italy. At Naples they were introduced to Hubert, and from her account the handsome Englishman is making sad havoc among Italian hearts."

"Nonsense, Laurette! how you rattle on," said Constance, laughing, and too unsuspicious to be wounded by this arrow.

"Nothing like credulity and incredulity," replied Laurette, "for I have constantly remarked that they usually walk hand-in-hand; so, my dear, let them both console you, till you discover for yourself that this gay Hubert is—now do not be angry—a sad flirt."

"Nay, Laurette, that is an odious word."

"Odious or not, it is the true and proper one here. Why, Hubert would have flirted with me if I would have permitted it; and when he found that I did not think this suitable amusement for a lady and gentleman, he would flirt with any of the village girls rather than be out of practice."

Constance was too angry to reply to this; but really wishing to hear about the Sicilian expedition, she checked any display of feeling, and asked, with affected composure, "Did your friend join this party?"

"It has struck," thought Laurette, noting the shade on that ingenuous face, and the pointed disregard of her censure. "No, she could not," she replied, "and much regretted the impossibility, as a Neapolitan family, with whose daughter she had formed an acquaintance, were the promoters of the party in which Hubert was included. I dare say," she added carelessly, "you have heard Lady Hurstwood speak of the Duca di St. Angelo?"

"No," said Constance, thoughtfully; but she was not now likely to forget the name.

Another week, still no letter—at last a very hurried one, dated Palermo—but no mention made of having joined any particular party; nor did he find time to say where her answer would reach him.

Pained, she scarcely ventured to ask herself why, Constance was too just, too generous, to dwell upon what seemed injurious to Hubert's character, especially as he was absent. She therefore busied herself as usual in any thing that needed her help, and sent for little Minnie Dallas, who, since Helen's departure, had been frequently for weeks her companion and amuse-

ment, and who was will with delight at hearing of the summons. She assisted Mrs. Vernon and Caroline in their village duties, and was as the apple of her eye to her fond mother.

Caroline was now preparing for her visit to London, as Mr. Morton had, within the last few days, returned to the Hermitage, for the purpose of escorting her and Mrs. Vernon to his townhouse.

"Oh, Caroline, how I envy you!" sighed Constance, having walked to the Rectory to bid her farewell. "You look shocked at my speech, but you can see our darling Helen, you, and Mrs. Vernon; and mamma and I can not," and tears rushed to her eyes at the thought that this happiness was forbidden to them by whom it was most prized.

"Dear Constance," replied Caroline, gently and soothingly. "I know this is your sad trial; but dear friend, it must work out its use, and then God will remove it; do not, therefore, lengthen your probation by repining."

"I try not, Carry," she said, sadly but humbly; but you never had a sister."

"No; but I have two brothers—one lost to us by marriage," she answered, trying to impart a ray of her own cheerfulness—"and the other swallowed up by law."

"Yes," said Constance, determined not to talk of her sorrows, though she could not forget them; "and that reminds me I have a message to send to Ashley. Tell him, I shall not forgive him for taking such ungenerous advantage of our absence, and making his visit then, till he comes and sues for it humbly in person. And mind, Carry, you send us drawings of all you see at Helen's; the inside and outside of their cottage, a sketch of dear old Gretchen, and pray take notice how she looks when you give her my copy of mamma's sweet face; and send us portraits, morally, intellectually, and physically, of all their friends, and in short tell us all you can of them—dear Reginald, and thrice dear Helen."

"You will not, then, refuse to pay the postage of these bulky descriptions?"

"Certainly not; they will be worth their weight in gold."

And when Mrs. Vernon returned, having left Caroline with the Mortons, by whom she was lodged and feted like a princess, it is wonderful how she managed to answer all the questions Constance poured forth.

"Dear child," said Mrs. Templeton, "let our kind friend take breath;" but she looked very happy herself to hear the replies, though tears were still on her cheeks.

"I have a great mind to punish you by being obedient, mamma. You pretend to stop me and yet sit there urging me to go on—yes, you do. What does your dear contented face say, but 'Go on, Constance, let us hear something else that will make us happy;'"

"I believe, then, that you can scarcely ask any thing to which my reply would not be satisfactory," said Mrs. Vernon, cheerfully. "Ashley says, that if ever he is inclined to feel dull, he goes to Reginald's, and comes away almost happy—why he should not say quite, I can not tell."

"He studies too hard," said Constance. "You must insist on his coming here, and that will cure him."

"And so the little Mortons are sweet birds, you say?" asked Mrs. Templeton; "and Caroline's introduction to Victor's relatives pleases you?"

"Very much. They have a noble, well-appointed house; Miss Newman is very amiable—older than Mr. Morton, and already Helen has won her interest. While I was in town I was also introduced to Mr. Turner and his sister—both of them studies in intelligence and kindness—and to a Mr. and Mrs. Stacey, of whom more hereafter."

"What a delight this visit has been, dearest," said Constance to her mother, as they drove home; "Helen seems to have quite a list of friends, and all of them people we should like to know—clever and intellectual, all more or less celebrated; and then, if she and Reginald do not mind giving up pomp and luxuries, how much better off are they than many others!"

"Does Minnie Dallas still occupy your dressing-room, Constance?" inquired Mrs. Templeton, as if, during this remark, her thoughts had been far away.

"Yes, mamma; I have taken Helen's ever since she left, and keep it sacred from any one else."

"Then, come, my dear, and have a chat with me to-night, instead of going to your room."

"Thank you, dear mother! I shall enjoy that; it is such a pleasure to feel I am your friend as well as your child—there is nothing better."

Had she forgotten her vexation about Hubert? In truth, this looked and sounded rather like it; and yet it was only the firm trust that love and respect bring, which made her so contented and happy. She was sure he had a sufficient reason for acting as he did; he must not be judged hastily; and her noble and truthful nature had its reward in being spared the agony of fear and doubt.

CHAPTER L.

"If Misfortune comes, she brings along
The bravest virtues." THOMSON.

"AND now, mamma, that we are so snug and comfortable, what have you to tell me?" inquired Constance, as she sat in her mother's boudoir.

"Several things, my dear, but first come here—" and she showed Constance the door through which Helen had passed on that memorable night, and repeated the explanation she had then given.

"I see it all," said Constance, with a look of intelligence, and a sigh which seemed as if a load had been removed from her breast—"and that I should never have thought of it—but we must not speak of it, I suppose."

"Not yet," replied Mrs. Templeton, pleased to find that Constance had divined what she wished her to know, and yet had hesitated to avow. "I show you this simple contrivance because I have still the same suspicions regarding Ruth that I then had—Dawson does not hesitate to say that she is not trustworthy."

"If you distrust Ruth, why not dismiss her?" asked Constance.

"Because I do not like to act upon mere suspicion—for I might do her a serious injury. No one could have been more attentive or useful while we were at Grantham, and during our Scotch visit. She seems attached to us—and yet I doubt her."

"Is Dawson prejudiced?"

"I believe not—but she asserts that she has often found Ruth lingering about this corridor, after she has been dismissed, as if listening or spying—that once she heard her shut a drawer hastily in your dressing-room, and, on entering, she smelt the peculiar scent of that Indian box in which you keep your letters, and which I know you lock up in your dressing-case. Dawson at once recognized the scent. What do you keep there? Hubert's letters, I suppose."

"No, mamma," said Constance, with a smile and a blush, "they live by themselves. In that box there are only letters and notes from my general correspondents."

"I am glad of that—we must be careful; and directly I can, without injury to her, I shall dismiss Ruth: but my greatest objection to her is still to be told—I know that she is intimate at Cooper's; and, Constance, believe me, that man is a rogue, and all his party good for nothing. But I have not yet done with my revelations—come here."

The rooms which especially were called Mrs. Templeton's consisted, as we have said, of four, the last being a bath-room.

One day, years ago, Mrs. Templeton remarked, that while the external wall ran in an unbroken line, this bath-room was internally much smaller than the dressing-room which it joined; and, on examining it, she felt sure that there was either a very large closet or some waste space.

"I mentioned this to Dawson," she continued, "who was amused at my having attached any mystery to the matter—the wall was built even outside, to preserve architectural symmetry, but as the fireplace of the bath-room could be placed only on that side, a double wall was run up—see this projection is made by the chimney and fireplace;" and Constance followed her mother into a long, narrow, but lofty slip or closet, the entrance to which was by a sliding panel neatly contrived, but apparently with so little desire for concealment, that it was surprising every successive housemaid had not detected it.

"I show it you because it gave me the idea of opening the door I had made from your rooms. I often think of that communication—" she suddenly stopped and became pale and agitated. "Constance," she continued, solemnly, "I have sometimes trembled at the thought that if ever your father should learn the particulars of Helen's flight, in his anger he would hesitate at nothing."

"Good heavens! mother;" and Constance cast her arms round her, as if to protect her from harm.

"Well," said Mrs. Templeton, after a pause, "I am glad that this is told—and now, my child, I am about to incur further risk, and I want you to help me—I *must* see Helen."

"Mamma, you really terrify me."

"I hope not, for I rely on your presence of mind and energy. Helen expects to be confined in a few months. I must, I will see her—but, if I delay, perhaps Reginald might object to my wish—indeed, I must go soon, or not at all,—and I repeat it, I will see her—why am I passively to submit to this? all else, all else—but not to lose my children;" and she laid her head on Constance's shoulder and wept convulsively.

Constance spoke not; tears silently rolled down her face, but she pressed her mother to her heart and repeatedly kissed her.

"I believe I have said all I need," resumed Mrs. Templeton, making a successful effort to be calm—"forgive me, my child, for having laid on your young heart part of a burden I sometimes find almost too heavy to bear alone, and in silence."

"Oh, mother! dearest mother! God knows I willingly accept it—and how willingly I would, if I could, take it all from you. Mother, is good to come from this also?"

"I firmly believe so," was the reply; "if not in the way we wish, in a way that will be much better for us. And now listen; my plan is this. The Sinclairs leave us for a week's visit at Hurstwood. In a few days your father is going to town on business. I know this, as Cecilia puts off her party in order that we may all be there—for she is kindly bent on keeping up a friendly appearance. Doctor and Mrs. Vernon are informed of my intentions—the latter will accompany me—we shall, or rather she will, ostentatiously leave in the evening early—we travel all night, and breakfast with my darling girl—a short rest, again a night journey, and home. You may, if you like, take Dawson into your confidence."

"And what can I do?"

"Show lights in my rooms—moving lights, as if I were there—disarrange the rooms as though they had been occupied, to avert suspicion—but above all, lights at night—I know there are spies without, I believe there is one within. Be especially on your guard against Ruth. Are you equal to all this? the pier-door will enable you to do it without crossing the corridor."

"Trust me," replied Constance; "in this cause I am strong and vigilant."

"And now, my precious, receive my thanks, and good-night—but stay, I have one trifle more to tell you;" and she informed Constance of the income she had secured to Helen, and how she had been enabled to do so—"and should any thing have occurred which you wish me to learn directly I return, if we can not meet, do not forget our broad-leaved letter-box;" and leading her through the glass-door she again kissed her, and they separated.

When Constance reached her own room, late as it was, she sat down to think over all that her mother had told her—how thankful she was that Helen's disappearance was sanctioned by that mother; for, to her, there had always been something painful and degrading in the suspicion that Helen, even in the desperate circumstances in which she was placed, should have arranged and carried on a clandestine correspondence—or that while her mother and sister were sorrowing and suffering with her, she should have planned an escape. From all this Helen now

stood quite exonerated—as well as Reginald, who had shared in the secret censure which Constance could not help pronouncing.

How her mother had carried the matter successfully through, Constance knew not; but it was an infinite relief to believe that the whole responsibility rested on her.

The information relating to Helen's pecuniary matters, gave her also great pleasure. How often had she looked at the luxuries which everywhere surrounded her, and thought that, perhaps, the strictest economy could hardly make their present means suffice — for she knew that Reginald had scarcely any thing of his own beyond the rent of Sea-View Cottage—now, she could picture them comfortably off; and this, added to the charming description Mrs. Vernon had given of them and their society, made her feel quite happy.

But then suddenly rushed into her mind the dread of discovery; and Constance shuddered at the bare idea of what her father's rage would be, and of what it would lead to. She knew, that though he connived at her mother's hearing from Helen, perhaps only because he could not possibly help it, his anger was not at all abated—on the contrary, Cecilia's marriage had but served to sharpen his indignation against Helen. for having scorned those advantages he now, more plainly than ever, saw would have attended the match—while some annoying arrangements about money, which he had recently been forced to make, would have been unnecessary, had he had the wealthy peer for his son-in-law.

Constance dreaded also this fresh risk her mother was going to encounter, though she sighed to think that such danger should ever attend a parent's visit to her child. How she now wished for Hubert! his presence would so cheer and encourage her. Gay, happy Hubert, who always brought sunshine with him. "Perhaps," she said, "I shall have a letter to-morrow;" and with that hope she retired to rest.

"I expect Mrs. Vernon to-morrow morning, to breakfast with us, Helen," said Reginald, trying to speak, as if this were an every-day occurrence. "I have told Gretchen, and she is already as busy as a bee, preparing quite a banquet of coffee and cakes."

"When did she arrive?" inquired Helen; "I hope they are all well."

"Very well—but she has not yet arrived: her visit will be truly a flying one—for they imitate us, and travel all night."

"What an odd arrangement—does the Doctor accompany her?"

"No," he said, and he felt anxious, as he knew what a few more questions would reveal; "she brings a lady friend to see us—to see you."

"Oh, Reginald! Reginald!" and she fixed her expressive eyes wildly on his face.

"But they will not be admitted, if my little wife is not quite composed;" he put his arm round her, for she looked pale.

"It is mamma! my darling mother!" and she burst into tears.

"Yes, my love. it is—but do not make us repent having planned this pleasure, or it must not take place."

"Dear husband, let me weep—it does me good," said Helen; and after a few minutes' quiet indulgence in this luxury of tears, she raised her head from his shoulder, and said, "How kind of you—I have so pined for this, you can not think—and it will make me so happy."

"I know it, dear Helen, and therefore I have urged it; and now let us talk it over composedly, and let this dear mamma see that my wife is almost more beautiful than ever, and as happy as she is fair;" and he looked fondly at the sweet face which raised its grateful eyes to his.

And when, the next day, she rose earlier than usual, he was delighted to find that instead of exciting, the expected interview had almost quieted her. Her great wish was about to be granted, and Helen felt soothed and thankful.

And the breakfast was prepared in grand style, for Gretchen had seen after that; and Helen, in her simple dress, was looking so charming, that Reginald forgot lost wealth and station, and felt there was nothing wanting to complete his happiness but a reconciliation with her family.

But here is the carriage—Helen turns faint and pale—in a minute she is in her mother's arms—how it was all managed she does not know, but there stands Reginald, looking so proud and so handsome, and there was her mother's smiling face, while her arms were still round her, and Mrs. Vernon and Gretchen deep in the mysteries of the breakfast-table.

"We have usurped your throne, dear Helen," said the former; "but your mother and I have traveled all night, so we both require breakfast.

And the sound of the well-known voice completely restored Helen to consciousness, for a strange feeling of swimming had prevented her from fully understanding all that had so suddenly happened.

"Mamma!" and a shower of kisses fell on the dear form she had so longed to see—she kissed her hands, her hair, her very dress, in an ecstasy of rapture; and then followed question upon question, till Mrs. Vernon called "Order, order," and set them an example of what she termed sensible behavior, by commencing her breakfast in good earnest.

And a strange meal this breakfast was; nor was Gretchen's conduct the least extraordinary part of it; she came in, for at least, the tenth time, apropos to nothing, except to look at Mrs. Templeton, touch her bonnet, or shawl, or something that belonged to her; but when her mistress again put out her hand, and once more thanked her for all she had done for Helen, Gretchen could stand out no longer—she pressed the hand with deep reverence to her lips, and in her own language uttered a prayer over it, that the good Lord would, one day, see fit to let his face shine on her and hers, even in this life; and having thus relieved her pent-up feelings, she quietly resumed her household duties, and busied herself in preparations for her unexpected but cherished visitors.

"Now," said Mrs. Vernon, "I think half-an-hour's walk on your beautiful heath will refresh me more than any thing—so, if Mr. West will accompany me, I am ready."

"Will you not lie down in preference?" asked Helen; "there is a room quite prepared for you."

"Not till after my walk; then I may, perhaps, doze—at present I could not; now adieu, for an hour."

So mother and daughter were again left alone, for the first time since that eventful night when one had braved so much to save the other. And amply was this now repaid—there sat Helen, no longer pale, broken-hearted, desperate, and despairing—but blooming, happy, joy dancing in her eyes and smiles on her lips; and as Mrs. Templeton looked around and saw, not indeed luxuries, but comfort, and marked the love that spoke in every tone of Reginald's voice, she felt that she had done well to secure such great blessings for her child.

Ashley rode up for half-an-hour toward the middle of the day; he fancied that this interruption would be a relief to the continued indulgence of feelings which were almost painful from their intensity; and he was right—the thoughts of all were brought down to a more common level, while conversation was diverted into a more ordinary channel.

The Staceys, who had been told of this expected visit, of course kept away; but he had worked himself up to such a state of excitement in imagining the scene, that he struck off a short poem, which described so much that had really occurred, and this with so graceful a flow of language, that when he read it the next week to Helen, her eyes filled with tears; which he protested was the most flattering homage a poet could receive.

But now evening is come—and they must part, who have so lately met. Helen's smile faded away as her mother pressed her to her bosom. "But we will soon meet again, my dear girl; meantime, let us treasure the remembrance of this bright day, to cheer us through any gloomy ones."

Mrs. Vernon, who had had some refreshing sleep at the Cottage, now undertook to watch and arrange, while her exhausted friend reposed.

As they approached the end of their journey, which had been arranged on Mr. Morton's plan, though not performed quite so expeditiously, Mrs. Templeton began to be nervous and uneasy.

There is the Doctor's carriage waiting to convey them to the Rectory—here is the Rectory—"And see, my husband," said Mrs. Vernon; "and yes—it is—there is Constance."

"All safe, dearest mamma," were the first words.

"Heaven be praised for this mercy."

"Amen," said the Doctor, reverently, "we do not ask you to stay and breakfast, my dear friend; you will be better at home—and when you feel sad, remember this great blessing, and praise His name for it."

"We shall, most devoutly; and now adieu."

"And Helen?" cried Constance, looking as if the answer must be returned in some way more speedily than by words.

"Happy—happier and more beautiful than ever—for she looks cheerful and contented."

"Another mercy to return thanks for," said Constance, solemnly.

"You are right, it is indeed—but has all gone well, here?"

"Quite well—Dawson has helped me—you were not missed till last evening, when Ruth wanted particularly to see you—but I told her her business must wait till this morning. I was up long before any one—put your room into 'most admired disorder,' and when Ruth enters mine, she will find that I have flown—and as we return together, may suppose that we both rose early for a walk. I was sadly afraid last night, for the clouds threatened rain, and then my plot would have been a failure."

"And the lights?"

"Most ostentatiously displayed—especially last night—for I fancied when I entered the conservatory that I heard a step on the gravel."

"Had you a light then?"

"Of course not—or my means of access would have been discovered, had any one been watching. So I returned to my room and rang for Ruth, who was a very long time before she came. Dawson declares she had to be sought for, but she means to find this out, in her own fashion."

"Well, dear, and then?"

"Then I undressed, and dismissed her as usual, before I read a little. I again entered your conservatory—carefully lighted the taper in your bed-room—the boudoir table-lamp had been lighted before, so that the oil might be consumed—and then I paraded from your dressing-room to your bed-room, as if going to rest—put out the lamp, and left the night-light burning."

"Well done, dear; you have, by your courage, enabled me to secure a great and permanent pleasure, one that Helen also largely shares in;" and then she proceeded to give Constance all the minutiæ she could possibly remember relating to that dear banished one.

Still she was not satisfied; but smiled and shook her head, remarking that she feared her mother had no eye for the details of a picture, as she could tell neither the color of Helen's dress, nor give a catalogue of the furniture.

"I plead guilty to this—but in compensation, I can tell you that this journey has relieved my mind of a host of apprehensions and fears. I now picture Helen well and happy—instead of fancying her still the pale, dispirited girl who fled to avoid all but dishonor."

"And yet, mamma," observed Constance, "how happy Cecilia is."

"Yes—and you would say, in the very situation from which Helen shrunk with dismay—but Cecilia, though she had no decided preference for Lord Hurstwood, had certainly no decided objection—nor did she love another. Besides, she is altogether a very different character from Helen—not that I mean this as a reproach—perhaps, to the majority, it would sound like a compliment. Even *I* have sometimes questioned whether the possessor of great delicacy and refinement, strong affections and acute sensibilities, is to be envied—whether, in short, these are the fit materials with which to go through this work-a-day world. I fear they cause many

a wound and bruise, from which others, who possess them not, escape: and, except strong affections, Cecilia is not much troubled with the rest —she is true, honorable, an excellent daughter, a firm friend, and will, I am persuaded, unless it be his own fault, make Lord Hurstwood very happy. She is one whom I greatly love and respect; and all the good qualities he has, and which have hitherto been perverted or warped aside, will, by her invisible management, be developed and confirmed."

"Still, mamma, great refinement, though it may be hurt where rougher natures never can, has pleasures which these can never know."

"You are right; for I never yet met with any one who possessed it that was willing to exchange it for more blunted feelings, though they might, at the very moment, be smarting from contact with the rude and rough."

"And now, I suppose, you will try and see Helen again?" said Constance.

"I shall, but not till after her confinement. I have no longer a feverish anxiety about her. I have seen that, hitherto, all has gone well, and this I hope will strengthen me to trust the future with One who does all things wisely; but, darling, can I not contrive to pleasure you—can you not share in what you have ably helped me to enjoy?"

"Me! oh, mamma!" her eyes sparkling with delight; "oh, if you could safely contrive it," and she began eagerly to pace up and down the room.

"Well, we will accustom ourselves to the idea, and then think and consult about effecting it."

CHAPTER LI.

"The devil knew not what he did when he made man politic; he crossed himself by it, and I can not think but, in the end, the villainies of men will set him clear."—*Timon of Athens.*

THE dinner-party at the Hall comprised most of those with whose names we are familiar, except the Forresters. A ministerial crisis required the presence of all their party, of which Mr. Forrester formed one.

"I am delighted to hear," said the host, addressing Lady Sinclair, "that Lady Hurstwood has prevailed on you to prolong your stay and favor her with your company during my absence. I am going to London to-morrow, to be at my post in the house," he continued, turning to Doctor Vernon; "a very important question is pending, and if the ministers are beaten on it, they must resign."

"Then there will probably be a dissolution," observed Sir William Dallas.

"No doubt—this is the sixth year of the Parliament's age—when it is generally pronounced superannuated, and receives the same fate, as I have read the Hindoos inflict on the aged and infirm—namely, is killed, to spare the pain of natural death."

"I wonder your Lordship does not exercise your privilege, and vote by proxy," said Mrs. Templeton.

"So I would, if I did not wish to show very pointedly that I am in opposition—I may safely say so—as our respected member, Mr. Forrester, is absent—for whom no one has more regard than myself, though we are political antipodes."

"Oh! I hope they will be beaten, for then there will be an election," exclaimed Lady Dallas, whose imagination was already busy with bows, ribbons, banners, chairing, and, finally, a ball at the Grange, the usual close to what was generally a very friendly and quiet little transaction; in the course of which Mr. Forrester would be nominated, seconded, and make a speech about Church and Constitution—would be returned in the most genteel manner possible; make another speech about Constitution and Church, assure his friendly supporters that Britannia was still very busy ruling the waves—return thanks in a somewhat lengthy wind-up, and dismiss them to a plentiful dinner, where they might eat and drink as long as they could.

"Ah! those *were* glorious times for country gentlemen—there was no Carlton with its snuggery—no gallant officer with his A.S.S. signature —or, suppose there were—there was no 'Times' to drag the convenient arrangements before the public—to tear the lion mask off the honorable initials and show that he signed truly—there was no rude violation of the Eleusinian mysteries performed in little dark rooms, and the hocus-pocus doings of the presiding priest—no inquisitive and prying election committee, vulgarly troubling themselves with their neighbors' affairs—oh, no!—"a fellow-feeling made them wondrous kind"—they remembered their Latin, and as they themselves lived in glass houses, forbore to throw stones—there was no cross-questioning of "frail" witnesses and agents, whether Black, Brown, or Grey—but when a gentleman was returned, his friends congratulated him, and wished his country joy of so honorable a member.

The day after this party, Colonel Templeton mentioned the rumor, of a probable dissolution, to Cooper—for it was no secret to all who took an interest in politics, that it was expected there would be a struggle, a mustering of forces, and, perchance, a defeat.

Cooper, when he returned home, in his turn named it to Mrs. Captain, as an event likely to excite her attention, on account of the festivities and amusement even this peaceful election caused. He forgot how trifles light as air are, by a strong will, made powerful instruments to serve a cherished purpose—perhaps he had never read the court gossip of how Abigail Masham's best silk gown was spoiled, and the disasters it caused —but it was too late if he had, for the words were spoken, and dauntless Mrs. Captain grappled at once with a new idea.

"Put Colonel Templeton in opposition," said this brave and patriotic dame.

"Good God! what are you thinking of?" exclaimed Cooper.

"Of myself," was the sublime reply.

"Return Colonel Templeton!" gasped the amazed agent.

"Who spoke of return?" withering scorn on her bold but handsome face. "I said, put him in

opposition, and I mean what I say. How will that stately, pompous old empty head," such was her irreverent way of mentioning Forrester of Forest Hill and Hargrave likewise—"how will he like the man, or the daughter of the man either, who attempts this? for I know it will be but an attempt."

"And the money, where is that to come from? for I know he is hard up."

"It must come from the wood—it needs no fairy, in these days, to turn trees to gold—a good chopper does that."

"How often must I tell you," asked Cooper, impatiently, "that he will not cut any more? You know he almost quarreled with me about that last clearance. Will you never understand the difference between trees and timber?"

"Pooh!" she retorted, with infinite contempt; "a distinction without a difference."

"Maria, I told you then, that I believed he consulted some one in London about that fall, and found he had done wrong—besides, if you put this clearing project into his head, I would not give much for the stability of any thing he could convert into money; and I fancy it would not suit your schemes to have only the bare walls of the Priory left."

"Certainly not;" and she laughed a little merry laugh. "Well, then, he must borrow, and make those about him more economical; so, send him to me; I undertake that he shall come back primed and loaded, quite ready to take the field—there shall, at least, be an explosion, and a little mischief."

I very much fear that the old king who said women are the cause of all the disasters that happen, had reasoned from cause to effect, and from effect to cause, as closely as any Scotch metaphysician—for certain it is that from Eve, the first mischief-maker, down to the last little miss who encouraged her brother to steal the green gooseberries, which she ate, and for which he was punished, these fair creatures are perpetually tossing about apples of discord. It is a fact, that Colonel Templeton, who had laughed at Cooper, when that worthy hinted at the astonishment Mr. Forrester would feel, were he to offer himself as his opponent, and who had subsequently never thought of such a proceeding, returned from the village, bent on trying his chance in a contested election.

"Some demon whispered, Colonel, have a seat."

When this determination became known, it is more easy to imagine than describe the dismay of his wife and daughter, the sorrow of the Vernons, and the indignation of Sir William Dallas; who, though, like his father the General, he differed in opinion from Mr. Forrester, considered him so honorable and independent a man, that notwithstanding more than one application, both had always declined to oppose his return.

And now, Colonel Templeton, a man not liked even on his own property—a man who, for various reasons, was positively disliked in many other quarters, a man of no particular intelligence, influence, or weight—who had never done any one act likely to make him popular—he, above all others, to break through all precedent!—it was monstrous!

It is true that the Ashley family, who had agreed in politics with the Forresters, had, on one or two occasions, been returned instead of a Forrester—but this had never been on account of any unfriendly or adverse feeling—it had generally happened when, from seniority in age, an Ashley had the advantage.

"My dear Cecilia," said Lord Hurstwood, a few days after the event he had predicted, and helped to effect, had happened, "did you know that Colonel Templeton intends to oppose Mr. Forrester's return?"

"No, indeed, I did not," she replied, "and on every account I am surprised—for one reason, very sorry. How will this affect his son's engagement with Constance?"

His Lordship merely shrugged his shoulders, a movement which plainly and expressively said, "that is his affair."

"I think," he said, after a pause, "that if you do not object, we might very pleasantly pass four or five weeks in Paris. You have never been there. On our return this election will be over, and Lady Grantham will then perform her promise of spending a few months here."

"I am delighted with your plan, my dear Lord," she answered—she was almost always pleased with what he proposed, wise wife!—"and I presume you will like to start soon."

So to Paris they went; his Lordship giving his tenantry to understand that they were to vote as they thought proper; for, though the Colonel was his wife's uncle, and on his own side of the question, that was no reason why he should dictate to them; in short, he respected Mr. Forrester, but not Colonel Templeton.

CHAPTER LII.

"Here we go up, up, up,
And here we go down, down, down."
Nursery Rhymes.

Hubert was at Naples when he received a letter from his father, summoning him immediately to England, but in which no reason was assigned for this unexpected though peremptory call.

Happily for his character as an obedient son, this arrived at a juncture when his father's command was more readily attended to than it would have been a few weeks earlier; for the Duca di St. Angelo and his family had gone to visit a relative at Taranto.

Therefore, with some undefined idea that he would return, and complete his term of probation in that delicious climate, Hubert set out without any needless delay.

Had any one told him that his love for Constance had diminished with absence, he would have repelled the accusation with indignation; because it would have been equivalent to calling him fickle, false, dishonorable. But had he examined his own feelings, or taken a just view of his recent conduct, perhaps these offensive terms might have been suggested and whispered by himself.

But Hubert never did examine or justly view himself. He meant nothing dishonorable, he deliberately planned nothing faithless toward Constance by his attentions to Beatrice. But was he, therefore, guiltless?

His father's letter had, however, this good effect: it awoke recollections of home that had lately been rather drowsy; it recalled one fair image, which had gradually ceased to be the one most prominent; and the reply to his father, announcing his prompt return, was accompanied by one to Constance, so full of joyful anticipations of their approaching meeting and of expressions of unabated love, that she was vexed to remember how she had sometimes thought his letters uninteresting and unsatisfactory, rare as they had generally been.

It was, therefore, with double pleasure she read this, which told of his return, at the very moment when the thoughtless, the selfish conduct of her father might have provoked a very different tone; for she had never stopped to inquire if Hubert knew what had occurred, and his letter had led her to infer he returned because longer banishment was insupportable; for attaching but little importance to his father's desire to see him, he had not even alluded to it.

The Forresters, whose proud feelings had received a wound never anticipated, and from a quarter the least likely to have struck the blow, remained in dignified silence in town, "nursing their wrath to keep it warm," and meditating how, in a way most consistent with their family honor, they could revenge the insult it had received.

Of course, nothing was neglected by the Forest Hill party to secure the defeat of the intruder; and though this seemed by no means a difficult task, the zeal of Mr. Forrester's adherents made them most desirous that his discomfiture should be so complete as to prevent any future interference—at least, from him.

Nor, to do him justice, was Cooper less active; he was the very man of the situation—unscrupulous both in deed and speech—confident of success, and imparting this confidence to others; supple, and accommodating himself to the whims, prejudices, and ignorance of all; cajoling, coaxing, bullying, as any of these means seemed likely to succeed; and had his principal possessed the least chance of success, Cooper would soon have inflated that chance, and made it a man-to-man struggle. How miserably was all this talent now wasted! Surely such as he must have been in the mind's eye of the poet when he lamented over the flower that blushes unseen, and the gem that shines unheeded. How would a man like Cooper have been hailed and fêted during the progress of some of those elections which have lately become—we were going to say—"so famous;" elections, where blarney, bribery, and bludgeons—priests and perjury—fighting, ranting, and calumny, if used generously and boldly, are sure to carry the day—elections, where it is impudence, meanness, and lungs, *versus* honesty, reason, and brains. He, at any rate, even now, left nothing undone; and the very day that Hubert, not knowing his family were in London, arrived at Forest Hill, and there first learned what was going on, this faithful and zealous adherent was made practically to learn that there are other

> "dangers as environ
> Than come of meddling with cold iron."

Before Hubert left the Continent, the English papers had informed him that there would be a general election; and as he approached Seabrooke, the name of "Templeton, the coming man," and similar placards, had astonished and greatly annoyed him.

From his deserted home, where he was informed by his father's steward of the exact state of affairs, he rode immediately to the Priory, in order to understand, if possible, what had led to this extraordinary opposition; but, alas! for his father's cause!—his father's insulted dignity!—the first person he beheld was Constance, more beautiful than he had ever thought her, more bewitching than he had ever found her.

How rapturously he gazed on her! how proud he was to think that she was his, by promise—his, by her own free will! How could he ever have fancied any other comparable with her?—and so, with a brow unclouded by self-reproach—for really he felt none—he was as gay, as charming, as handsome as ever. And when Colonel Templeton came home, with a very grave face and in no amiable temper, the sight of this smiling vision made him look less gloomy, and checked his ill humor, especially as events had just occurred which made Hubert's arrival, evidently in a pacific character, most opportune.

Ah! Mr. Forrester! Mr. Forrester! if you do not legislate better for the nation than you do to gain your own purposes, your defeat would be no loss to your country.

Poor gentleman! he had blundered at every move. None the less enraged because he refrained from an open demonstration of anger, he thought it a capital stroke of diplomacy to summon Hubert without giving his reasons, lest his son, anticipating a rupture with Colonel Templeton, should refuse to return, and be implicated in the quarrel.

Had he told Hubert the truth, the whole truth, namely, that he intended to withdraw his promise, holding himself justified in so doing by the offensive conduct of Colonel Templeton, who knows whether that exemplary and dutiful son, with the lovely face of Beatrice di St. Angelo fresh in his recollection, might not have consented to relinquish the far lovelier one of Constance Templeton?

Why, also, had he not prevented his going to Seabrooke, by informing him that himself and his mother were in town? this, to say the truth, he had done, but the letter never reached Hubert, owing to his quick return.

It is easy to imagine why Constance was rejoiced to see Hubert; but her father was not in love, nor did he usually evince much pleasure at seeing any one; why, therefore, did he look glad, and say so?

It is all very easy to plan a great and glorious deed—the next thing is to execute it. Indeed, some common-sense people insist upon it, that the execution is the all in all, the only part that has any merit. They quote vulgar proverbs—the proof of the pudding, belling the cat, and such like—but then, common sense is so low!

Now Colonel Templeton had talked both largely and loudly of representing his country—so far, it was great and glorious. In aiding and abetting, as before said, Cooper was not slack; he composed addresses and had them printed—he, or Mrs. Captain, invented rude and insulting placards about dumb orators and silent speakers, in allusion to Mr. Forrester's being generally satisfied with recording his vote, without wasting the time of the House by a speech, when his reasons had already been well expressed by those with whom he agreed. He was contented with being recognized as a consistent, independent member—and this he was, without having recourse to brogue, bluster, or blunder, insolence or invective; he had no talents for becoming trumpeter in any demagogue's brass band; and was too much a gentleman and a patriot to serve in any political brigade, either as officer or subaltern.

This quality, which made him respected by all parties in the House, was now, by the broad caricatures of Mrs. Captain, turned into ridicule; and the gaping villagers were at first shocked, and then amused, to see these coarse but humorous jokes stuck in various conspicuous places, and freely distributed to all who would take them.

Not contented with collecting all the worthless vagabonds and trampers, who sniff the ale and beer of a coming contest from afar, and making them drunk and quarrelsome, Cooper, emboldened by the continued absence of Mr. Forrester, determined to carry the war into the enemy's quarters, and ventured to the village, from the public-house of which hung and swung the Forresters' arms.

Here he began with some random observations, till a little group, who had been lounging round the green, attracted by the subject, gathered close about him. Charmed with the apparent success of his manœuver, he began to harangue them, which was quietly listened to, till, coupling Mr. Forrester's name with some impertinent jest, he was at once made aware of his folly and rashness. For suddenly, strong hands pinioned him, strong hands blindfolded him, as securely as if he had been Dame Fortune herself; and before he could well understand it, he felt himself literally dancing on nothing—but air! for kicking and struggling, up he went—shouting and bawling, down he came—up again—down again—and all in perfect silence; *he* had soon no power to cry, his tormentors no intention—a woman's voice alone was heard singing—

> "An old woman tossed up in a blanket,
> Seventy times as high as the moon;
> And in her hand she carried a broom—"

till faint, and evincing this by being passive in the hands, or rather blanket, of his assailants; sick, dizzy, but carefully kept from bone-breaking, he felt himself laid in a cold bath, and after a short interval heard a voice, most suspiciously like the one that had sung, exclaim—"Lauk-a-day, Master Cooper! be it you, man? deary me! what be you a doing of here?" and the bandage being removed, he found himself in the horse-trough! Too sick and sore to move, he was lifted out by the landlord and hostler, who grinned and sniggered at each other, while a perfect roar arose from the tap-room, as he was carried through it up stairs to bed, where, as he lay sore and savage, he heard a full chorus shout out—

> "Old woman, old woman, says I, says I,
> Where are you going so high, so high?
> To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky,
> And I shall be back again by-and-by."

There he remained all night, and early the next morning, stiff, bruised, with aching head and feverish body, he was conveyed in the landlord's covered cart home, where he remained invisible to all eyes for several days. And when he did recover and emerge, so crestfallen and yet enraged was he, that Colonel Templeton advised a week's absence to some place where he could recover his nerves and, if possible, his temper.

But this incident decided the fate of the election. Colonel Templeton, who had never comprehended what standing meant, had already stood till he was tired; and he was now glad to sit—if not in Parliament, in peace and quiet, as he had done before. He therefore relinquished the matter with as much levity as he had taken it up.

To him, therefore, Hubert was doubly, nay, trebly welcome. He was to be ambassador, plenipotentiary, any thing, so that he did but make peace between his father and the Colonel; and this he confidently promised to do.

For a long time, however, his father and his mother also were inexorable—they declared that such an unprovoked insult freed them from every promise; so it might, had Hubert been willing to consent to this; but he insisted on keeping *his* plighted faith, and talked so like a modern Bayard of the dishonor that would attend a failure on his part, that any one who had peeped into his heart at Naples, and while in the society of Beatrice, might have asked, "Is this the same Hubert who was perpetually haunting her, and following her with looks of love? or is it only his exact likeness?"

But he won the day—though his parents were never, after this, even cordial in their manner to the Templetons; and Laurette, who, with her mother, was in town during the beginning of the rupture, and had, in her indirect way, done all she could to widen the breach and strengthen their objections, now protested that she must accompany dear Mrs. Forrester to Seabrooke, and remain with her a short time, to cheer her up after this very painful misunderstanding.

"Pray spare her to me for a few weeks," said Mrs. Forrester to Lady Sinclair; "she will be every thing to me at this particular moment;" and her ladyship, who loudly and openly blamed her brother's conduct to the family, whose son was engaged to his daughter, easily consented to this proposal.

CHAPTER LIII.

"Ne sont-ce pas les femmes qui ruinent ou qui soutiennent les maisons, qui règlent tout le détail des choses domestiques?"—FÉNELON.

"How your needle flies through your work, and how beautifully that is done!" remarked Mrs. Stacey one day to Helen, as she sat watching her

progress on some pretty article of dress for her baby.

"To work neatly was made part of our education," said she; "Mrs. Loftus, who for many years was kept out of her property, found from experience that this was a resource too commonly but improperly neglected. She therefore made the completion of a portion of useful needle-work one of our daily duties. How grateful I now am, for being skillful in this despised art, I can not tell. My husband's very small income would sadly suffer if I could not hem and sew, or even put on buttons," and she smiled.

Very early in the progress of their acquaintance, Mrs. Stacey had made the discovery of Helen's superiority, and, happily, she had made it herself. No injudicious friend had placed Helen in the disagreeable position of flugel-woman, so Mrs. Stacey, of her own free will, and because she felt a pleasure in doing it, had adopted Helen as her pattern. The homage she rendered was, therefore, the deeper from being self-imposed; while the influence of Mrs. West was, unconsciously to either of them, producing a good effect.

Mrs. Stacey's self-love was never wounded by advice being offered unasked for, by censure well meant, but useless, because it was unwise; but her voluntary admission of her own inferiority, when she compared herself to this kind friend, led to a knowledge of her own deficiencies, and to an earnest wish to supply them; and when self is thoroughly roused to useful exertion, it is astonishing how it clears away obstacles, how remorselessly it tears up weeds, roots out deep-seated prejudices, and cuts down the tough hedge of long-indulged habits. To be convinced of this assertion, nothing more was requisite than to watch Mrs. Stacey; while silently but resolutely engaged in this clearance she proved herself quite a little heroine.

She and Helen were often together to their mutual advantage—they generally met during their walks; and sometimes, when Miss Baby was quiet for the evening, Stacey would bring his wife to the cottage and read to them, and to that Rhadamanthus of critics, as he called Ashley, the results of his literary labors.

They were all more or less musical, and though Mrs. Stacey, during her troubles and illness, had lost her voice, she almost feared forever, as she and Helen were superior musicians, these evenings possessed a charm which was often remembered in after years; and it was during one of these meetings that Mrs. Stacey had remarked on Helen's industry and the beauty of her performance.

The next morning it was not fine enough for a walk; and Helen, knowing the "wee thing" would detain Mrs Stacey at home, sent a little note, in which she said that she should brave the weather with wrappers and strong shoes, and spend a few hours with the mamma.

Of course she was welcomed with real pleasure, and soon seated very comfortably in a large chair by the fire.

"Now do not faint at the sight of my thimble," said she, "or think that I introduce it *à propos* to a compliment."

"No; but it will very well introduce a question I have to ask," was the reply; "if it becomes you, Mrs. West, to do so many things, because you are not rich—how disgraceful it is for me not to imitate you; so I am determined, henceforth, to work as much as I can for us all. And I blush to think how many useful and beautiful things my baby owes to you, while I have been little better than an idle looker-on."

"Nay, nay," said Helen, glad to hear this, and much too honest to compliment away what she felt convinced was a good and most needful resolution; "you have been very busy nursing her, and seeing after your house, and very comfortable it always looks."

"Even that is due to your example—you, born an heiress to great wealth, connected on every side with nobility, have taught me, a penniless girl, brought up to earn her living, how to keep my house and use my needle."

"Now you are too serious and too severe, especially upon faults which have disappeared," replied Helen; "and you must read me something merry as a cure."

"I would much rather, if you will have the goodness to allow me the choice, fetch my work, and, spite of the seeming egotism, tell you of myself."

"Do; I shall like that better than any thing," returned Helen, with that ready and true sympathy which was so beautiful a feature in her character, and which made all who knew her so implicitly trust her.

"Oh, it is commonplace enough, and soon said," remarked Mrs. Stacey, with a sigh. "I lost both parents when I was very young. My mother I remember as a pretty woman, always fashionably dressed. As to my own appearance, it was the great topic with almost all whom I met. My mother, I say it with reverence, treated me more like a live doll than a rational and responsible being. I was perpetually being dressed and undressed, and she was perpetually busy, making or devising something elegant and becoming for me, which foolish friends were called upon to admire in my presence, till I began to confound myself with my frock or bonnet; and when these were praised, to receive the admiration as something personally meritorious—of course, I did not *then* reason in this way, but such was the effect.

"My nurse would say, 'Be good, and you shall wear your pink or blue sash;' and when I was naughty, I was punished by being made to put on a shabby frock.

"I was about eight when both my parents died, and then went to live with a relation. I must now begin my education—and hard work it was. It seems that I early showed a talent for music—this must be cultivated; for I had, literally, nothing from the wreck which extravagance and waste had caused, so I must be taught to earn my own living. My aunt could barely afford the sum necessary for my instruction; but she did manage it, and treated me with great kindness. You must remember that the dressed-out baby of eight was almost entirely ignorant. I could read, but very badly—to compensate, I sang a number of songs very charmingly. I could not write at all; but I had a remarkable taste in arranging colors—so think of the labor!

"At length I was admitted to the Academy of

Music; my ear was good—my voice gave promise of being very fine—and when the drudgery of piano was nearly over, came the fatigue of singing and learning Italian.

"As soon as I could, I tried to relieve my kind aunt of some expense, by endeavoring to obtain pupils; this was extremely difficult—I knew no one whose influence could serve me, and those with whom I most associated were rivals, each seeking for the same thing.

"At length I did succeed, by the help of one of the professors—and then—oh! the weary fag of going from place to place, through all weathers—and for so trifling a remuneration.

"However, I had what many had not—a respectable home and a kind relative; for these, let me hope, I was truly grateful. But when I was about nineteen, this dear friend died, leaving me all she had, which was but little, as her income died with her. Still I was not destitute, for I had a small connection; I really was industrious—readily took what was offered, if it only paid, and tried hard to please my employers—this was easy, where my pupils were clever and amiable—but as they were not all of this description, of course then I failed.

"But, not to weary you, in the course of a few years I began to feel that, if health were granted me, I had taken a step in the right direction; when the mother of one of my pupils offered to introduce me to her friend Lady De Vere, who, this lady said, was a most excellent patroness where she took a liking.

"I need hardly tell you that my musical career had given me very little knowledge of society beyond those of my own profession, and the few who employed me; I was young and wholly unprotected, and had, therefore, been rather careful to limit my acquaintance to an unusually small circle. Still I had heard and read a good deal of patrons and patronesses; and the impression left on my mind was not favorable to the idea of being dependent for more than the recommendation my talents really merited; but not understanding very clearly the limits which separated the reward of merit from the puff of patronage, I called on my old master, who had been particularly kind to me, and stating the offer and my own difficulty, I asked his opinion.

"'How are you doing now?' he asked.

"'Well,' I replied.

"'Are you laying by?'

"'Very little indeed?'

"'No matter how little—it is in favor of my opinion; why not trust to your own endeavors? gradually, as you become known, you may raise your terms, you may give lessons at home. I know what Lady De Vere will propose—a concert at her house; this will interfere with your teaching, perhaps give offense to your old connections—and if, from nervousness or cold, or any of the thousand accidents voice and fingers are subject to, you should fail to produce a sensation—why, then there is an end of you at once.'

"'But if I succeed?'

"'You succeed—and so you do now. You may say, but the introduction to titled and noble pupils is a chance worth securing; do not let that influence you—in the long run, your present wealthy pupils will be the best for you. But think well of it before you decide. I see you are a little dazzled.'

"I was very much dazzled; and the more I thought of the offer, the more brilliant and fascinating did it appear. In short, you know, I accepted it. The concert was proposed, arranged, and came off. I did not clear five pounds, though, in order to secure a dazzling array of noble names, the tickets were very expensive; and had not Mr. Stacey come to the rescue, I should certainly have failed altogether—for I was faint with excitement, fatigue, and anxiety; but he kindly helped me—he joined me in an unexpected duet, and then sang a song of his own composition, written, as he said, expressly for the occasion; and at the conclusion, more dead than alive, I was led about by Lady De Vere, to be complimented, fêted, and forgotten!

"Not a single pupil did I gain by that first appearance in public; but the time needed for rehearsing, organizing, coaxing rivals to put aside rivalry, and be generous for a few hours, lost me several of my best engagements—for few of the parties where I taught were on her Ladyship's list, and were consequently affronted at my presumption, and kept aloof; and the high bribes I was obliged to offer the avaricious to help me, and the insolent to be civil, swallowed up, as I before said, all the profit.

"Then dear Charles married me; and, all at once, carried up by his genius and popularity, I found myself in such society as I had never, in my wildest dream of ambition, aspired to.

"We sang, we acted vaudeville and comedy, till the tragedy came in earnest; and had it not been for friends, whom God reward and bless for their goodness! I know not what would have become of us. May the terrible experience we then had, prevent us from being ever again misled by such senseless ambition!"

"If that be the result, and you are happy and contented in your present circumstances," said Helen, "you will have but little cause to sigh that the delusion has vanished."

"I never was happier," replied Mrs. Stacey; "my husband is gradually working himself free from those pecuniary difficulties which, ever since our marriage, have painfully pressed on him—he is becoming known and esteemed among men of intelligence and high literary attainments; believe me," she added, with deep feeling, "it is no small reward to have won the regard of two such characters as Mr. West and Mr. Vernon, while you, on your part, kindly permit me the privilege of calling you friend."

"I am sure," said Helen, "you greatly overrate this, and quite forget my share of the pleasure."

CHAPTER LIV.

"——— What crime to me unknown,
Steep'd me in ink? my parents', or my own?"
POPE.

"MR. TURNER wishes to be introduced to you, Stacey," said Reginald the same evening, "but you must waive ceremony, and accompany me to town some morning—when can you do so?"

"To-morrow, if this will not seem too eager to avail myself of his invitation."

"Not at all; promptness, in this case, is a compliment."

And the next day Stacey was made known to the old gentleman.

"A friend of mine," said Mr. Turner, "a celebrated scientific man, though rather an oddity—I say this merely to prepare you for some of his notions—has papers and letters relating and once belonging to a man who formerly made a little noise in the world. Mr. Moore thinks the time has arrived for giving selections of these to the public; but being, in some sense, no more fit for the task himself than I should be to command a fleet; and, happily, being as well aware of his deficiency, he has consulted me on the subject. Now, I should like you to meet him, for I think you would suit his purpose, and I also think his purpose would suit you. Though he is a man of rare talent, the fame which follows the profession of, what is termed, elegant literature, would be readily relinquished to you; and as to any arrangement that may be requisite, you may depend upon his liberality and honorable character."

"I wonder," remarked Stacey, slightly nettled, to think that he was permitted to scramble for the crumbs of notoriety and fame, merely because another scorned them—"I wonder, with this lofty disdain of light literature, he should condescend in any way to contribute to it."

"That," replied Mr. Turner, dryly, "is his concern, not ours—and, perhaps, I have not well expressed my meaning. In this case, he contributes the materials, which originally were not his—and the money to insure their being well arranged, which *is*. In this undertaking, which must lay bare the deformities and weaknesses of genius, his purpose is to make one, who, during his life, exercised an injurious influence, and who had no idea of honesty or morality, repair, if possible, after his death, the evil; and by pointing a moral, warn from the rocks on which he himself split. However, as I really have not time now to enter into particulars and discuss them with you, dine with me the day after to-morrow, and meet Mr. Moore; you will afterward be able to see each other, and make your final arrangements—here is my card, half-past six punctually."

Stacey, who had inwardly fumed and fretted at the business-like manner of Mr. Turner, who, during their interview, seemed wholly unconscious that he was addressing the man whose verses, just published, were at that very moment being talked of by young lords, and by ladies, both young and old, and which had brought the author something very substantial in the form of a check from his well-pleased publisher, hardly knew how at once to descend from his Parnassian stilts, and walk with the common-sense companion just made known to him.

The truth is, we blush as we write it, Mr. Turner knew nothing of these poems but what his kind sister had occasionally read to him, when he was tired and sleepy, after a day of hard intellectual wrestling with some *pro tempo* rival; and at those times, more in deference to her than from any particular impression they produced, he murmured now and then, "Very pretty, very good;" and associating the author with one for whom Mr. Vernon was interested, he thought Stacey might be exactly the man to help his friend with his project; and so, as he concluded with "here is my card," he did, perhaps, by turning to his papers, dismiss the votary of Apollo rather cavalierly. "Mr. Turner, Bedford Square," muttered Stacey, and looked so clearly as if he longed to ask where that was, that this shrewd reader of character, glancing sharply at him, and saying, "Yes, it is known to all respectable Londoners, you will be sure to find it—good-morning," was, before Stacey reached the door, deep in the mysteries of his brief.

"That is a queer old governor of yours," was Stacey's remark to Reginald; "you have no idea how small he contrived to make me feel; and I was so provoked, that remembering the anecdote of a royal duke—when he gave me his card, I longed to ask where Bedford Square was."

"I hope you did not," said Reginald, gravely.

"No, faith, he looked too grimly clever, something as you do now," was his laughing reply. "I saw a sly devil twinkling in the corner of his gray eye, which told me I should feel the sting of his answer."

"Then, for once, a demon spoke truly," said Reginald; "but do you think the task one likely to interest and suit you?"

"If it be as I suspect, it will be the very thing—it is true, I shall be but little more than the arranger of materials; but as precious stones tossed in a disordered heap seem neither attractive nor valuable till the eye of taste disposes them in forms fit for the arm and bosom of beauty, thus it may be with these shreds and patches; and it must be my care to arrange them so that the silver thread, which connects, may here and there peep out."

Arrived at Mr. Turner's comfortable house, and seated at his well-served and well-arranged table, Stacey had time to look around on the guests, most of whom were men whose names were well known to fame, and respected by that bestower of celebrity—the public. And as he glanced from one intelligent countenance to another, he acknowledged, that not even at the fashionable and *recherché* dinners of Basingstoke House, the rallying-place of wit and talent among the aristocracy, had he ever seen heads and faces that promised a more agreeable party.

As he recognized name after name, he knew them to be all men of learning, education, and energy; many, he recollected, must have toiled their way up to eminence by the most indefatigable industry. They had considered nothing degrading or disgraceful that was free from meanness and dishonor; and by reviewing, revising, reporting, and all those mental labors which cause men to rise early and late take rest, they had, steadily and surely, established for themselves both renown and station; and long before dinner was ended, Stacey found that second-hand repartee and well-turned platitudes would here attract no attention; that the best substitute for silver, though passing current for the real metal among fine ladylings and lordlings, fell here with a flat and lead-like noise, when contrasted with the ringing sound of the pure coin, and its elastic rebound.

"And so," said a titled dignitary, whose ver-

satile powers and extraordinary attainments rendered him one of the most remarkable men of his time, addressing Mr. Moore, "it is whispered that you are at last going to give us a peep into the life and career of Hammond. I sincerely hope that Rumor has, on this occasion, blown through the trumpet of truth."

"I think she has—I have long been contemplating this work. So many years have elapsed since his death, and there are now no relatives whose feelings can be wounded by any disclosures, that I am much disposed to consider this a favorable moment."

"But as he was so intimately connected with the most celebrated of his cotemporaries, and in brisk correspondence with many, whose fame may be a little tarnished by a revelation of these private matters, may not *their* collaterals wince."

"Certainly not, if these memoirs are published according to my notion of what is due to the living, as well as to the dead I purpose it to be the 'Life of Hammond'—not to be swelled to endless volumes by introducing anecdotes of every wit and *vaurien* with whom he occasionally associated; so the vanity of their descendants need fear no wound, nor their egotism anticipate much gratification."

"But the letters?" suggested a young gentleman, who had, as he said, once perpetrated a tragedy.

"I shall most scrupulously insert all that are necessary to place the character in a true light—neither suppress, nor aught set down in malice; but I shall not repeat the dose *ad nauseam*. There is also much correspondence, which, alluding to the political and public events of the day, is in one sense historical, which must be carefully gone over; and here I mean to entreat your Lordship to assist me, as from the enormous mass of letters sent and received, few, comparatively, will be published."

"I am right glad to hear that," said Mr. Turner; "it is really time to stem the torrent of violated private correspondence, which threatens learning with a second deluge. Men now write an order to their tailors and bootmakers, with the dread of publication before their eyes, or the inquiry of 'What will Mrs. Grundy say?'—and while this rage for rummaging the post-bag fetters persons of sense and ability, and destroys all the ease and freedom of confidential correspondence, it operates as injuriously in another way on men and women too, whose little coterie, which to them represents the universe, be-puffs and be-praises them, till they no longer exchange invitations without writing, as Pope is said to have done, with one eye on the note, the other on publishers and posterity. And many an honest soul who went respectably through life, becomes after death, by the foolish toadying of a friend, the butt for a spiteful reviewer or waspish critic. And I am truly glad, my dear Lord, that you will help in this selection."

"I could hardly have been asked to do any thing I shall more completely revel in," replied his Lordship. "I accept Mr. Moore's challenge *con amore*—when will the pleasure commence?"

"We shall settle that with Mr. Stacey," was the answer. And Stacey, bold as a lion in the salons of many a duke and marchioness, perhaps never more painfully felt his own inferiority than at this moment.

"I congratulate you on having found such a Plutarch," said a guest, whom Stacey had often met at Basingstoke House; "the man who can send us such sparkling poetry from the Heath, and burn the midnight oil while he writes so acute an analysis of Doctor White's ethics, is the very one to do justice to poor Hammond. Good heavens! it compels us to serious thoughts when we revert to that brilliant but brief career, and know that the end was gloom, darkness, and misery."

"Yes," said Stacey, taking courage, and pleased to be thus recognized, "that will be the most difficult, the most painful part of the biographer's task; but we may hope he will do it gently, and so interest all the kind and better feelings of readers, that they shall remember the fate of him whose memoirs are before them, and 'be to his faults a little blind.'"

"And what says Mr. Moore to that tender handling?" asked Reginald.

"He says." replied the party addressed, his his strongly marked but benevolent face full of expression, "that thus he would have it, not only toward the erring sons of genius, of whom we say with a sigh, 'How art thou fallen, oh Lucifer! star of the morning'—but in all our daily and ordinary intercourse, one with another, Mercy *always* holding Justice by the hand—not one inch more will I seek to 'draw his frailties from their dread abode,' than I think necessary to prevent others from following his specious but fatal example. Edward Hammond had a splendid fortune, and his sickly child was supported by the charity of friends till death closed her brief existence. He had talents of the highest order, they were applied to the meanest purposes—he attained to extraordinary eminence—he became at last infamous, and was avoided as a drunken nuisance by those who helped to support him; and though he showed occasional glimpses of his lost glory, he was generally a mean, depeudent sot. But enough of this. And so they cut you up famously, did they?" turning to a very young man, who gayly replied—

"Infinitely worse than any surgical dissection at the Hôtel Dieu—but you see I have saved the pieces, and here I am, ready to undergo another operation."

"Bravo! bravo!" said Mr. Turner; "at any rate *you* will not die of a review."

"No, I shall print again, and 'shame the fools.'"

And then, after a more general conversation, they adjourned to the drawing-room, where they found Miss Turner with a party of ladies; for her brother did not choose his guests from talent or station of that coarse kind which mates with cooks and laundresses—worthy as these may be, when wielding the spit or broom. His sister was highly cultivated, and delighted in good society as well as himself, so he gave it to her in the wives and daughters of his own associates

Mrs. West and Mrs. Stacey were now among those who formed her party; and with some other ladies gave such music as is not often heard out of the concert-room, while Stacey, now completely in his element, charmed them with his

impromptu and improvising till the small hours had rung out twice before they separated.

"What a delightful evening, and what glorious fellows those are!" he said to Reginald; "by Jove! I was a monstrous fool not to stick to the law when I had so good a hold of its robe—but I always fancied a lawyer with a pen behind his ear, a blue bag in his hand, and his fingers and wristbands stained with ink. And only think, on Saturday, Mr. Moore and I dine with that Colossus who does bestride the world of letters—is not that something to talk of?"

"I am sure," said Mrs. Stacey, "we never can sufficiently express our thanks to the friends who have done so much for us;" and the grateful little creature quietly wiped her eyes—but such tears do good.

CHAPTER LV.

"Vous éloigner!—croyez moi mon ami c'est un mauvais moyen—l'absence ne fait rien sur un amour véritable. Vous ne l'oublierez pas et vous serez plus malheureux."—VALÉRIE.

HUBERT remained a few days at the Priory, as Forest Hill was still in solitary state; and seeing Constance, which he now did for the first time, as an inmate of the same house, he was more in love with her than ever; and as he made no secret of this, there can be no treachery in telling it.

Constance, perhaps, less demonstrative, or from maidenly reserve more silent, did not echo him on this subject; so we must remain in doubt whether her love still kept pace with his.

Shortly after Hubert's departure, her mother proposed that she should avail herself of Doctor Vernon's escort to town, and visit her aunt, Lady Sinclair, who had repeatedly urged it; and for the first time, Constance consented to leave home alone.

"It will be only a fortnight's absence," she said; "and during that time it will be odd indeed if we do not drive to Hampstead Heath—is it not so, mamma?" A smile and a kiss were the reply.

At Lady Sinclair's she was, therefore, safely left; and found no difficulty in gaining her assent to drive in the desired direction. Her aunt had always blamed the Colonel for forcing Helen to this extreme. She observed, that it was bad enough for the match to be broken off with Mr. West—but that was inevitable; and Helen's submission, in this case, her Ladyship contended, ought to have secured her from any persecution arising from other offers.

A little note apprised Helen of the guests she might expect, and, punctual to the hour named, they arrived.

Constance, who had resolved to be so calm and collected, could scarcely repress a scream when she saw this beloved sister smiling in the little porch; and was astonished, as she looked up through her tears, to hear Helen's gentle voice murmur, "Dear Constance, dear sister, you are overcome—lean on me."

The contrast from what she had pictured to herself, in which *she* was to act the heroine, was so great, that she was roused to exertion, and smiling, in her turn she exclaimed,

"So, this is the result of my bravery and self-control!" and she looked lovingly at Helen, whom she kissed and fondled as if she had been a little child.

"How delightful this is," said Helen; "how kind, how very kind of aunt Laura to leave us together. Constance, how you have grown—and dear mamma, tell me all."

These, and a thousand questions and remarks, were poured forth by both, during their first moments of meeting; for those who love and have been long parted, seem scarcely to know how to make the most of their happy re-union.

But when this effervescence of the thoughts and feelings had subsided, Constance had time to look about her, to look at Helen; and to see everywhere, and especially in her loved face, tokens of comfort and contentment. She then understood how it was that her mother had brought away such a treasure of peace, collected during her hasty visit.

"And Gretchen, I scarcely saw her in my delight at having you once more in my arms;" and forthwith Madame Stöpsel was summoned, to be thanked and chatted with, and to feast her affectionate eyes on her two nurslings, seated, with beaming faces, side by side. "Has she not grown, Gretchen?" said Helen. "Stand up, Constance."

"Grown! du Himmel! she has grown the loveliest thing I ever saw."

"Oh! fye, Gretchen! I shall certainly be jealous."

"No need," was the cheerful retort; "Mr. Reginald will soon set that to rights, and supply my deficiency—but, sure Miss Constance will stay and sleep here, and see him."

"Ah! Constance, if you could but do that—if aunt Laura could send for you to-morrow."

"I never ventured to hope for such a pleasure, but now you have reminded me of it, we will try our united eloquence."

And when Lady Sinclair returned from her visit to the Westroughs, she was so assailed that it was impossible to refuse; and Constance, half-wild at this prolongation of her furlough, flew about the cottage, looking into the very kitchen, and astonishing the staid German servant with her volubility and fluency in her own language.

But here is Reginald, and oh! unexpected joy, Ashley—and while Constance rushed into the arms of her brother-in-law, and received his first kiss of welcome, Ashley happily had time to take breath—though his voice shook, and he was very pale, as he took her extended hands, and muttered over them some unheard inquiry.

Constance had not seen either of them for a long time—Reginald, not since he departed for his Scotch tour; nor Ashley, since he so abruptly left her at the Priory, during the absence of his family; and when the first tumult of feeling had calmed down, how difficult it was to keep up a connected conversation—for memory was busy with all of them—and loaded with the stores which had accumulated during this long separation, they were poured forth with a prodigality and abundance which made silence almost a pleasure. It was truly *l'embarras des richesses*.

Ashley was, perhaps, the one most conscious of

this tendency to ponder rather than to converse; for he made the most vigorous, and at length successful, efforts to free himself from this dreamy influence, when his sudden eagerness to learn particular news of all who were at Seabrooke drew on him the playful indignation of Constance—who assured him that there was not one of his old friends who did not feel hurt at the indifference his self-banishment implied. She especially submitted whether, in her case, there was not a marked avoidance, since the only visit he had made was during her absence. Nor would her justly-excited wrath be appeased till he promised to take the first opportunity of disproving all her allegations. "And, mamma," she continued, "to whom you vowed fealty — oh! you faithless knight, to leave us all deserted."

"This is too bad of you, Constance," said Reginald, coming to the rescue of his friend, for Ashley was uncommonly tired and out of spirits; "why, he left an excellent deputy in Victor Morton, who seems to have been at the Priory perpetually, when he could escape from the Hermitage."

"Yes; a deputy something like his principal, especially latterly, who started for the Priory and always stopped at the Rectory."

"Now, I will punish your duplicity. There was the handsome Hubert Forrester—did he also stop at the Rectory?"

She colored crimson; but, happily, Helen remembered she wished to know about Minnie Dallas, of whom her mother had made mention as their frequent guest.

Ashley left early, and declined the invitation to breakfast the next morning on the plea of business; but he made Reginald understand, when they parted in the garden, that, as Constance was limited to time, Helen might prefer having her society more entirely to herself.

But he was in no hurry to return to town after he left the little party; he walked rapidly for more than an hour on the broad road at the top of the heath, severely examining himself, and unsparingly taking himself to task. Was this the result of his many months of self-denial? What! had he refused himself the pleasure of joining his own loved family circle—had he condemned himself to such severe and unremitting mental occupation as began almost to affect his health—and was this his recompense—this his success?

Was the first glance at that lovely face, the first sound of that musical voice, to show him that his struggles, his resolution, were all in vain? Was the enchantress to come, and with a touch of her hand cause his shield to melt away and his armor to become useless?

Ashley loved Constance—passionately, hopelessly loved her—loved her with the romantic tenderness of a poetic temperament—with the enduring intensity of a faithful, affectionate heart; he had loved her childish beauty and grace, her girlish tokens of intellectual superiority, her brave truthfulness of character; and as her early promise of rare excellence was fulfilled, so did his love steadily increase and deepen.

They had been parted by sad circumstances, and as Ashley became aware of his affection its folly and hopelessness, they had been kept asunder by his own stern determination to strive against a passion which her splendid prospects rendered absurd, and which her subsequent engagement to Hubert made desperate, and its indulgence little better than insanity.

Unexpectedly they now met; a year has more than realized all he foresaw—ah! much more than all; for though, with lover-like credulity, he had prophesied that time would mature and strengthen her mental powers, he had thought it impossible for her loveliness to grow more extraordinary. Yet there she had sat before him, her old, sweet, playful expression chased away by a look of such deep feeling; and now again the smile returns, to yield to the grave intelligence which looks out from her eyes, and gives dignity and additional beauty to every feature. And, as he gazed, "Constance, Constance, oh, how I love thee!" was the simple, earnest language of his rebellious but worshiping heart.

"But I will no longer submit to this; I will no longer deprive myself of intercourse with my own family. Why should I, since the object of this sacrifice is not gained? I will see them; I will see her, and no longer tremble in her presence when with her, nor dread it when away. Above all, I will see *them* together; and though it will be torture, I must, I will endure it. Yes, I will see them together; I will see her happiness, and—his also. I will try and find him worthy of this treasure: and if so, God give me strength to bear my part in silence, and with calmness! I will not delay, but go at once." And, as if he meditated walking there forthwith, he set off toward town at a pace which few could have overtaken without running.

Constance, the next morning, amused her brother and sister with her account of the ignominious exit of the intruders at Hurstwood—that of the boy, she said, Dawson had told her, when they sat together the night of Mrs. Templeton's absence: and they all laughed heartily at the *sang-froid* with which they fancied Cecilia had gone through this.

She also told them of her performance while keeping watch; but here Reginald interrupted her, and charged her very earnestly to be careful if she or her mother had reason to fear treachery he informed her that Cooper and his relatives were held in the utmost disrespect by the villagers generally, who were quite justified in entertaining this feeling; and that Mr. Morton strongly suspected Cooper of having some deep design in all the acts of mismanagement to which he advised her father; and, above all, he strongly recommended that, if Ruth's conduct seemed doubtful, she her mother, and Dawson should compare notes, and dismiss her summarily if all did not seem clear.

"You have no idea, Constance," was his concluding remark, "of the dreadful mischief which may arise should this girl be—as from your account I think very likely—in league with the Coopers."

To all this she promised to pay attention.

Though the Forresters were in town during the whole time that Constance remained with Lady Sinclair, and though Hubert was almost a daily and welcome guest at Sir Archibald's, the senior kept very much aloof, on the plea that Mrs. Forrester was not quite well enough to pay and receive visits.

Whether Constance noticed this is not known.

as neither by word nor manner did she give any indication of being either hurt or disappointed. Not so quiescent was her aunt.

"This is rather odd behavior of the Forresters," she remarked, to Laurette; "they have called here only once, have declined an invitation to dinner, and I never expressed the most distant wish that Constance should spend a few days with them; not that I wish it; she is a sweet girl, and, I hope, enjoys herself here more than she could with them, in their hum-drum way; only, I repeat, that it is very odd; especially as Mrs. Forrester has made such a point of your visit to Forest Hill when they return."

"Perhaps you would understand it all much better if you had been behind the scenes, as I have been, both at the Priory and at Forest Hill. Mamma, I am sure they do not like this match."

"Not like it!" exclaimed her mother, looking both angry and astonished; "and why not? where can they expect to find any thing better—at least for them? The Templetons, if not originally so rich, are quite as respectable as the Forresters; here is a splendid fortune, for I suppose Constance will have almost all the Seabrooke property; and to my mind," pursued her Ladyship, proudly drawing herself up, "she is one of the most beautiful and accomplished girls in England."

Laurette had a tart reply at hand, but she prudently saved it for another occasion and another hearer, so she said quietly:

"Mrs. Forrester never forgets Helen's marriage"—but she did not say she took very good care to prevent this obliviousness—"and in addition to former indifference, my uncle Lionel has grievously offended Mr. Forrester by this foolish election business."

"I grant that is an annoyance," replied Lady Sinclair; "only as he permits the engagement to continue, it would show the good politician to do so graciously." After a pause she asked, "Do you think Hubert is very much in love?"

"I believe he fancies that he is," was the reply, with a scornful laugh; for it was with a jealous pang she was forced to admit even this.

"I thought so," said her mother; "there is not enough depth of character in him for any thing strong or enthusiastic. I suspect that the last speaker is his oracle, and the last pretty face his idol."

Lady Sinclair's judgment here was correct; and though Laurette liked but little in a speech which reflected so severely on one who was her divinity, she could not deny that her mother was right. But this very weakness in her Apollo was to be her assurance and means of success; could she contrive to be often the last speaker, could hers become frequently the last fair face, she thought she might triumph; and hence the pertinacity with which she contrived to be so much domesticated in the same house.

She forgot that, to Hubert, hers never had been a fair face. Though the clever and the intellectual might see much to admire in her speaking black eyes, in her flexible features; and truly as they could appreciate her cultivated and richly-stored mind—this to Hubert was not beauty—he could not understand it, value it, or sympathize with it. His gay and thoughtless nature could not comprehend her cutting irony, her sharp and caustic wit—his superficial observation was rather startled than pleased at her piquant remarks, her satirical analysis, her merciless dissection of character, while her undoubted superiority of intellect frequently only wearied or oppressed him.

Had she been a very little prettier, and a great deal less talented, Laurette might have won him with ease, and would most likely have found that her faith in the power of propinquity was not misplaced. But as it was—well—she was still hopeful, still patient, in spite of the French sneer at the last quality, "*la patience; c'est la vertu des ânes;*" still it is something to admit that it is a virtue; and as a proof that Laurette possessed it, she resolved again to establish herself at Forest Hill, in defiance of what her mother, with more frankness than politeness, termed the humdrummery of the old people—an opinion in which Hubert seemed fully to concur, who, finding the society at home more dull than usual, and his father's feelings still ruffled by the recent behavior of the Colonel, availed himself freely of a general invitation to the Sinclairs, where, besides the attraction of Constance, there was always some amusement either going on or being devised.

Lady Sinclair, who was kindly desirous to vary what she knew was rather a monotonous life to Constance when at home, determined that this short visit should include as much pleasure to her as the season afforded; and as she and Sir Archibald readily collected round them society of the best kind, she fully succeeded in rendering this absence from home, which was prolonged to three weeks, one of the golden eras in her niece's existence.

Here, for the first time, she beheld Hubert among those who were distinguished as scholars and men of literature and science. Without deliberately contrasting him with these recognized leaders of intellect, she could not help remarking his inferiority—his want of information, talent, and taste; and without attempting to account for this, she decided that here he was not in his proper sphere; that the gay vision which at the Priory she daily expected with impatience, was not suited to a London *conversazione;* yes, that was the reason, the deficiency must be caused by place alone, for Hubert must be still the same; and so he was. He was gay, amiable, kind; ever ready for pleasure; fluent and amusing about trifles; skimming all that was elegant, and using it adroitly—but silent, wearied, bored when any mental labor was necessary.

Still, this might not have been so evident, or have made any permanent impression, had not Laurette given it importance by her invidious remarks. And though she almost hated herself for speaking in disparagement of one she passionately loved, she yet determined not to lose this opportunity of enlightening Constance.

"Mr. Fergus is, doubtless, a very clever man," she remarked to her one morning, "but I own he is quite beyond me; and really my head aches only to think of the load his has to carry."

"Oh!" said Constance, "I have scarcely ever been so deeply interested in any one's conversa-

tion and descriptions, and I quite long for to-morrow, when we are to go and see the beautiful and curious collection he has made. He has kindly promised me some engravings of the marbles he has brought home."

"Ah! yes, I perceived that he was wooing you through your love of beauty, and it was equally evident that he ranked Hubert and me among the dunces."

"Hubert has no taste for antiques," said Constance, rather vexed at this remark

"To say the truth," replied Laurette, "I think that last night he seemed to have very little taste for any thing but our projected gay party to Richmond. He appeared quite ready to excuse himself from joining us at Lord Latimer's to-day—though his Lordship has one of the finest private collections of pictures in the kingdom. I suppose, during his intimacy with the St. Angelo family, he had a surfeit of the fine arts."

Constance had often been on the point of naming this family to Hubert and asking about them—but some feeling she did not well understand had always prevented her—and now she felt particularly annoyed when Laurette proceeded to ask, "Did Hubert ever speak of them to you?" and she was obliged to reply, "No."

"Well, that is odd, so intimate as they were; however, as Hubert has his secrets, it is not wise for friends to pry and guess"—and she sauntered away to dress—leaving her words to be remembered or forgotten, as the case might be.

CHAPTER LVI.

"Were't not affection chains thy tender days
To the sweet glances of thy honor'd love,
I rather would entreat thy company,
To see the wonders of the world abroad."
SHAKSPEARE.

UNLIMITED powers had been given to Mr. Forrester's bailiff, with regard to feasting his tenantry and voters who liked to avail themselves of beef, pudding, and malt liquor; but Lady Dallas wore a disappointed look, for she, and all who had fully counted on it, were defrauded of the ball, without which no election, in the memory "of the oldest inhabitant," had ever terminated. Sir William was as ready as ever to indulge her in this harmless pleasure, but in the first place Mrs. Forrester was far too poorly either in mind or body to attend; and next, there was a little difficulty, until it was clear how this ill-advised opposition would affect the relative circumstances of the two rival families. "A plague on both your houses!" was her Ladyship's ejaculation whenever visions of dress and ball-room rose before her.

But Hubert's conduct quickly reassured and comforted her—the ball need only be postponed; and her imagination relieved from this pressure once more ran rather riot, and beheld a succession of gayeties and festivities looming, to borrow a popular phrase, in the distance. First, as she remarked to one of her friends, the election ball, that would be given directly Mr. Forrester could attend—next she hinted, the wedding parties at both Hill and Priory—then, with a knowing nod, the christening at Hurstwood, and, perhaps, a few strays and waifs which those resolved on amusement would be sure to pick up from all this gayety.

"Ada is wild to be introduced," she said one day to Laurette, when they had been talking over probabilities; "but Sir William thinks she is too young."

"And so she is," said Laurette, remorselessly destroying all hope of help from her opinion; "it is bad policy to bring girls out too early—I was nineteen before I was presented."

"I suppose you are right," sighed Lady Dallas, who longed to indulge her daughter; "so she must give up the idea—only I hope there is no harm in her occasionally joining a quiet little party."

"That depends on what the quiet little party is composed of," replied the referee; for she felt that Ada, though only a pretty girl, shy and timid, might be dangerous to such a flirt as Hubert, and tempt him from his allegiance to—— her cousin—not to mention any diminution it might make in her own chances.

"So says her papa; but next year she shall put away governess and pinafore, and see what life is, before she settles as an engaged young lady, or, perhaps, a wife."

"I wish you would ride over to Hargraves with me," said Hubert to his father, about a week after they had all arrived; "I want to see what they are doing there."

"Willingly," replied Mr. Forrester, who knew very well that they were doing nothing there, but who gladly seized this opportunity of having some conversation with his son regarding his own views and wishes—a conversation which something had made him shrink from attempting at home, as that same something very significantly warned him that Hubert would most likely start off at the opening.

"Your mother and myself have been lately talking of the situation in which we find ourselves placed with regard to the Priory, and, to be candid, we find it rather embarrassing."

"I am not surprised at that," replied Hubert, much to his father's amazement, adding, "to me, it is very annoying."

"That is precisely the term I should have used," rather hastily interrupted Mr. Forrester, "only I wished to avoid any thing that might needlessly hurt your feelings."

"Thank you, dear father, for being so considerate—and this encourages me to proceed—for, I assure you, I never go there now without, in my own mind, reverting to the foolish way in which the Colonel suffered himself to be so ill-advised, and wishing the awkwardness removed by my immediate marriage with Constance."

"Good heavens! Hubert, how I have misunderstood you. I was in hopes that, upon mature reflection, you fully entered into my feelings with regard to this deliberate insult, for such I consider it, and would so far sympathize with me and your mother as to see the propriety, indeed, the necessity, of withdrawing from your engagement there"

"Withdraw!" broke in Hubert, "what! when

we are engaged, pledged, plighted to each other—and because of a paltry electioneering squabble! you surprise me, sir."

"Not half so much as you do me, to call an affront offered to us a petty squabble. I should have thought my son knew too well what is due to a Forrester of Forest Hill, to have spoken so lightly."

"But I must be pardoned for asking in my turn, what notions of honor a Forrester must have, who, for such a cause, would expect his son to break his promise, to forfeit his word, and that, too, to one he loves? I thought, sir, we had sufficiently discussed this during our interview, soon after my return; and I repeat now, as then, that nothing shall induce me to give up Constance. I love her every day more and more."

"I regret exceedingly," replied his father, overcome by Hubert's impetuosity, and yielding when the latter insisted so strongly, "that on an occasion such as this we should have any difference of opinion. You know that from the first it was with reluctance I consented to this match. I never did, I never can, like Colonel Templeton; toward Constance I can not possibly have any objection, though I may have wished your choice had fallen elsewhere—but I assure you, Hubert, that this recent proceeding of her father's has increased ten-fold every motive for dislike which your mother and I have ever entertained—and, in my opinion, fully justifies me in desiring that further intercourse with his family should cease—his conduct releases us from all engagement—but of course, if you insist on his daughter's being introduced to our family, we submit—but I feel bound to say she will not be cordially welcomed."

Beautiful Constance! has it then come to this? thou with thy wealth of loveliness, thou so richly dowered with intellect, with a loving heart, with thy true and noble nature! and so thou art not to be cordially welcomed!

Something of this, perhaps, Hubert felt—for he turned his handsome face, glowing with indignation and love, to his father; but happily recollecting that it was his father, he rode on in silence.

After this had continued some time, Mr. Forrester said, with rather a hesitating manner, "As this subject seems ever to herald something unpleasant and painful, let me say now, that if I forbear urging any further objections, it is on the express condition that you complete your stipulated term of absence—indeed, whether you do or not, I could not permit the marriage at once to take place, as Hargraves is almost in the same state as when you left I have, hitherto, clung to the hope that it would never be needed for this purpose."

"I then only leave on the understanding that Hargraves shall be immediately seen after, and that, from time to time, a statement of progress be forwarded to me; and this very day, as you and my mother persist in your singular avoidance of the Priory—which to Constance and her mother must be very unpleasant—I shall speak to Colonel and Mrs. Templeton, as well as explain to Constance pretty frankly how matters stand, of course not affronting her by a repetition of the whole of your conversation."

And in no very peaceable mood did the two, abandoning the useless examination of Hargraves, separate—Mr. Forrester to seek the sympathy of his wife, and Hubert riding to the Priory, when he explained to the Colonel the state of his future abode, and his father's wish that he should delay his marriage till he could conduct his bride home.

Colonel Templeton laughingly told him, "That delay as he might, he would still have time to repent when fairly tied;" and added, "You must not expect me to hurry the bricklayers and carpenters, for what we shall do without Constance I do not know;" and feeling secretly much relieved that "that confounded election blunder" had not produced a serious quarrel, he was more than usually gracious with Hubert and the rest of his family when they met at dinner.

Mrs. Templeton, hearing that Mr. Forrester still wished Hubert to see a little more of life, strongly seconded his intentions; but she recommended that he should not remain permanently in one place, but avail himself more of his excellent introductions than he had done during his previous absence. She remarked that he and Victor, when in Germany, some time ago, had done little more than pay a hasty homage to its attractions, and said he ought now to examine more at leisure the beauties of both nature and art; and she added, "that delay would have been her own proposition, even had it not emanated from his father."

Baffled in this quarter, he sought Constance, hoping that she would listen to his murmurs; but she said, how delightful it must be to see so much that was grand and lovely.

"But, Constance, we could see it so much better together—and besides, to tell you the truth, I do not think I care much for these things. Now there was Morton, when we were at Naples, why, he used to go about raving of the beauty of effects—he would drag me about to look at the sea, one day because it was quiet, and the next because it was rough. One night it was the stars that kept me from sleeping; another, the moon. I must wake early to see the sun rise, and go dinnerless to see him set; and then he went poking and prying about after associations and facts, imaginations and realities, till it was rather a bore."

"The more reason you should go and complete your education," she smilingly replied; "for I see it has been sadly neglected: besides, if you took me," she added, gravely, "you would find me quite as bad as Mr. Victor—indeed, I may as well say the truth, a great deal worse."

This, of course, he gayly denied being possible; but the result was, that go he must; for Mrs. Forrester had communicated part of her husband's report to Laurette, who advised firmness—at least as regarded Hubert's absence

CHAPTER LVII.

"So holy, and so perfect is my love,
And I'm such a poverty of grace,
That I shall think it a most plenteous crop
To glean the broken ears after the man
That the main harvest reaps." SHAKSPEARE.

"AND dear Helen has a little boy," said Con

stance, as she sat holding her mother's hand "Mamma, are you not very grateful for this joyful news?"

"Very, very grateful indeed, my love," was Mrs. Templeton's energetic reply. "You shall have this letter from Mrs. Loftus, and read it to Caroline, while I tell our kind friends the good news; so prepare for a walk to the Rectory."

"Do you know, dear mamma," said Constance, as they joyfully pursued their way along the beautiful path which led from the ground toward the church. "that I have sometimes had a thought, which, after all, is perhaps hardly just; but I have thought the marked avoidance of all reference to Helen, which Mrs. Forrester shows, is rather unkind Hubert very often inquires, but Laurette sometimes annoys me also by her apparent indifference, so that I never volunteer any information to her; therefore she can not repeat much. I do not like this forgetfulness or pointed omission And then Lady Dallas is always so kind in her inquiries, that the difference strikes me as more remarkable Have you ever felt this?"

"I have, dear; and I have tried to prevent its having any influence on my manner or feelings. I advise you to do the same. Has Hubert fixed a time for leaving home?"

"I believe the end of this month; he goes at once to Naples."

"I thought he purposed remaining some time at Venice."

"He did; but Laurette says he has some particular friends at Naples;" and as Constance said this she was conscious of blushing deeply, for Laurette had not told her this only, but had kindly added, "If I were you, Constance, I should forbid this visit Strange rumors have made themselves heard about a certain Italian beauty, and Master Hubert's conduct when he was there before;" but though Constance felt vexed, it was more, she believed, at Laurette's manner than at her matter, for she had returned no answer to her insinuations.

"What a blessing it is to have such friends as the Vernons," said Mrs. Templeton, as they returned from the Rectory, where the thankfulness and congratulations had been so sincere; "language fails to express all they have been to me. And here is that noble, generous Ashley insisting on making my obligations hereditary. Such friends—such rare friends to me and my children! God reward them for it!"

"Ah, mamma!" said Constance, "I think Ashley almost the grandest of human beings."

"I think him quite," replied her mother, rather quickly. But, without noticing this interruption, Constance went on:

"You should have seen Caroline when I read that part of the letter in which Mrs. Loftus speaks of him—she made me read it twice: and she is so delighted that the baby is to be called Reginald Ashley; and the tears actually sprung to her eyes when she heard that almost the first words of our darling Helen, when she knew it was a boy, were, 'Let me see my little Reginald Ashley.'"

"It is so like the grateful, affectionate character of Helen," said her mother: "and so like Mrs. Loftus to notice and relate it."

"I have been making a little romance out of this," said Constance, after a few minutes' silence. "Suppose Ashley, now he sees more of Kate Loftus, should fall in love with her"

"Oh! you are not half romantic enough, child; you should fancy him falling in love with Mrs. Loftus, or even Gretchen; either is as likely as your plan;" and her tone was rather sharp as she said this.

"Oh, mamma!" and she laughed; but wholly insensible to the evident annoyance the subject gave Mrs. Templeton, she continued: "I have often wondered that Ashley does not marry—do not you?"

"No, my dear," was the short reply; and as if determined to banish the topic she said: "you will not be surprised that I wish to see Helen and her baby, my grandson, you know," and her look was now nearly bright; "therefore you will have to contrive for me as before—will you?"

"Oh! I shall be delighted to help you to secure this great pleasure—shall you go soon?"

"I shall wait patiently till Mrs. Loftus sends for me. Ah, Constance! it is not thus that the son of Reginald and Helen should be visited by his grandmother."

"True, dear mamma; but if they were in India—"

"Right, my child! always remind me of my blessings and privileges when I sigh because they are not greater or more numerous."

And again did Mrs. Templeton, availing herself of the Colonel's first absence, see Helen, and again she returned, without having excited any suspicion that she had been away

It was now carefully and calmly debated whether an attempt should be made to effect a reconciliation. Helen was extremely anxious that the birth of her boy should be the cause of so desirable a result; and on her account her husband yielded; for he had felt deeply wounded that Helen's entreaties, accompanied by her own avowal, that nothing but the extraordinary circumstances in which they were placed could palliate their disobedience, had received the most contemptuous neglect and silence.

Only to Ashley had Mrs. Templeton mentioned the insulting behavior of her husband when the marriage certificate and the joint letters arrived; and on hearing of this violent token of displeasure and rage, he counseled delay and further consideration. It was his intention, he said, to spend the next week at Seabrooke, and while there they would be able to deliberate and avail themselves of any circumstance that would seem favorable.

Yes, Ashley was going to Seabrooke; he had determined to see Constance and Hubert together; after that, they would be so associated in his memory that there would be no excuse for thinking of her without him; there would be no possibility of her image presenting itself unaccompanied by her accepted lover—her affianced husband; and thus guarded, Ashley trusted that time would aid his own honorable and strong determination to hide this love in his heart, so that none should suspect its existence; root it out, he believed, nay, he was sure, he never could. And then, if he felt certain that her happiness was secured, what mattered it? then "let the stricken hart go

weep;" but in order to pass through this silent martyrdom he must see them both.

"Happy, well, and lovely! so that is Reginald's description of his wife. I should not wonder, mamma, if, after all, he fancies he has married perfection."

"Oh! he has not the least doubt of that," replied Mrs. Templeton, "and Helen's appearance so fully warranted his description, as to leave me no feeling but joy and gratitude; and till I looked at you, dear girl, I thought it impossible to see any thing more beautiful."

"Oh! mamma," said Constance, with a gratified blush, "and the baby?"

"Like all other fine babies, if we could be rational enough to believe it—that the parents should think it a prodigy is nothing extraordinary—but, I assure you, Mrs. Loftus never rested till she made me say it was the sweetest little thing I had ever seen."

"Ah! and you thought so, you rational, philosophical grandmamma, I know," said Constance, kissing her mother's still lovely face, and smoothing her silky, dark hair. "It seems so odd to be an aunt; but, mother," and her gay countenance was suddenly overcast, "about papa, was any thing said?"

"Much, and we have decided on leaving every thing till Ashley comes—which he will do next week."

"Then all will go well," said Constance, with a sigh of relief; "he will arrange it wisely and kindly—perhaps," she continued, thoughtfully, "this may do papa good—who knows?"

"Who knows, indeed, dear child," replied her mother; "Providence, though it does condescend sometimes to use human means, does not work by the aid of giants—its most striking punishments, as well as its most signal mercies, are generally effected by agencies that seem the least fitted to produce them; and to that Providence we must leave this, and all other events."

Ashley came as he had promised; and after the joy occasioned by his arrival had a little subsided, he was all impatience to walk to the Priory—for under his acquired calmness there lay an impetuosity which it sometimes required all his good sense to govern and subdue.

"Dear Ashley, give me time to bonnet and shawl," pleaded Caroline; "how eager you are to open your budget of news!"

"Yes, I am very impatient to tell what will give so much pleasure;" but he did not add, "and to have an interview over which will give so much pain."

And it was with a pang which made him feel sick and dizzy, that, on entering the drawing-room, he found himself in the presence of Hubert, as well as of Mrs. Templeton and her daughter. He was conscious of his want of self-possession; but as this was his first visit to the Priory since Helen's marriage, he trusted his embarrassed manner would be ascribed to his recollection of all that had subsequently happened.

How joyful, how almost fond, was his reception. Mrs. Templeton declared afterward she longed to embrace him; and Constance told Caroline it was a good thing for her character that Hubert was present, or she must, in her delight, have thrown herself into Ashley's arms.

And Caroline told him what they had said, and it is odd how soon he forgot this, and she had to repeat it to her father and mother, and finally again to himself, before he understood it as an excellent joke, at which they all, except himself, laughed right merrily.

After a long *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Templeton, they joined the rest in the conservatory—the very conservatory which had helped to decide the fate of Lord Hurstwood and Cecilia; when Constance, who, with Caroline, was laughing at Hubert's attempts to arrange a nosegay, deliberately owned she must hand him over to her mother, to be taught the A B C of that important art, while she learned news much more valuable to her than all the art in the world.

"This is the very first time," she said, taking his arm, as he expressed it to himself, just as if nothing had happened, "that you have come among us since our great trial. Oh, Ashley! you can not think how dear mamma and I have missed you—how often we have needed your kind, wise advice."

"Have you?" he asked mechanically; fancying some remark was necessary—and shrinking from the tone, the look, the touch, which all spoke so clearly the confidence of friendship, nothing more—fool, madman, he thought, what more were you wild enough to dream of?

"Ah, you know we have; there is no one on whom we more rely—you are the adopted son of mamma—the dear brother to Helen and me—even Caroline consents to this claim, so you will hardly refuse."

"Refuse! and to you?" then checking himself, he continued calmly, Heaven knows with what an effort—"yes, let me be so to you and Helen—and now let us talk of her. Your mother and I have been considering the best way of introducing this little stranger to your father's knowledge, to his affection—and my father thinks it will be better, and more in accordance with the position he occupies here, if he undertakes to inform him, and at the same time endeavors to plead the cause of its parents. You know he may safely be trusted with this important mission."

"No one else half so well," replied she. "Doctor Vernon will be so gentle, there can be no danger of his irritating papa; and then he is so forbearing himself, that there is no fear of his temper giving way. Besides, it is his boundeu duty to try and make peace, and counsel forgiveness."

"Precisely so," said Ashley; "and for these reasons he consents to become mediator, and let us hope that the result may show that a blessing has attended his exertions."

"God grant it," she fervently ejaculated; "for though they are so happy with each other, and so contented with their condition, I am sure this state of things must be the perpetual bitter mixed with their sweets. Not," she continued, "that poor Helen knows the whole extent to which papa's anger led him," and she trembled and turned pale as she said, "nor would I, under any circumstances, ever have her know; and oh! if Doctor Vernon could only have this unsaid, it would be an unspeakable relief to mamma and me;" and then, for the first time, did Ashley collect, from her look and manner, that some dreadful maledic-

tion must have burst from her father's lips during the paroxysm of rage.

"And Reginald's law, how does that go on?" she asked, after making an effort to banish the recollection of that dreadful scene.

"Nothing can be better; I assure you he rivals me in the good graces of Mr. Turner—and were not Helen to sound my praise now and then, he would do the same with Miss Turner."

"Miss Turner!" repeated Constance; "is that his daughter, and is she beautiful?"

"No, to your first inquiry—she is his sister. Yes, to your last—for she is one of the kindest and most benevolent old ladies I ever knew."

"Ah! I understand what you mean by that indirect reply and that covert rebuke; but I am nearly cured of that folly, and I—even I—can now see beauty in mind, in feelings, in acts. I have learned to look through or beyond the material—and you will not now hear me say, with the literal meaning I then attached to the words, 'I can never love what is ugly'—though in another sense I may still feel it—for I never can love what is wicked, or even base and mean; but I have seen the most homely features beautified with the light of intellect, and the plain face suddenly ennobled and made lovely by its sympathy with what is truly great and heroic."

And as Ashley looked at the enthusiastic countenance that was raised to his, he thought if these feelings beautify the homely, and give dignity to the ignoble, what will mind and sentiment do to one already of surpassing loveliness? and he sighed.

"But you doubt my good report of myself?"

He shook his head—he feared to speak.

"And you—you will soon be called? will you not?"

"Yes, very soon."

"And then you will not study so hard, but you will come among us?"

"Yes—no—I do not know;" but feeling that he had endured enough for the first attempt, he said, "I fear that Caroline is waiting for me."

"Then she is in an unusual hurry. I have not asked half I intended—but you both dine here to-morrow—mamma said so."

"Yes, I promised Mrs. Templeton," for he resolved to go through his self-imposed ordeal.

And the following day he met Colonel Templeton, with whom he had always been a particular favorite. Ashley and Victor were continually cited by the Colonel as specimens of what he called, real out-and-out fellows—handsome, spirited lads who had a will of their own, therefore his welcome to him was both warm and sincere.

Ashley thought him much altered; he looked older by several years, though little more than one had passed since their last meeting—he was less naturally cheerful, though at times loud in his mirth—and it was with deep regret that he perceived how he indulged in wine—and that he did not accompany Hubert and himself when they joined the ladies.

Ashley had now the opportunity he sought; for without any attempt on his part to draw Hubert out, Caroline unconsciously furthered his views.

Associated as Hubert and Victor had been, for some time before the latter left for Cyprus, it was natural that she should refer to various events of which his letters had subsequently informed her, and this naturally, also, led to discussions on these subjects, and involved an expression of opinion from which the tastes and habits of the speaker were rendered apparent. Ashley, who had been in Italy, was also curious to learn about many changes in public feeling which had since then taken place; but Hubert, finding that all these inquiries supposed that he had been a close observer, and that he had a greater knowledge of the progress of society and the arts than he possessed, candidly referred them to Victor Morton, who, he said, gossiped with all sorts of people about all sorts of things. And then, thoroughly weary of the conversation, he asked Constance to sing one of the pretty serenades he had brought home.

"I see," said Caroline, opening the music, "that it is dedicated to Beatrice di St. Angelo; did you not meet that family when you were at Rome?" she asked of her brother.

"Yes," he replied; "I met them, or rather, I should say, the Duca very frequently—he married an English lady—his only child I never saw—but I have since heard she has grown into a celebrated beauty. The mother died of decline, and at one time there were fears of this girl's health being delicate. The Duca is a man greatly esteemed. But," suddenly addressing Hubert, "you, of course, have been introduced to him?"

"Yes," replied Hubert, flushing to the temples, "he has a place in Sicily;" then turning to Constance he said, rather abruptly, "If you dislike that song, try this," substituting another in place of the first.

Why should he suppose Constance disliked that particular song?—had she given any indication of so doing?—none. Had he any reason for thinking she might?—and did conscience wake and utter a whisper?

Both brother and sister, on their return to the Rectory, for some time kept silence; at length Caroline said, "I hope Constance has done wisely in choosing Hubert."

"What makes you have any doubt about it?" asked Ashley steadily.

"Merely a vague feeling that, agreeable and amiable as he is, he is not exactly the person I think suited to her. Circumstances have very remarkably developed her character, which always gave promise of great superiority; but I suspect that Hubert's mind has done growing, and will never be taller or stouter."

"Hubert," said her brother, "has hitherto only played with life, and therefore his character seems stunted—it is the penalty the Sybarite must always pay—happily, however, very few are allowed to make a pastime of the world, and when they begin in good earnest to struggle against its trials—to grapple with its realities—to find that they must conquer or die, then men show of what they are made; and if this be of the true stuff, then qualities and powers undreamed of answer to the call."

"But all are *not* of the true stuff—all are not great."

"No," he replied, "for if all were great, none would be so;" and amused at her puzzled look, he continued, with a smile, "never mind the paradox just now, 'I will explain it when I have

time,' as Doctor Rochecliffe says. In the common acceptation of the term great, it is not necessary that all should be so, though there *is* a moral greatness which all may achieve, and then society would be much benefited. But with reference to our present question, what I mean is, that a life of ease, with no *acknowledged* duty of sufficient importance to rouse to exertion, never can produce a character above mediocrity; but Hubert may's till be placed in a position that will develop qualities for which we now scarcely give him credit. However, Caroline, I do not think he ever could be either a Reginald or a Victor Morton."

"Still less an Ashley," she replied, fondly, pressing his arm. Then, after a pause, she added, "You can not think how happy your just appreciation of Victor makes me. And only think of my ignorance of character, for I once used to dismiss both him and Hubert with the disrespectful remark, "Two thoughtless, do-nothing lads."

Calmly as Ashley, to all appearance, had discussed Hubert's character, it was not so that he felt. Too noble and generous to seek for faults, even in his rival, and to rejoice when he had found them, he sighed to think that further observation had only served to confirm his previous impressions. He felt sure that though Hubert did, must love Constance for her beauty, accomplishments, and amiability, he was quite unable to comprehend the real elevation of her mind, the refined taste, the exquisite sense of the beautiful in feeling and morals which were so eminently her characteristics. And Constance, would she ever discover this superiority? and would this want of sympathy be then keenly felt? But, after all, what was this to him? All this thought and speculation would not help him to banish Constance, and prevent her taking so prominent a position in all his dreams; and yet it had been his firm resolution to achieve this, "at least," he said, with a sigh, "my firm resolution to attempt it."

The same day that Ashley left, Doctor Vernon set forth on his errand of peace. He met the Colonel in the grounds, and though there was no friendship between men so dissimilar, the sacred character of the Doctor's duties, and his unaffected piety in their performance, obliged all to respect him; while his Christian sorrow for those who, like Colonel Templeton, cast away their happiness with their integrity, imparted a gentleness and kindness to his manner which was not altogether unfelt by the most hardened.

"I have come to crave a little of your time and indulgence," said the Doctor, meeting him on the terrace and proceeding toward the house, as there, he knew, the Colonel could not abruptly leave or dismiss him; "and I hope I have chosen an opportunity as favorable to success as this sweet health-inspiring morning is to gratitude and kind feelings."

"Ah! you must not expect to find that I resemble that placid sky or these gentle zephyrs," replied he, laughing.

"Oh! but I do expect it," rejoined the Rector, "for a grateful spirit is precisely the one we desire for him of whom we are about to ask favors, and you have many causes for gratitude."

"I am not at all sure of that," he answered; and wholly unconscious of Doctor Vernon's business, he having never alluded, even the most distantly, to family affairs, the Colonel led the way to the library, where he politely waited for him to begin.

"My office and calling often impose that upon me as a duty which in others would be impertinent and officious. I come to you fully expecting a blessing—blessed are the peace-makers."

"If you come with any idea, Doctor Vernon, that I shall consider even your office justifies interference in my domestic arrangements, dismiss it at once," interrupted the Colonel rising and speaking with much excitement.

"Nay, call it not interference," resumed the Doctor, mildly; "remember, you have assumed that. I do not admit the charge. You have known me long enough to be sure that nothing but the best motives could induce me to say what might, perchance, annoy. Believe me, Colonel Templeton, that if my mission succeed, though but in the smallest degree, you will very largely share in the blessing—why then cast it from you? —why close your heart so that peace and love knock in vain for admittance?—if you can not wholly forgive, remembering that you—that all —need forgiveness—do not cherish bitter feelings and unhallowed hate."

"Doctor," said he, resuming his seat, "as I am willing to believe that a sense of duty animates you, and that you have no intention to offend, you must give me equal credit for the absence of any thing like disrespect toward you when I assure you that your attempt is useless. By that girl's conduct I have been placed in circumstances most irritating and mortifying to one of my character; and I never will forgive her—she left this house, and while I live she shall never re-enter it. Do not interrupt me," seeing the Doctor prepared to speak. "In my just indignation I pronounced a malediction on her. This I withdraw; but any further concession I never will make so long as I live—I never wish to hear her name pronounced —I care not what becomes of her nor where she goes;" and then seeing the excellent Rector quite overpowered with emotion, he added, with rather less vehemence, "This unpleasant interview was wholly unsolicited on my part—and I beg you to believe that my pleasure does not prolong it."

"Colonel," said the Doctor, rising in imitation of his companion, "for the withdrawal of words so fearful, and which no offense from another can ever justify, I rejoice on your account. Curses injure not those against whom they are hurled beyond the sorrow they cause, when we see that one human being should be so vindictive against another; your child is under the protection of that Power who can not only shield her from evil wishes, but cause them to return whence they came. If the day should ever arrive, and I pray that it soon may, when you repent of having cast away the blessing I brought for you, send for me —it may, mercifully, even then not be too late to secure it;" and feeling that further remonstrance would only more deeply exasperate the man whose suppressed passion spoke in every tone, every movement, every look, he bowed and withdrew.

Oh! how did his slow step thrill through the heart of Mrs. Templeton and Constance, whose impatience and anxiety as to the result had been almost agony—and who read, in the sorrowful

expression of his benevolent countenance, that their hopes had been fallacious, and that the father's heart was steeled against the child's petition for pardon.

"No hope, then, dear friend?" murmured Mrs. Templeton.

"None—like the angels, we must wait to see why this mercy is still withheld"

Constance burst into a paroxysm of tears—but she said not a word.

"The Colonel consents to withdraw his terrible denunciation—but even this was accompanied with words of such cruel indifference, that we have scarcely gained by their substitution; and as poor Helen was never informed of the extent to which passion led her father—she is as she was."

"Did you tell him of the birth of her boy?"

"No—I would not risk the repetition of words evincing such cruel apathy—and shrunk from associating an innocent babe with an interview so very painful. Again I say to you and dear Constance, wait—the purpose is wise, though we discern it not."

"Oh! mamma, mamma," sobbed Constance, while her mother pressed her to her heart—"this is dreadful, dreadful!"

"My child it is—even I have not learned to bear it without a murmur."

CHAPTER LVIII.

"Men's evil manners live in brass."—SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN Stacey, according to appointment, called upon Mr. Moore, he found the old gentleman seated in his handsome and comfortable library, the table literally covered with books and papers—the latter, some tied up, others looking yellow and worn—were open, and seemed as if they had lately been perused.

Mr. Moore's intelligent countenance had an expression of deep and serious thought as he rose and kindly greeted Stacey.

"You find me here," he said, pointing to the opened letters, "seated like Marius amid ruins—the ruins of the Creator's best and noblest endowment—that of intellect; and it has saddened me to trace the decline, decay, and total downfall of one who had the fatal gift of genius."

Stacey was no less touched by the tone of earnest regret with which this was uttered, than stung by some remembrance that whispered "take warning!' but shaking off a mood by no means habitual to him, he remarked that it was painful to be forced to admit that the term "fatal" was here only too justly applied, but that, happily, such was not always the case.

"It is, indeed, but too properly used here, and in numberless other instances," replied Mr. Moore; "but, as you say, happily, it is not inseparably connected with genius any more than with beauty, the *misuse* alone renders it appropriate; and this is precisely one of the mistakes or fancies which I would gladly attempt to destroy. Instead of imprudence, extravagance, and, in some instances, vice, being thought the necessary and inevitable accompaniments of genius—nay, sometimes welcomed as sure indications of its existence—I should like to show that they are its disgrace, its annoy, its impediments, its certain destruction. Good God! are we to believe that the power which renders man's efforts imperishable is clogged with a condition so ruinous and hateful? Are men of the highest intellect, of the richest imagination, of the most elegant fancy, to pay for this distinction by being blind to moral elevation, and incapable of valuing the dignity of truth, honesty, and laborious independence? It is monstrous to suppose it!"

"Right!" cried Stacey, carried away by Mr. Moore's warmth; "we must no longer allow them to quote the hackneyed '*Video melior*—' and so on, as an excuse for their inconsistency; and though it will never be as easy to do, as to know what were good to do, it will, indeed, be a grand victory to sweep away this cobweb which entangles the judgment and obscures the moral perceptions of so many."

"Yes; and to return to your quotation—'though I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow my own teaching,' let these master spirits henceforth no more neutralize the good effects of their lessons by the bad effects of their example."

"But how often does it fortunately happen that this evil example has little or no influence, from the ignorance which so commonly prevails, as to all that personally relates to authors," remarked Stacey.

"I grant that, but only in part; the author, let him be as personally unknown as you please, knows and feels the effects *himself;* and so, unhappily, do all who are connected with him; and this alone ought to be motive sufficient to make us expose this fallacy; but when he is not unknown, but courted, sought after, imitated, then no one can be insensible to the danger of his example. Besides, unknown as he may be during his life, in this biographical and autobiographical age, he is lucky who escapes being disinterred and dragged before the public, either through his own vanity, the folly of friends, or the cupidity of a publisher; only think what encouragement folly and extravagance then receive. They take refuge under one name of literary celebrity, and indulge in habits of destructive intoxication; under another, meanly take from honest industry to support their pampered and luxurious habits; under a third, for conduct still more disreputable; and so, under cover of one name of note or another, they play off pranks at 'which the angels weep,' but which they and the foolish public call vagaries of intellect, eccentricities of genius, as if intellect and genius did not pay the penalty of folly and crime. But you will think me a hot-headed old fellow, perhaps a soured one; only take these packets home, read them carefully, and before you judge me unfavorably, remember that, if I speak warmly, it is because I feel warmly and kindly toward these children of genius, who, in so many cases, never cease to be children. Ah! why should reason and poetry be antagonists?—why should common sense and talent so often pursue different paths? And now, adieu!—will you dine with me *tête-á-tête* this day week, and prove to me that I have not scared you?"

Pleased, interested, touched, and roused, Stacey

pursued his way home; and finding, when he reached the Heath, that he had still food for meditation, he walked and sauntered about for a full hour, thinking over all he had heard; and so deeply were both judgment and imagination at work, that before he entered his own house he had collected from memory, and occasional glimpses at the papers he carried, materials for his introductory chapters — for the individual whose memoirs he had undertaken to write was one whose name, for good and evil, had, during his life, and long after his death, attracted public attention, and was even now often quoted as a proof that talent without principle is a curse.

CHAPTER LIX.

"O' my word, the father's son—I'll swear 'tis a very pretty boy."—*Coriolanus.*

MERRILY and cheerily rang out the bells at Hurstwood, and told in their musical tones and laughing voices that an heir is born to the Lord and Lady there. Busy figures flit about, and important faces are met here, there, and everywhere, announcing that no common every-day occurrence has taken place—smiling looks and happy voices report that my lady is doing as well as can be expected, and that the baby is the finest that ever was seen—"the very model of my noble master," said the dignified nurse; and Lady Grantham goes about with a more stately step than usual, oppressed, perhaps, with the weight of her newly-blown honor in being grandmother to a Lord.

"It's a very grand thing to be mother in-law
To a very magnificent three-tailed Bashaw."

But Lord Hurstwood!—never was a man more elated—his wife was safe, and to do him justice, that was his first thought—the child, oh! climax of joy, the child is a boy!

Already he began to doubt whether he had done quite wisely in having so decidedly retired from public life—he had certainly been rash and premature; at his age, it was rather absurd to suppose that his country could not benefit by his wisdom and experience—and he comforted himself with the reflection, that statesmen, like other celebrated performers, may have more than one positively last appearance.

He commanded the steward to have the usual rejoicings and festivities arranged on a larger scale than ever; so that directly her Ladyship could appear to receive congratulations, every mark of respect should be ready prepared—and he presented Lady Grantham with a splendid copy of Cecilia's portrait, which had lately been added to the family picture gallery.

And when he was admitted to see his lady and their firstborn, his expressions of joy and gratitude were so reiterated and sincere, as to make her threaten him with banishment if he did not moderate his transports—though she privately told Lady Grantham that that would be punishing herself, as it really gratified her to perceive how much this event had added to his happiness as well as to her own.

Mrs. Templeton and Constance were among the first to offer their congratulations; and it will not, it is hoped, detract from the character of the former, if we record that while she most sincerely rejoiced with her sister-in-law, the remembrance of her own little grandson came across her mind and made her sigh.

It was impossible to check the train of thought which was busy in drawing contrasts between two very similar events. Here the young mother was not only surrounded by every comfort and luxury that great wealth could procure, but she was cheered and sustained by the presence of her mother, and receiving openly the felicitations of her nearest and dearest relatives.

There, far from *her* care and watching, was her beautiful Helen; not, it is true, needing one comfort—these she could readily have—but in a small and humble abode, attended by strangers, an alien to her kindred, her father's blessing refused to her innocent babe, and her mother's caress prohibited.

But, thanks to her disciplined mind, here Mrs. Templeton stopped. What signified all these contrasts when such rich blessings had still been bestowed on her? She had the love of her noble, true-hearted husband; she had her mother's prayers and blessings, though denied the comfort of her presence; and above all, as with the noble Lady of Hurstwood, Providence had sent health to her and her child; and with a chastened mind and self-rebuked spirit she lifted up her heart in thankfulness.

"Mamma, I fancy I know what you have been thinking of," said Constance, remarking the silence and thoughtful look of her mother—"you were comparing Helen and Cecilia."

"I was going, dear Constance, to plead guilty; but at the very moment you spoke I was calling myself strictly to account for indulging ungrateful and discontented thoughts, and I hope I have succeeded in bidding them hence."

The little Lord Stanley, the son and heir, *par excellence*, was about six weeks old; and calls and congratulations were nearly over, when one day Lady Hurstwood was in her own private sitting-room, into which she often had a beautiful little cot introduced, with its still more beautiful inmate. Such was the case now, and seated by it she was fondly contemplating her sleeping boy, when a gentle tap and the gently opening door announced his lordship.

Happy man! he may easily be pardoned if he stopped for a few seconds to gaze with delight on the scene.

His handsome wife, dressed in a costly and most becoming *negligée*, was bending over the cot, holding back one of the lace-trimmed curtains, so that she might have a full view of that living and breathing picture which is the loveliest and best a mother's eye can rest on. Her face, always attractive when lighted by one of her sweet smiles, was eminently so now; for mixed with her look of love and pride there was an expression of deep thought which harmonized most touchingly with her occupation and attitude. It seemed as if she were trying to gaze into futurity, and see there what was to be the destiny of that innocent slumberer; as if she were endeavoring to raise the curtain which hid the history of his life from her

eyes, and to learn from it all that the feeble, helpless little being, so unconscious at present, was to do and suffer hereafter; and she gently sighed as, dropping the muslin, she turned to greet her husband.

"How beautiful he looks, Frederic," she said.

"Very beautiful, indeed," he replied, always much pleased when his wife addressed him by his Christian name, which she occasionally did in private. To his ears this was especially agreeable—it sounded affectionate—it sounded youthful also—it awoke dormant feelings which were a little romantic—it united the happiness of the present with pleasant recollections of the past, and hopes of pleasure for the future; above all, to him it whispered an assurance of his wife's love, and this he had learned to value.

"We must think, my love, of giving some earthly name to that dreaming Cupid, and if you are at leisure I should like to consult you about it."

"My opinion is soon given," she said, softly touching the dimpled little hand that lay on the satin coverlet; "no name will be so pleasant to me as his father's."

"My dear Cecilia, you will positively spoil me; but to be candid, I intended to have proposed it, with the addition of Cecil, which will be a compliment to Lord Grantham that I shall be truly delighted to offer."

"Very kind, indeed," she replied; "but when are you not? I was thinking, just as you entered, of many things; some strangely at variance with what our sleeping infant seems likely to have suggested; and yet he was the most prominent figure among all the various groups. But with other things, my dear lord, I was framing a little request I have to make."

"You have but to speak; it is granted if in my power."

"That power I am not quite sure of; but as I know you have influence with the present government, I want it exerted for one whom I am certain you would esteem if you knew him."

"May I venture to guess?" he asked, with a smile. "It is Mr. Reginald West whom you mean."

"The same—how kindly and readily you read my thoughts. You are already partly acquainted with his unfortunate history; and though I find from Mr. Ashley Vernon that he has talents of the highest order, with industry and perseverance to render them useful, it may be years before his profession can make him independent, especially as, like you," she added, laughing, "he is burdened with a wife and son."

"I have more than once thought of this gentleman, dear Cecilia; but I felt delicate about mentioning him, as being your connection. Your usual good sense and candor now set me at liberty, and, in imitation of your conduct, I may say I actually have a commission from official quarters to name a gentleman, such as I believe Mr. West to be, for employment in a foreign court; which employment may continue for two years—scarcely less; but if performed in a satisfactory manner, it will be certain to lead to higher duties and preferment. Now I thought you would like this to be a little offering from us both, on this joyful occasion, to your cousin—what says my lady?"

But my lady was rather overcome for a brief space; indeed, she wiped her eyes before she could say, "Nothing can be better—more graceful—more thoughtful; and if I might suggest the best way of opening the business, it will be through Mr. Ashley Vernon, with whom you are already acquainted."

Ah! Reginald and Helen, is Preferment coming with a thundering rap-a-tap-tap at your humble door? and have you no presentiment that the great personage is so near?

CHAPTER LX.

"A momentary grace of mortal men,
Which we more hunt for than the grace of God!"
Richard III.

"I AM not quite comfortable about Stacey," remarked Reginald to his friend, some time after the birth of his son; "his little wife looks anxious, and he talks of changing the atmosphere, and running away for a short time with that good-natured but silly Lord Chalton."

"In that case I have no doubt that the atmosphere will, indeed, be quite changed; but I do doubt whether it will be more healthy for him. However, he has really worked on so steadily for some months, that I am not surprised he desires a little respite. His mercurial nature and thoughtless habits require a holiday now and then to make him work cheerfully when he returns to school; and I must own, the rapidity and success with which he produced that first volume of memoirs fairly took me by surprise."

"Well, if you are satisfied, I have no reason to croak and be dismal."

It would have been well had Mrs. Stacey been satisfied also; but such was not the case.

Since the remarkable success of part of the work, for the appearance of which public curiosity had been raised by all the machinery that publishers so well know how to put in operation, and which from its own real merit, both as regarded manner and matter, had produced quite a sensation in the reading world, Stacey's mind and pen had flagged. Like a racer that distances all others till near the goal, and then drops dead lame, so it was with him; instead of following up this success, and securing for himself a high and permanent place in the temple of Fame, he acted as if that were certain, or already attained—in truth, he seemed to have made an effort he had not strength to continue; and Ashley was partly correct when he said Stacey wanted a holiday.

We all want a holiday now and then—a kind of change; Nature herself requires it—she works hard, she lays in her stores, she prepares her vast laboratories, and silently continues her labors without giving much sign of even the faintest exertion. Spring comes, and she then evinces her taste and skill in making evident preparations for the beautiful and gorgeous attire in which she pranks herself, and takes *her* holiday amid flowers and fresh perfumes during the glorious summer.

And so, we repeat, we all want a holiday. But there is a great difference in the way of spending it. Some make it a season of over-

feeding—too much plum pudding—too many mince-pies; then, after sundry natural punishments, comes the crowning penalty in the doctor, with his draughts and powders. By some it is spent in over-pleasuring—and though a different process is gone through, still there is the same result—a penalty of some kind to be paid.

A few enjoy it rationally.

But Stacey was not one of the rational animals—so he flew off with his rattle-brained friend, and soon found himself more than ever the observed of all observers—the petted—the fêted. Nothing could be done without him and his direction—so that, if he had thought, he might have asked, "Have all these people been in an enchanted sleep since I last met them? and am I the prince who alone can wake them? How have they done without me during this long interval?"

But it was enough for him that they offered incense; he asked not how long it was since they had burned it to the cap and bells, nor how soon they would do so again. He was once more on the pedestal—what mattered it that some creeping thing had squatted there before him, or that some bird of prey would alight on it after.

"This is a poor substitute for the second volume, which so many are looking for," remarked Reginald to his wife and Ashley, as he opened a splendidly bound and illustrated book of poems, by Charles Stacey.

"I can not tell you how greatly I am disappointed," replied Ashley; "not exactly in this, which is a fair average specimen of modern poetry, but I am sorry that a man who possesses the talents Stacey really has—the memoir evinces that—should allow them to be wasted in the trifling, shallow society into which he has so eagerly thrown himself."

"But they are not entirely wasted," observed Helen, apologetically; "witness this gay little volume."

"Which proves nothing for your argument, Helen," answered Ashley; "the best of these poems, as you may see by the dates and allusions, were written while living here—and even without those indications I would undertake to point out all that have been inspired—inspired, indeed! it is to profane the word—composed, under the influence of

> 'The music, and the banquet, and the wine,
> The garland, the rose odors and the flowers,
> The sparkling eyes, and flashing ornaments,'

of the world of fashion. It was not at Almack's that the true poet learned to 'give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.'"

"You would insinuate, then, that these smell of the lamp?" asked Reginald, laughing at the other's warmth.

"In one sense, certainly. Ah! how inferior is all this finery, contributed by jewelers, upholsterers, and mercers, to that gentle but majestic beauty which is imparted by holding converse with Nature. How fresh are all the similes borrowed from her ever-varying aspect—how true and life-like all the images drawn from her boundless stores!"

"Oh! Ashley," pleaded Helen, "do you then forbid us ever to borrow from art?"

"Do not urge him just now," said Reginald, "or I foresee he will answer rashly—we shall have him denouncing art itself, and branding poor Stacey as one of the multitude, who 'indite much metre with much pains.'"

"And little or no meaning?" asked she.

"Not quite so bad as that," said Ashley, calming down; "though I am bold enough to assert, that the more we copy from copies, the less shall we find of the real spirit of poesie."

"Still," persisted Helen, willing to say what she could, in extenuation of Stacey, whose many amiable qualities made her lenient to his follies, though not blind to them; "still, you see, these poems, artificial as many confessedly are, sell well. Mr. Stacey writes for his patrons, and they buy what he writes.

"Yes, and he dedicates his rhymes to a woman who is quite unable to comprehend true poetry—who made use of himself and his wife while it suited her—and forgot them in their distress, when the remembrance did not suit her. She now again coolly invites him, because he is the literary pet of the day, and still leaves his wife unnoticed, as if she were not in existence. It is such people who, under the name of patronage, are the vampires of intellect and true genius. Happily, a man of real talent does not need a patron now—he has only to write or paint up to the mark, and society at large are his patrons; and, reversing the old order of phraseology, are his grateful patrons too."

"Ah! Ashley, you are not consistent—why, your old idols would never have lived till now had not their inspirations been fostered by the warmth of patronage, ay, and royal patronage too. Speak up, old Chaucer," continued Helen, "and say how your patron and friend aided and encouraged you. Faerie Queene, bring your own true poet, and bid him tell us of his brother bard and kindred spirit, the gallant Sidney. Why, if I were to summon them all, with their queenly and noble patrons, 'and they did come when I did call for them,' not this little room only, but not this large heath, would hold them."

"Well done, Helen" said Reginald; "you are fit to be Solicitor-General to defunct poets and their encouragers. Mind you ask for the appointment."

"She has spoken well," returned Ashley; "but she forgets that when John of Gaunt so nobly favored Chaucer, very few, but those in the learned professions, could do more than read the scanty range of religious books then in MS. —that the great mass knew absolutely nothing but what they *heard* read—that even in the reign of Elizabeth, learning was only beginning to be diffused—and that directly patronage emanated from the mere courtiers, as in the time of Charles the Second, never was our literature so near total destruction—elegance and grossness went side by side—the most noble sentiments were contaminated by union with the foulest ideas; so that, purified as it is, much of the treasure bequeathed by the fancy and imagination of that age is as useless to the general reader as if the benefit of a rich legacy were negatived by the condition that we should inhabit a pest-house, and there alone enjoy it."

"I entirely agree with you," said Reginald;

"and then, only think of the miserable fawning, the fulsome panegyric, which the man with brains so often paid to the man without."

"Ah! it rejoices me to think that we have at last made a step in the right direction," said Ashley," his fine face glowing with enthusiasm; "the man of letters has at last said he will also be the man of independence, and live respectably and honestly by his labor."

"What a fellow you are, Ashley!" exclaimed Reginald, who had been looking at him with friendly delight—"I wish Constance had been here to have caught your look, and transferred it to her collection of celebrated character portraits, about which she talked with such animation when in town."

Silenced, at least on this subject, Ashley walked toward the window, and in a tone completely subdued, turning soon after to Helen, he said—"When am I to have that portrait of you and my godson, which Mrs. C—— promised to send home last week?"

"Oh! it is done, all but the hands," she said, laughing; "and they are to have a sitting by themselves."

"And I promise you that Constance will give you no peace till she has a copy of this your modern Madonna—she was crazy about it, after having seen it when only half done," remarked the *mal-a-propos* Reginald; and again Ashley's eloquence forsook him—when, happily, Mrs. Stacey was announced. She apologized for seeming, as she said, to haunt Mrs. West, but the temptation was very strong; and the latter assured her that if the visits of ghosts were always as agreeable as hers, no one need dread them.

"And where is Mr. Stacey?" asked Helen of his wife when she came alone one evening, about a week afterward to see her; "though I shall not regret his absence, if it be the cause of securing me the pleasure of your company, as Mr. West dines to-day with Mr. Turner."

"That is quite an unusual event for him to leave *you*," remarked Mrs. Stacey.

"Our visiting list, to talk fashionably," said Helen, laughing, "is so limited, that he rarely has an opportunity; and then, you know, we are not rich, so that want of money and want of leisure are sufficient reasons for our quiet life."

"To tell you the truth," said the visitor, "I am a wee bit, only a wee bit, out of temper; and what will you say when I tell you that it is partly with Charles?"

"If it is only part of a wee bit," replied Helen, "I suspect this infinitesimal dose will not be very difficult to swallow; especially as I conclude the other, and larger part, falls on yourself for indulging in such undutiful conduct."

"You are not a true guesser, Mrs. West," said her friend, usually very easily mollified; "I am vexed and much hurt at Lady De Vere's conduct—she has invited my husband to Roehampton till the day after to-morrow, and never sends the slightest message to me to prove that I am not quite forgotten."

"Perhaps that shows that she is at least truthful, if not kind, or even courteous. But, my dear Mrs. Stacey, I thought long ago you had taken the measure of her Ladyship's regard, and put a just estimate on it. Suppose she had invited you, could you, or would you, have gone?"

"Probably not—certainly it would have been very inconvenient; still it is not pleasant to be thus ignored, and on that account I think Charles should not have accepted when I was not invited."

Suspecting that her little friend was much more hurt at her husband's going than at her Ladyship's bad memory or rudeness, Helen saw that she must act the peace-maker.

"I think," she said, "that when a man occupies a place in public attention, which it is important that he should retain, his wife, viewing him in some sort as a 'servant to posterity,' should be contented to share his society with that public—in return for which sacrifice she has the pleasure of sympathizing with his celebrity. I can scarcely imagine any thing more embarrassing than for a man devoted to literature and the arts, to feel it a personal slight if his wife be not invited wherever he is."

"But do you not think this exclusion seems as if the wife were not considered fit society for those who receive the husband?"

"I think the wife will do well not to encourage such Mimosa-like feelings, or she will pass through life perpetually suffering. An artist is frequently asked to visit for several days, in families where he is engaged to paint; but it is surely no affront not to include his wife."

"That is true," said Mrs. Stacey, though with rather an unconvinced face; "but *here* I have been a visitor."

"Now, dear Mrs. Stacey," answered Helen, and she felt that she must be that disagreeable person, the teller of unpalatable truths, "have you not often said, that the terms on which you were both received at that house were like those of persons hired to amuse, without the substantial equivalent of being paid?"

"You are right, Mrs. West; and I blush when I remember my folly in believing that I was considered any thing else. Still, I wish my husband shared my feeling—and this on many accounts—as I know that those who now tempt him into their charmed circle, do so because he amuses them, or because they like to show him off as the lion of the day."

Helen so entirely agreed with her, that, while careful not to own it, she mentioned this conversation to her husband; and both expressed a hope that when Stacey had once more found that all is not gold that glitters, or when he had tired of his friends, or *vice-versa*, they of him, that he would resume his industrious habits, without which his old difficulties, and from which he was not even now quite free, would again close round him and become fetters to both mind and body.

It was, however, some time before he returned to what he now termed the drudgery of life; while Mrs. Stacey with dismay discovered that during this effervescence of a few weeks, more money had been spent than would have maintained their frugal housekeeping for double the number of months.

As regarded wisdom, Mrs. Stacy was never

likely to rival the Queen of Sheba; but she had a remarkably large share of that vulgar, though not common plant, honesty; and this throve all the more vigorously from being cultivated by gratitude and affection. She loved her husband, and was very proud of him—but her gratitude to the friends who had come, like ministering angels, between them and misery, amounted to enthusiasm, and she determined that no effort on her part should be omitted to prove this, and to secure the intimacy and friendship which to her were as precious as light and air.

To Helen her society had been extremely useful since the birth of her little boy; and when she, on one occasion, expressed this strongly, Mrs. Stacey, disclaiming all thanks said,

"If I shall not weary you, I should be glad to consult you about a plan I have been revolving in my mind;" and receiving an assurance that she should at least have a true opinion, she continued: "I have been trying to understand the position in which Charles and I really are placed. At present, the result of his literary labors maintains us; but since we moved and furnished our house, it does no more; and I never forget that we have pecuniary debts which ought gradually to be discharged. Now, before I married I earned my own living—why should I not try and do something now?"

"But your little Isabel?"

"I have thought of that—she must on no account be neglected; but if I had any success I should immediately engage a good nurse—the help of one I even now often need. If I am patient, I have great hopes also that my voice may be restored."

"And Mr. Stacey?"

"Oh!" she replied, coloring deeply, "he would not object; but now your opinion."

"I approve of it, provided you are not obliged to live in London—for, putting aside my own selfish desire to retain your society, it will be better for all of you to remain here."

"While Charles consents to remain, *I* will not move," was the emphatic reply; "and he has advantages here for which nothing in the heart of the great Babel could compensate. I have also ventured to think you would name me to Lady Westrough and Mrs. Loftus, who, as they both reside within a few miles, may be able to introduce my cards."

"I shall do so at once," said Helen. "I predict that in Mrs. Loftus you will have a most efficient ally; she has herself lived through a stormy day, and will readily give you her sympathy. While the affairs of Captain Loftus were unsettled, she did not sit waiting the result with folded hands; she knew what Jupiter advised in similar circumstances, and she put her shoulder to the wheel, and kept it there for many years, and this in spite of the remonstrances of her husband's family. But she used to say, that if poor relations are a burden, rich ones are often an impediment; and with two children to maintain and educate, impediments must be removed or jumped over: she did both, and finally proved that her way was the best. But here is my husband; wait till I tell him of your plan, and then he shall see you safely home."

"Well done, brave little wife," he exclaimed, when informed of it; "and may you succeed—for you richly deserve to do so."

And thus were matters at the Heath when the rap-a-tap-tap came, to which allusion has already been made.

CHAPTER LXI.

"I saw Bassanio and Antonio part.
Turning his face, he put his hand behind him;
And with affection wondrous sensible,
He wrung Bassanio's hand—and so they parted."
SHAKSPEARE.

"It makes me breathless," said Helen, when Reginald communicated to her the result of an interview he had had with a government member, in consequence of Lord Hurstwood's proposition; "St. Petersburg! and perhaps two years' absence!"

"But you, my love, would not object to accompany me?"

"Object, Reginald! why, you would never think of going without me?"

"Assuredly not—while we could struggle on together here—but we must talk this over with our friends when we have quietly considered it ourselves. After all they have done for me, I am not at liberty to accept or reject till I have heard their opinion; and then, dearest, there are mamma and sister Constance."

"Alas! as regards them, we are scarcely further of there than here. If you accept, so do I—your wife shall never hinder your progress."

"You are my best treasure," was the reply; "and long before this really kind and graceful act, Lord Hurstwood had my forgiveness—without him I should still have been without you."

When Ashley was taken into their counsel, he was at first disposed to advise rejection, without weighing all the reasons for and against. It so completely swept away all the visions in which he had indulged for his friend, it so entirely broke off that daily intercourse which was so valuable to him that he could scarcely be brought to listen patiently to all the advantages it offered; but at length struck with the selfishness of his opposition, he promised to withdraw it if the majority were against him.

Mr. Turner said it would spoil a capital lawyer. But when Mr. Morton was consulted, he strongly advised Reginald no longer to hesitate—but to accept it at once—and this the latter was much disposed to do.

He reminded Ashley, that when he accepted the help of his friends he was unmarried, and firmly resolved to continue so; but that with his unexpected happiness came additional expenses; and though the income Helen enjoyed freed them both from serious inconvenience, he owned that it often caused him grave disquietude to think what would be her position and that of her boy if illness or death interfered with his endeavors to support them; and that his utmost exertions, even if ultimately successful, could not free him from debt and dependence for many years, whereas—"

"Do not speak those odious words," said Ashley, infinite disgust expressed on his fine face.

"Let us speak the truth, old friend," returned Reginald, with deep emotion. "My debt to you and Mr. Morton weighs upon me more than you, who never think of it, can imagine. I almost grudge myself the least indulgence, and sometimes fear Helen must think me a dull companion, with my everlasting translations and originals; and yet these have added materially to our comforts.

"He is quite right," said Mr. Morton, who had been a silent but not unmoved listener. "God knows how happy he would make me, if he would accept, as a son from a father, some of my abundance—but I have ceased to urge it. This office, it appears, is one for which he is peculiarly qualified; and Lord Hurstwood says, 'He will have established such a claim upon government, when these duties are performed, as must insure his appointment to an equally good post for a permanency.'"

"That," said Reginald, "weighs with me more than any other advantage—without this, I would not drop the substance for the shadow. Helen has also heard from the Priory; and though reluctant to consent to our exile, her mother's good sense decides in the affirmative. Constance, who has frequently met them at the Hall, speaks in the highest terms of the Duke and Duchess of Isleford; about the former she has sent us a little romance, which already has had its effect on Helen."

"I see it is useless to stem such a torrent against me," said Ashley; "when are you to go?"

"In a couple of months; and in a note which Lady Hurstwood sent my wife, with a most splendid outfit for your godson, she informs her of their intended arrival in town the week after next. It is clear they do not anticipate a refusal, and I conjecture that I am expected to call on them."

"No doubt," replied Mr. Morton; "and greatly do I rejoice that thus all difficulties will be removed in that quarter. I wish, also, that you and Mrs. West would establish yourselves with my sister in town; it will save much time and fatigue, while making your preparations."

And Helen did partly accept of this thoughtful invitation, to the great sorrow of Mrs. Stacey, though she said she was quite angry with herself for indulging regret at what was so useful to her friend. As to Gretchen, she hovered about Helen like her shadow; and when the parting came, and they were really gone, she shut herself up in the little room which had served for a nursery, and, at first, was deaf to words of comfort.

Ashley, who felt their departure quite as much as she did, took pity on her distress, and resolved himself to occupy the now deserted apartments. He therefore offered to supply the place of Reginald, and good-naturedly asked if that would not be some equivalent—"Ja! ja! yes, for Mr. Reginald he would be—but who was to comfort her for the loss of Miss Helen?—no one but Miss Constance; she, indeed—" but Ashley waited for no more, and happily no one was present to witness his precipitate exit.

It is the day fixed for the departure of the Wests, and Constance was waiting for her mother to join her in a drive to the Grange.

Some refreshing showers which had fallen after a long drouth, had given additional beauty to the ever lovely scenery of the Priory. The air was full of odors, distilled alike from the bosom of the earth and the masses of flowers with which the gay parterres were adorned.

Constance, whose eye for the graceful and beautiful was always open, whether in the arrangements of drapery, the suitableness of ornament, or the contrasting of colors, had herself superintended the forming and laying out of these flower-beds; and now, while she was viewing the result of her taste, her ear was also gratified by the joyous songs which were being poured forth from shrub and tree. A rival and rural opera-house seemed to have established itself in that sweet spot—the notes of the happy birds making themselves heard with that delicious clearness which is the usual effect of a recently refreshed atmosphere; and as Constance watched the little musicians winging their flight from tree to tree, she thought, "Oh that I had wings like a dove!"—and tears silently, almost unconsciously, fell from her eyes as she remembered that her beloved sister was now, perhaps at that very moment, leaving England. Should they ever again meet on that broad terrace? should they ever again watch together those white sails steering clear of the coast, and yet approaching near enough to add all those attractions the prospect needed to make it perfect in beauty and poetry? *All*, Constance? did it need no gay vision, once thought so essential?

But as this question suggested itself, the face of the fair girl was more deeply overcast with a look of anxiety as well as sorrow—for Hubert had been away some months, and his letters had not been numerous. He had been told of this new trial which she and her mother had gone through, in bidding adieu, by letter only, to the travelers, and no word of sympathy had arrived, while Mr. and Mrs. Forrester since his absence seemed to have become more stately and chilling than ever.

They were now in Scotland, having returned with the Sinclairs; but before they went, Laurette found means to instill into their minds a greater dislike than ever to their son's union with Constance; while to the last she did not fail from time to time to enlarge on Hubert's want of punctuality in writing—a fact she contrived to learn, by pretended inquiries from Mrs. Forrester, respecting her son's movements and occupations, of which she expected, *of course*, Constance could inform her, and of which, by the way, Laurette, through her friends in Italy, learned more than any other person.

All these reflections crowded into the mind of Constance and made her feel very sad—a sadness she tried to ascribe wholly to the departure of Helen, who had gone without having again seen either Mrs. Templeton or her sister. This had been impossible—for the Colonel had never been long enough away, and a growing conviction that Ruth was in some way a spy on herself and daughter made Mrs. Templeton more cautious than ever.

Constance at last saw her mother approach; and trying to banish all traces of discomfort from her countenance, she hastened to meet her. Mrs. Templeton looked very pale, and as if she had

been weeping; and wishing to draw her attention from sad thoughts, she forced a smile as she pointed to the sea in all its calm majesty, while a tiny speck of sail in the distance was the only sign of life on its boundless expanse. But, as is too often the case, she produced the very effect she had wished to avoid.

"Yes, darling," said her mother; "by this time our beloved Helen has left us—I realize it all."

"But she writes in such good spirits, dear mamma, and Reginald is so pleased with the appointment—and then it may not be so long as two years—and, you know, you have often told Caroline, when she spoke of Victor, that they soon pass."

"Another proof," replied Mrs. Templeton, "that we are very philosophical in bearing the trials of others Still, dear child, I am not going to repine—and was thinking less of the length of time than of the many events that may happen in a very short space—and then I fancy I could so much better have borne it had I been able to have bidden my children God-speed—but He knows best—yes, surely He knows best."

A few days after this, Caroline called to tell them very agreeable news from Victor. He had joined a party of intelligent French travelers, and was visiting the wonders of Egypt and the Nile.

"Only think," said Dr. Vernon, when Mrs. Templeton alluded to this at their next meeting, "what a book of travels the young hermit will be; we shall read him over and over again."

"No difficult matter to read Victor," remarked Mrs. Templeton, on whom his frank, true character had made a most favorable impression; "the writing is always legible, and the style both clear and happy—but when will he return?"

"Ah! not yet," replied Caroline, with a sigh, though she colored with pleasure at Mrs. Templeton's speech—"he fears that some troublesome business will oblige him to visit Smyrna before we see him in England."

She longed to hear Constance say something of Hubert; but though they loved each other dearly, and frequently conversed of the absent and the loved, Caroline always hesitated to inquire about him—she had a vague and unsatisfactory feeling that between them there was not the same confidence and truth as between her and Victor; though so cautious was she not to say any thing to draw forth an expression of Constance's sentiments, that Laurette wasted several choice pieces of malice on Caroline, in the mistaken hope that they would find the mark at which she shot—and many and many an dukind hint or indirect anecdote was carefully kept in her friendly bosom which the narrator intended should wound the heart of her cousin.

At length came the long-expected letter from Italy. But, instead of sending condolence and sympathy, Hubert saw nothing in the departure of the Wests but a subject for congratulation. He only wished he had had such an offer—a post of emolument and confidence—one leading also to certain promotion and employment—he really envied Reginald. At first Constance was so provoked that she was ready to weep—then, as she again read this, and much more to the same purpose, she remembered these were the very arguments all their sensible friends, and Reginald himself, had used, in order to reconcile them to the pain of separation; and she thought it was kind and wise of Hubert to dwell upon the advantages of an inevitable event, rather than by useless sentiment and foolish pity render them unhappy and discontented; and as she read an animated account of a visit to Vesuvius, and a description of some curious specimens of carved lava he had packed up for herself and Mrs. Templeton, her spirits resumed their even tone—though it was still with something of disappointment that she folded and locked away the letter.

Had she judged it impartially, she would have said it was commonplace and uninteresting—perhaps she might have added cold and indifferent; and had Helen, during the halcyon days of her short courtship, been in the habit of parading Reginald's letters, which, of course, she was not, Constance might have been still more unsparing in her criticisms.

At any rate she had heard—and heard that he was well, for, lately, that anxiety had begun to harass her; she could also tell her mother that Hubert had ascended Mount Vesuvius; and little as that was it was something—for she had fancied that Mrs. Templeton, though imitating, in one sense, Hubert's silence, had thought it more extraordinary than that gay youth himself seemed to have done.

A visit from Miss Newman and the little Mortons to the Vernons was a pleasing interruption to the monotony of their present life. Hurstwood was left to the servants; the Forresters were away—not that the Priory missed them much; Lady Dallas was at the sea with all her family, except Minnie, who was left with Constance at their united request; and it seemed as if a more gloomy shadow than ever had fallen on Colonel Templeton. He was often much occupied with his solicitor from town, and under the plea of business frequently absented himself from the morning meal, so that, as far as his presence went, both his wife and daughter might have spent half their time with Helen had she been in England.

It may, therefore, be imagined how the arrival of the Rectory guests was hailed by Constance, whose love of children was excessive, and who had more than once called on Miss Newman while visiting her aunt; and her mother was delighted to perceive that the bright eyes were brighter, the musical laugh more frequent, and that her Constance, who had lately looked so drooping, was once more the cheerful, blithe creature who had returned from school so full of gay hopes, almost every one of which had been destroyed. And when letters were at length forwarded from Ashley, announcing the arrival at St. Petersburg of all, even the new nurse, safe and well, Mrs. Templeton uttered grateful thanks for mercies vouchsafed, and endeavored not to think of those which, she fancied, were withheld.

CHAPTER LXII.

"—— Oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths"
SHAKSPEARE.

"Do you think you can procure me a copy of old Ashley's will?" asked Mrs. Captain in her usual disrespectful style of conversation when alone with Cooper.

"No doubt I can," he replied; "but what is in the wind now?—what dodge are you up to?"

"Never you mind," was the courteous reply; "perhaps I have no motive but curiosity. You let me have a sight of this will, and I shall then know better what I want."

Accordingly, as a copy of the will was among the Colonel's papers, and quite easy of access, it was borrowed by the agent and conveyed to Mrs. Captain Mordaunt, who, after several futile attempts to come at the plain English meaning, enveloped as that was in the technicalities of the law, was fain to ask Mr. Cooper's assistance respecting a few sentences which seemed particularly to interest her.

"If you think to wheedle him out of more money just now, you will find your mistake—he has been bothered lately in many ways, and that annuity to you swept off a cool five thousand and odd."

"And what of that?" she retorted, with a contemptuous laugh; "I can put him in the way of, perhaps, repaying himself with interest, and a handsome present to the gold-finder, besides."

"What stuff you talk, Maria," exclaimed Cooper, angrily; "whenever you get on that hobby you remind me of a beggar on horseback."

"You keep a civil tongue in your head, or when I am lady paramount you may look for your profitable agency some fine day, and find it gone."

"By the Lord Harry!" he replied, pale with spite and rage, "if you go on so, I will blow your fine scheme about your ears, and—"

"Be buried yourself under the fragments. Dare but to threaten me again, and see if I do not rout out that *Palais Royal* affair."

"Fool and fury," he began—

"Keep the first title to yourself," she retorted, interrupting him; "why, you are quarreling with your bread-and-butter, you great gaby—and now tell me, what is that man from London doing up yonder?—what plot is hatching there?"

"I do not know," he replied, sullenly; "and if I did I would not tell you."

"Yes, you would," she replied, with a conciliatory laugh and patting his back; "there, the monkey is off—and do not play these tricks with me. Are we not both in the same boat?"

"I am not quite sure of that," said he, beginning to be controllable; "but you make me mad when you go on so absurdly. I know no more than you about this business with Mr. Sloper; I only suppose they are trying to raise the needful somehow, though how he spends his income, puzzles me."

"If he meets that set in town, it is easily understood—remember what he lost one night in Paris—why, that German alone would strip the very skin off you, if he could make any thing of it. I have often warned him, since *we* have had nothing to do with it—but I believe he is sometimes mad after the dice. And now I think of it, what is Miss Ruth doing, or, rather, what has she done lately?"

"Oh! she says every one suspects her, and that she is miserable, and talks of leaving, and being sorry, and such stuff."

"Ah! she must do a little more, and be a little more sorry, before I have done with her, and then she may leave and go where she likes; she must have acted like an idiot to cause suspicion—and serve her right."

"Well, this is good," cried Cooper; "why, you have tempted the girl to watch and betray her employers, and now you upbraid her with having drawn upon herself suspicion. That old dragon, Dawson, I am sure, has set them against her, and I owe her one for that trick."

"And I owe her many, for several tricks," said she; "but it will be odd if I do not pay her, and another old witch, when my turn comes—but even he is besotted about her honesty and management, forsooth."

The "*He*" thus unceremoniously alluded to came that evening, on a little business connected with Augustus, who was expected from Paris; but from whom his mother had that day received a letter, dated London, in which he said that he should be detained there for a few days.

Two or three words must here be especially devoted to Master Gussy and his doings; for the truth is, he was absent without leave—he had absconded, deserted—in short, run away from school. He had there been detected in so many discreditable pranks—among others, frequenting estaminets, gaming and smoking with the soldiers stationed at Versailles, where his school was—that the head master, at length, determining to impose some severe penance on him, ordered him to solitary confinement till he could think of what was most likely to cure him. But Augustus did not relish the idea of waiting till this salutary measure was arranged; he contrived to escape, made his way to Paris, where, among a few profligate acquaintance he had picked up during his mother's sojourn in that city, he was concealed and encouraged—till, every franc spent, and a handsome watch and appendages, with his clothes, all gone, he wrote for a remittance to enable him to cross the water, as he positively refused to return to school; and by threatening his mother to do something dreadful, obtained at once the requisite sum. Arrived in London, he joined Juliet at the house of one of his mother's friends, wisely waiting till the storm, which he knew raged against him at Seabrooke, had passed over.

"What is this about Augustus?" asked the Colonel; "what is he doing in town? and where is he staying?"

Prudently avoiding an answer to the first two questions, Mrs. Captain thought it enough to reply to the third.

"He is staying with the Lawfords."

"Well, I hope they will be able to keep him out of mischief—his last visit cost me a pretty penny, and I promise both him and you that I have neither pence nor farthings to spare just now."

"Why, Juliet is there, and it is very natural

they should like to take a little pleasure together"

"As much as they like, provided that I have not to pay the piper: for, to speak truly, I have no more the will than the means"

"Oh, you never want the will to be kind and generous when you have the power that we all know," she artfully replied, not noticing the ill temper with which it was evident he was animated: "and what will you give the person who shall show you where a snug little sum is buried, and only waiting for you to dig it up?"

"Why, I shall say, when that happens, that I believe in the Philosopher's stone," he replied, slightly clearing his stormy brow; "but where is Cooper?"

"Never mind him, Colonel," she answered, "but attend to me now. Pray did you ever read the whole of the will under which you inherit the Seabrooke property?"

"Ever read the whole?" he said, with a faltering voice, and turning pale. "Good God! what do you mean?"

"Why, one would think from your manner that it was forged," she remarked, but still unconscious of the depth of his agitation, or she would not have hazarded a jest.

"I am in no mood for trifling. You have a motive for asking—what is it? speak out, and at once." And there was something in his look which reminded her that even she had better obey.

"Simply this," she replied; and without further parley she handed him an extract she had made for that purpose.

"Also to Ellinor, the wife of the said Lionel Templeton, I give and bequeath the sum of five thousand pounds for her sole and separate use;" and she stood watching him as he read, and saw the look of intelligence that gradually spread over his face; then she knew that the poisoned drop would fall and torture where she so bitterly hated.

When he lifted his eyes from the paper he encountered hers fixed full on him. Neither spoke a word for a few minutes, till, unable to bear the silence and suspense, she asked,

"And where is that sum?"

"Spent—I believe—I suppose," he stammered.

"Believe—suppose—had you not better make sure?"

"And for what purpose, except to disclose to her and others that I have so greatly exceeded my income? I have no power over this money—it is left expressly for her use."

"You have power over her," sneered this she-devil, "and her express use will be exactly such as you dictate—what business has any woman with such a sum, in addition to the money with which you so liberally supply her? Why, the interest alone of this would make her independent of you"

"That is true," replied the tempted.

"And," pursued the tempter, aiming at random, but unhappily hitting right, "who can tell whether that gallant young Lovelace has not had a slice of this comfortable little legacy? I advise you to borrow the remainder before you have another Gretna-green affair;" but she paused, for the cloud had returned with double intensity and gloom

"Once for all," he said, in a voice of concentrated rage, "name not *her*; angels only should speak of her; and I swear if you disobey me I will keep no terms with you; do not try me too much, or you may find the strength does not lie where you fancy."

Inwardly boiling with rage, and vowing deep vows of vengeance, when she had the opportunity, Mrs. Captain was obedient—for this was not the first time her spite against Constance had been hurled back upon herself; but she again reverted to this sum, and by plausibly representing that it could be easily borrowed, and by bringing before him his need of money, which was hardly requisite, inasmuch as the recollection perpetually annoyed him, she sent him home fully resolved to have this money—by fair means, if possible—but—to have it.

That day the Colonel had no opportunity of carrying out his magnanimous intention; for Constance, who seemed uncomfortable when she had not her usual post by her mother's side, never left her.

The next morning was more propitious to his design, as he heard little Minnie Dallas talking with Constance in her own room, and knew that his wife was either in or near the upper conservatory. Thither, therefore, he repaired, and found her in the boudoir, occupied in making a reduced copy of the portraits of her daughters, intended as a present to Mrs. Vernon; for Mrs. Templeton, like Constance, excelled in this charming art.

The beautiful Hebe face of Constance was admirably finished, and she was now completing that of Helen, with its touching and Madonna-like expression; but some associations and recollections were busy at work in the mind of the fond mother and impeded her look of love, for as she raised her eyes, on the entrance of her husband, they were filled with tears.

She started when she saw who it was, and her first movement was that of trying to hide the nature of her employment—but this the state of the oils prevented; and before she could even quit the easel, he stood by her side.

"A very successful copy indeed," he remarked graciously; "though as to any one ever satisfying me in representing that girl's bewitching face, I believe it impossible; even you have given it a pensive cast, which does not naturally belong to it."

Surprised, half startled that he should evince any thing like interest in her pursuits, Mrs. Templeton replied, "But it is one which her sweet countenance has lately worn, and I own to thinking it does not, in the least diminish its beauty."

"Oh! pray do not encourage Constance to disfigure herself with dismals and sentiment," he said, sharply; "she has every thing a girl can want now, with Forest Hill and Hargraves, when she marries."

How the mother longed to direct his attention to the other charming face, which seemed so touchingly to appeal to all of gentle and kind that might yet linger in his nature—but there was a scowl on his brow which warned her to be silent.

"I have always forgotten to name to you a legacy to which you are entitled by the will of the late Mr. Ashley," he said, feeling that he should be glad when this matter was over.

Trembling at the storm which she knew impended, and which she also knew she could not avoid, she replied, as calmly as she could: "My first act on possessing it was to invest it for the children."

"The devil you did!" he retorted sharply; "and pray who were your trustees in this precious whim?"

"My brother and his solicitor."

"Upon my soul! a pretty conspiracy, under the sanction of Lord Grantham, and a very honorable thing this interference with my property."

Aware that to resent this insulting mention of her brother, or to remind him that it was not his property, would only draw down his fury the sooner, she was silent.

"I presume that these honorable counselors invested it so as to bear interest—you, probably, know something of that?"

"The interest I have generally drawn for various purposes, such as my little charities—or indulgences to the girls while with Mrs. Loftus."

"Charities! to the tune of nearly two hundred a-year! upon my word, madam, you have noble ideas—pity they did not prevent you from defrauding your husband."

"It was no fraud upon you, Lionel," she replied. "I was given to understand that this legacy was so absolutely mine that I could at once have given it away."

"And confounded fools they are who allow any woman to have this power. However, henceforth, I shall control the interest, and also see what I can do about the principal. At a moment when every hundred is most valuable to me, to be coolly told by you that you have alienated five thousand, is intolerable. Where are these papers? and give me the address of this rascally lawyer."

"I have no papers," she replied; "but you can have the address."

"No papers! by heavens, madam, you are a fool!—what security have you for the income?"

"I gave them up when Helen was forced from her home," she said, slightly roused; "she could not be left penniless—and—" but he broke forth—

"She should not only have been left penniless, but to starve—she richly deserved it for her disobedience, and in which I now find you have been encouraging her—but I will tear this from them—her and her beggar husband. By the heavens above! I will make you all repent of this combination—penniless, indeed—and to give it to them when I want money!"

"I am really sorry that you should need money—though, with our income, it can only be for a short time," returned Mrs. Templeton; "but we can economize in some way, or, perhaps, you can borrow."

"Borrow!—how am I to borrow?" he said, savagely; "I am tied hand and foot by this cursed restriction—but tell me, where is this thief who first steals my daughter and then my money?"

"At St. Petersburg;" and there was a joy in her heart which unconsciously communicated itself to her tone, at the thought that let what might me to her, these dear ones were safe.

"Now," said Colonel Templeton, approaching her, while she instinctively recoiled, "you have not forgotten that no one, *you*, especially, can escape my vengeance—you must revoke this deed."

"But it is impossible," gasped she, pale with extreme terror.

"It must be done. Helen—out on her! that I have to name her—must consent. Do you hear?"

"Yes," she said, rejoicing to think that she knew so much better than he the nature of the trust, as to be certain it could not be annulled.

"And now, as you have frustrated me by this arrangement, you must be prepared to submit to mine. Probably we shall all go abroad, and let this expensive place—and as my need for every guinea is pressing, I must have your pearls."

The bare threat of living abroad so overpowered Mrs. Templeton that she lost all presence of mind, and raising her voice she exclaimed, "Oh! not abroad! not again abroad!"

He also spoke in louder tones, swearing that if she thwarted him, their exile should begin without delay—and, stamping his foot, bade her fetch the pearls immediately.

She left the room for that purpose just as the door opened which led to the corridor, and gave admittance to Constance, who having heard her father's voice from that quarter, a most unusual occurrence, entered her mother's boudoir.

Her father stood with his back toward her, quite unaware of her entrance; her mother soon returned, and placing the jewel-case on the table, she sank pale and trembling on a chair.

"Dearest mamma!" was the cry that broke the ominous silence, and Constance rushed forward—"Mamma, you are ill," she continued, not noticing her father; "what is the matter?"

"Nothing, child—leave me, leave me," she said faintly; but Constance took no heed of this request—for kneeling down, she began to chafe the cold hands, repeatedly kissing them.

"Your mother and I have business," said the Colonel; "leave us,"

"Not while mamma is ill and fainting," replied she; "no one can desire that; and then her glance falling on the jewel-case, she at once suspected that threats, perhaps violence, had been used, and rising, she said—"It must be evident to you, papa, that she can not enter into business details at present; perhaps it will not inconvenience any one if it be delayed;" and she maintained her post so as to intercept all approach to her mother, while it was difficult, with those flashing eyes fixed on him, for the Colonel to touch the case; so turning his fierce looks on his wife he said, "Remember, I will not be thwarted!" and left the room.

Constance quickly locked the door after him and then returned to her mother, soothing and caressing her, as if they had exchanged characters, and Mrs. Templeton had been the child needing a mother's care and protection. At length she had the satisfaction of seeing tears flow abundantly, while her mother sobbed out—"My darling child! my guardian angel!"

"Now, mamma, lie down, while I remain here!" and Constance felt that, more than ever, she must keep watch over this beloved parent; she was again roused to a sense of her mother's helpless unprotected state; and fervently did she now thank Mr. Forrester for the various impediments

he had interposed to her speedy marriage; indeed, in her enthusiasm, she doubted whether she ought ever to leave her—and began seriously to think she never would.

"How is your mother now?" asked the Colonel, when they met at luncheon, where she had hoped to see him—for Constance had no fear.

"She is better, thank you."

"Any one would think I had been trying to kill her," he said. "It was about money; and when I wanted thousands, you mother is foolish enough to offer her jewels."

Willing to accept any overture that sounded pacific, Constance quietly replied, "Perhaps mamma thought it would please you, to see that she wished to help you."

"No sign of that in her aggravating folly, to have locked up five thousand pounds, or handed it over to her disobedient daughter.

"Mrs. West is my sister," said Constance, with the flash and the frown.

"And, truly, a great honor that is," he replied, half-amused, half-provoked at these well-known signals; "wandering over Europe in search of a living."

"That want is not her fault; and as to wandering, it is a disgrace or an honor in which her husband has the company of the Duke of Isleford."

But he did not trouble Lord Grantham with his insulting opinion respecting trusteeship, for on consulting his lawyer he found nothing could be done. Fortunately there was no attempt made to investigate the account, or there would have been found a handy little sum arising from income which had been gradually added to the capital, which would have paid a few bills that Mrs. Captain and Co. had contracted—for both Juliet and Augustus were quite capable of having little outstanding accounts; indeed, the latter never was known to spend a guinea in the way ordered, if he once handled it—and a small misappropriation, or it would be more genteel to say, mistake, of this kind having occurred, Mrs Captain Mordaunt listened to the Colonel's defeat about his wife's legacy with double vexation.

CHAPTER LXIII.

"Ingratitude is a monster, Carolo,
To be strangled in the birth, not to be cherished."
MASSINGER.

ANOTHER unpleasant event followed this. Nothing less than a quarrel in the lower regions—an outbreak among the servants—which led Mrs. Dawson to think it was now time to discharge Ruth. One of the women servants declared that she was in the habit of skulking down stairs at night and listening at the door of Mrs. Templeton and her young lady's rooms; and that, moreover, she had keys which enabled her to examine their desks and writing-tables.

To one part only of this did Ruth deign a reply—she boldly challenged an investigation of her young lady's property, who, she said, would not find an old ribbon missing. The other charges she flatly denied—and even demanded that she should be allowed to appeal to Mrs. Templeton.

Ruth presented herself in a state of painful excitement; and though Constance bore testimony to her honesty, so far as regarded her property, she frankly owned that she believed Ruth, for some bad purpose, was in the habit of opening her desks and several other places. "Why, or for whom you seek to gratify this dishonest curiosity is not your secret only," said Constance, impressively; "but, Ruth, in yielding to this wicked influence, you are perhaps not aware how you may injure one to whom gratitude should so so strongly bind you."

To this there was no reply; but the girl stood with an expression on her rather pretty face which it was difficult to read—it was defiant, sorrowful, irresolute.

"It pains me much," said the gentle voice of Mrs. Templeton, "to say that, under any circumstances, it will be better you should leave. Where do you propose going? your father's home is not fit for you."

"My father is as respectable, in his way, as many who are rich," was the saucy retort; "but I have very kind friends in the village, who are bound to give me welcome."

"If so, I am glad," said Mrs. Templeton, really grieved that a motherless girl, to whom she had been kind, should prove so heartless.

Still, the departure of this woman was a relief, and various disclosures now made convinced Mrs. Dawson that her kind lady had long had a spy in the house.

The mine had, however, been sprung before all was ready; for, on going to Mrs. Captain's, Ruth heard that she had set off that morning to London; and though Mr. Cooper proposed that she should remain, this seemed scarcely expedient—it would only confirm the slanders which had been hissed into Ruth's ears from more than one quarter.

Before she had been taken by Mrs. Templeton into her daughters' service, she had been for a few months with Mrs. Sims, to acquire a finish in needle-work, and to learn these trifling duties her new situation would render necessary. For a long time after this a very friendly feeling subsisted between her and the Sims family; but it is almost proverbial—

"How slight a cause will move
Dissension between hearts that love—
A word unkind or wrongly taken,"

the poet tells us, is enough; what chance, then, of its enduring where there are many unkind words? Thus it ensued between Ruth and her friends the haberdashers—who scrupled not to hint at very paw-paw doings—high treason against her kind mistress, and other misdemeanors; and in proportion as the intimacy between Ruth and the Coopers rose to boiling heat, so did her friendship with the Simses sink to below zero.

However, it was with Ruth now, Hobson's choice; so laying aside her pride, of which she had a fair proportion, she presented herself at the smart shop with the rainbow window—and luckily, as she thought, found Miss Annie.

"I have come, Annie," said she, "to ask if you can receive me for a short time, till I can see my way clear, for I have left the Priory?"

"Left the Priory?" repeated Mrs. Sims, who, hearing her voice, had opened the little parlor-door; "indeed! and why? if I may be bold to ask."

"Oh! it is so wretchedly dull up there, and Mrs. Dawson has lately been so very disagreeable, that really I could not put up with it."

"Mrs. Dawson is a highly respectable person," remarked Mrs. Sims, "and I fear that they who find fault with her will not be over-pleased with me; we both dislike treacherous, shameless young women—besides, you will find it inconvenient to be here while all your things are at Cooper's yonder," for she had heard something from the Priory, and seen Ruth's boxes received at Cooper's cottage.

"Oh!" said Ruth, trying to laugh off the sting contained in this speech, "I had a message there, and the stupid boy followed with my things."

"Ah! then you had not heard that the woman there, and that dreadful boy of hers, set off to town this morning? But take my advice, Ruth, and go to your old father's—he is not always dead drunk; while the Coopers, if that is the name, are always up to some wickedness."

"Mother," interposed Annie, "Ruth can have a shakedown here, till she turns about."

"No, she can not," replied the stern old dame; "I harbor no tale-bearers—we want neither to make mischief, nor be a cat's paw to mischief-makers; if Ruth had honestly lost her place, and come here at once for shelter, she should have had it—as it is, the less we see of her the better. Young woman," she continued, "my advice to you is, make Cooper give you a right to be at his home as soon as you can—before his fine madam comes back, if possible—or it may be too late;" and, regardless of the crimson flush of shame and rage which overspread the unfortunate girl's face, she fixed her eyes on her with painful significance.

Without another word, Ruth flung out of the shop, a host of bitter feelings warring in her heart and giving her a foretaste of the wages she was to receive; nor was this anticipation lessened by a residence with her father, who, while freely taking from her, taunted her with the fine-lady habits which rendered his miserable cottage so unbearable, that she decided on braving all, and went to Cooper's.

Here, a few days after, Mrs. Captain arrived; and whether her temper had been previously tried by the unfilial conduct of her good-looking but good-for-nothing Augustus, or by the *inaviter in modo*, but *fortiter in re*, of sundry insignificant tradesmen; or whether she thought Ruth seemed more domesticated at their happy fireside than suited her plan, matters not—she, however, looked very coldly at her, and hinted that, when Juliet came home, the house would scarcely hold them all—probably because she intended to make it too hot for that purpose.

Ruth soon began to find that she had indeed sold herself to hard taskmasters; but, alas! it was too late to retrace her steps, though conscience whispered that even now she might pause and go no further; but instead of blaming herself, she blamed those she had so wickedly betrayed; and believing that she had a bribe with which she could still propitiate her present associates, she determined to offer it.

Cooper had long professed love for her, had promised to marry her—he must now, at once, perform this promise; and having raised Mrs. Captain's curiosity, by hinting at an important revelation, and extracted her solemn assurance that Cooper should have no rest till Ruth was his wife, she proceeded to state particulars which left no doubt but that Mrs. Templeton was cognizant of Helen's flight—nay, that she had assisted it.

Speechless with amazement at this assertion, filled with fiendish delight and malice that the rival whom she so remorselessly pursued at last was in her power, this hateful specimen of a bold, bad woman made no secret of her satisfaction—scarcely any of her diabolical intentions; so that Ruth, like Frankenstein, trembled at the devil she had helped to raise. But she had sown to the wind, she must reap of the whirlwind

Two days passed without any communication from the Priory, but on the third the Colonel came for the express purpose of "rowing" Augustus, who had, very impertinently, attempted to defend himself for having spent money which he had received for other purposes.

Nothing irritated Mrs. Mordaunt more than for any one to blame her son. He was the plague of her life—perpetually vexing her, and sometimes to such an extent as to make even his daring spirit quake at the anger he provoked; but so sure as any one else complained, so sure did her wrath fall on the complainer. And thus it happened how.

The groom was listlessly standing by the horses, when loud and louder rose angry voices from within—the open windows, shaded only by muslin curtains, rendering it easy to hear words, and whole sentences, very distinctly. The man listened with but little interest, beyond what the whole village would have given, to a sharp threat uttered by his master against that young scamp Augustus, and the folly of his mother who attempted to shield him from correction; when high and loud were heard her shrill tones, bidding the Colonel look at home and find out how his runaway daughter escaped. Here ensued a pause: and Robin, who was much attached to his mistress, strained every nerve to hear what would follow; presently his master's voice, regardless of caution, told her, with fierce oaths, not to play with his suspense. And then distinctly did she relate, that on the night Helen left home, Ruth was dismissed earlier than usual; that she heard voices in her room, and listened; but distinguished nothing but an opening of drawers—that, while undressing, she heard steps on the gravel, and fancied she perceived four persons. That the next morning, on discovering the flight of her young lady, she went to the spot, "And see, she picked up this glove."

Of course, Robin, whatever he heard, *saw* nothing, but the Colonel seized a man's glove, which she handed him. "And what does this prove?" he asked in a hoarse voice; "I swear that if your suspicions are true, I will take such vengeance ——" But the man waited to hear no more—he knew not that this woman, turning to the inside of the glove, pointed to R. W. very plainly written—for Robin felt he must act, not listen—a warning could never hurt, though it might be

needless. Gently and softly leading the horses till he reached the gate opening on to the road, he beckoned a lad who was loitering about, and making up a face as if suffering great agony, desired him to stay there, and say, if he should be inquired for, that he, Robin, "was suddenly took bad, and had gone to Mr. Curtis for a little remedy." And then, once out of sight, he lost no time, but made straight for Mrs. Sims. Without alighting, he called out the good woman, who was scared with his pale face and anxious look. "Never mind me," he replied, in answer to her inquiry; but have you any one you can send like lightning to the Priory?—and, for God's sake! write me a few lines, for I tremble in every limb."

"I can send our Bill up—luckily he is at hand;" and seeing there was terror in the man's whole manner, unlike most people, she did not hinder him with questions, but said, "What am I to write?"—"Mrs. Dawson, my lady is in danger—it is found out about Miss Helen—she must hide or run without losing a minute'—now a wafer—and Bill, give that directly you arrive to Mrs. Dawson, and see what o'clock it is by the stable clock—there, be off like a steeplechaser, and if you are there before ten minutes, I will give you a bran new shilling—now, cut over hedge and ditch, and run for the bare life;" and away flew the boy like an arrow.

"I will come down and tell you all—but mum's the word now;" and putting spurs to his horse, the groom was back just in time to hear the Colonel swearing furiously at his absence, which Robin assured him was caused by a dreadful pain that took him all over on a sudden.

To cause a little more delay, Robin had slipped the buckle of the bridle; and his trembling hands and pale face so moved Mrs. Captain's compassion, that she asked if he would have any thing; and slightly reprimanding the Colonel for his impatience, she graciously fastened the buckle herself.

At last they are off—and Robin's terror, lest they should overtake his messenger, instead of meeting him, was absolutely painful. Some vague notion of a dreadful scene took such possession of him, that he could scarcely prevent himself from darting past his master, to ascertain how his attempt had sped. Nor was the Colonel's manner calculated to quiet him—he looked deadly pale, and rode as if on the race-course. But help came again by means of the refractory buckle; which had not been fixed in the loop. This time his master alighted and secured it, and they came to the Priory stables, where Robin caught sight of Bill just coming *out* of the gate. An intelligent glance was exchanged, and Robin was so overpowered by the reaction, that it was not without help he alighted and stood by the Colonel, who, still whip in hand, with rapid strides entered the house.

In the drawing room sat Constance, dressed, as usual, in her white muslin, waiting for dinner to be announced.

"Where is your mother?" he asked; and the voice was so hoarse and unnatural that, with startled look, she rose.

"Mamma is up stairs; she has but this minute come in."

But a muttered imprecation, ere he rushed out, made her hastily follow.

He tore up the stairs as if pursued by the furies; he burst into Mrs. Templeton's room, thence through the others to the bath-room, overturning all that impeded his savagely-mad progress. As he returned from his fruitless search, seeing her bonnet and lace scarf lying on the sofa, he took them up, and tearing them to fragments, trampled on the shreds; in the ecstasy of his rage he struck the dressing-table and shivered the glass bottles to dust; and catching, in the mirror, the reflection of his own demon face, hurled it to the ground.

While this bedlam tragedy was acting, Constance, whose presence of mind never failed her, where her mother was concerned, had ascertained that she was not in the conservatory; but convinced that she could not be far off, she trembled lest she should have taken refuge in her rooms, and hastening thither, was quickly followed by her father, who, like a tornado, burst through them.

As he was leaving what had been the joint bedroom of his daughters, in which there was a copy of his wife's portrait, his eyes fell on it; a blaze of uncontrollable fury shot forth from them, while the other features expressed the most vindictive hatred, and, with a low hiss, he lifted his hand.

Constance read all in that look—that sound.

Quick as lightning she threw herself before the portrait, to save from desecration what, to her heart, was next to sacred.

Once more—once more—only once more—behold! the old attitude—the protecting, the menacing! She seems to have grown larger within the moment—the floating muslin looks cloud-like—she raises her fair arm. Great God! will that madman strike her? It falls—the pale face flushes, but she flinches not; the eyes, severe in youthful beauty, look scorn, contempt, almost rage—but she does not move; and a crimson bracelet slowly, slowly encircles that round and still upraised wrist. It was the work of a moment; and, let us be just, he meant not the blow for her, though had it fallen with its first violence it might have broken the perfectly-molded limb.

Brave girl! still firm at her post, she moves no more than if she had been an exquisitely carved statue. Father and daughter, both terrible in their beauty, gaze on each other; and—coward!—he is the first to quail. Following him with her stern, reproachful glance, she never falters till he withdraws; and she hears his retreating step descending the stairs.

Then Constance sank on the carpet and fainted.

When she recovered consciousness she found Dawson kneeling by her side. "Thank God!" said the affectionate creature, as Constance looked at her.

"Mamma!—my mamma!"

"Safe; but, hush!" and hiding her head on her kind bosom, Constance burst into refreshing tears.

"But my precious Miss Constance, what is the matter?"—the movement she made disclosing her wrist, frightfully swollen and still bleeding.

"It is nothing; it only pains me: but are you sure all is safe?"

"Quite sure. I have sent for Mr. Curtis; you had better undress before he comes."

"Dear Dawson, I can not do any thing till I know all about my dear, suffering mother."

"Hush, Miss Constance! you shall see her, but you must first be fit to do so."

"Why, you are pale and trembling yourself, kind old friend; how selfish of me to keep you; send Betsey to me."

At this moment, Betsey, who supplied the place of Ruth, came to inquire, from her master, how Miss Templeton was.

"Miss Templeton is better, but declines leaving her room," was the brief reply. And when the fussy, but really skillful, little doctor came, he at once ordered bed and a composing draught.

"But what have we here?" looking at the bruised arm.

"An accident," said Constance, now feeling a pain which made her sick.

"A blow," he replied, gently and carefully examining it. "My dear young lady, it is well it was on this side, though the bone *is* badly hurt; but on the other, among all those—well, well—do not faint; let us be thankful, when there is an accident, that it is not worse. You must be very particular to see that the fomentations are carefully applied, so as not to touch the wound, Mrs. Dawson. But, bless my heart! what is the matter with you all? You are as pale as death, and as shaky as if you had seen a ghost; and there is that strong chap, Robin, says I must send him something for the shakes. I hope our good Colonel and Mrs. Templeton are not touched with the contagion—quite a house of shakers;" and, smiling at this joke, the little man went on giving his directions, till Constance thought she must use the uninjured hand and lead him to the door. At last he went.

CHAPTER LXIV.

"I have heard, sir,"
Of men in debt that chose, for sanctuary,
Their lodging underneath their creditor's noses."
Duke of Milan.

When Bill took the note from Mrs Sims, it was with an undefined notion that there was danger in delay, but with a very clear conviction that there would be reward in speed. The bran new shilling, as we have seen, sent him off like an arrow.

"The willing mind adds feathers to the heel,
And makes the clown a winged Mercury."

And Bill certainly lost no time in reaching the Priory—but, alas! that the demon of cupidity should so often mar our best projects. On arriving, instead of seeking Mrs. Dawson and giving her the precious missive, he went round by the stables to note the exact hour by the clock; and when he had ascertained this, and decided that it was—it must be—it should be—a few minutes too fast, he began his inquiries, still, however, insisting on delivering the note into her own hand.

Fortunately, Mrs. Dawson was crossing the entrance to the servants' hall, and heard Bill's assurance that he could deliver the note to Mrs. Dawson only; and catching sight of her, he darted after her into a small room, in which they were alone.

"Please, marm, Robin bid me give this to your own hands, and you wor please to see what o'clock the stable is, though I think it too fast."

"The stable clock! what does the lad mean?" as usual, looking at the paper, and not opening it; "Have you any parcel for the ladies?"

"No, marm, only from Robin—and he bid me cut and run, for the love of a new shilling."

But by this time the note was opened, and she sank into a chair, for Mrs. Templeton, she knew, was still out. But, hark! a bell; Heaven be praised! it is hers; and she was hurrying away, when the boy, repeating—"Please to say, marm, what is the stable clock," placed himself in her path; but almost knocking him down, in her haste and excitement, she ran up the back stairs, and without ceremony burst into the room where Mrs. Templeton was calmly taking off her bonnet—and "Haste! haste!" cried Dawson, pale, and her very voice shaking; "here is not a moment to lose."

"I know," replied her lady; "I mistook the dinner for the dressing bell; the Colonel has not yet returned."

"But he will be here directly—hark!"

"What is all this?" asked Mrs. Templeton catching the alarm.

"It is discovered—Miss Helen—master knows."

"Then I am lost indeed!" exclaimed she, clasping her hands, standing motionless and powerless.

"No, no—the slip, the slip," for the heavy but quick step of anger was heard at this moment on the marble hall.

They flew to the panel. Mrs. Templeton's trembling fingers were useless; and pushing her aside, Dawson's powerful pressure made it yield. Almost carrying her mistress she entered with her, and as the door of the boudoir was rudely flung open, had a Fine-ear been there, he might have heard a sharp click from the dressing-room.

Terror had so completely mastered Mrs. Templeton that she seemed unable to control herself; and as the sounds of destruction, with the terrible threats of her husband, approached her hiding-place, she was on the point of shrieking in the extremity of her fear, had not Dawson, heedless of form, covered her mouth with part of her dress, while she softly motioned her to sit on the floor—the slip being quite destitute of furniture—and then crouching by her, the kind old lady put her arms round her and laid her head on her shoulder.

But by this time the frightful storm of passion had rolled into the other room, whence no voice was heard but that of the Colonel; soon that subsides—they hear him descending the stairs Dawson gently rises, and very cautiously opens the panel; the rooms are deserted; she seizes the caraffe and tumbler, and with about a spoonful of eau-de-Cologne still left in the shivered bottle, swiftly

pushes them in to her mistress, and then swallowing a draught of water, hastens to the young ladies' rooms.

It was now her turn to feel how difficult it is to control terror; for she had nearly ruined all by a scream, which, proceeding from that quarter, would infallibly have drawn forth the mother—for there, lying like a corpse, was Constance.

"The innocent child, he has killed her—the monstrous villain!" and ringing the bell, she ordered a messenger to be sent for Mr. Curtis, while she busied herself in applying such remedies as were near; and after a long interval, during which she had lavished all manner of tender epithets on her sweet flower, her beautiful bird, Constance opened her eyes and spoke.

Having then resigned her to the care of Betsey, she returned to Mrs. Templeton, and carefully locking the doors, was unspeakably relieved when she found her so far recovered from her alarm as to be anxious about her daughter.

"Miss Templeton is quite safe—but like you, sadly terrified—so I have sent for Mr. Curtis, and directly he is gone, she shall come and see you."

"Poor Constance!—kind Dawson!"

"Hush! madam," said that steady ally; and thinking a little exertion would be of use, she handed her a few articles of furniture, which were not likely to be missed; and remarking that they must not mind dust, though to her tidy habits the least speck was offensive, they proceeded to render the slip available as a hiding-place.

"It is clear to me madam, that here you must remain till the hue and cry is over; so, now for this little table; there, sit down, and put your feet on that stool, and this low chair for our beauty. Oh! we will have it all so snug; three taps on the panel will be Miss Constance or me. Now I must go and collect the news—can you spare me?"

"My kind old friend, I must; but return as soon as you can."

And away she trotted, to hear that dinner was all spoiled; but no matter, there is no one to eat it, for the Colonel, directly he received the answer from Constance, had mounted in fiery haste and galloped to the Rectory, feeling convinced that there alone should he find his wife.

"Where could she be?" he asked of himself, as he returned from this fruitless errand. He commanded every nook to be searched—he himself once more visited all the rooms; and then, remembering the bonnet and scarf he had torn to atoms, he was convinced by the conservatory alone could she have escaped. Still no one had seen her.

Having ascertained that all was safe, Dawson opened the pier door, and led the trembling Constance to the panel. Three taps were the masonic signals, the open Sesame, and mother and daughter were in each other's arms. She left them together while she collected a few materials for Mrs. Templeton's bed.

"Thank Heaven! dear mamma, that you are safe," sobbed Constance.

"And you, my treasure," said the mother, pressing her lips on the pale cheek that nestled in her bosom; and there was a long silence. "And now that we have seen each other, we must separate; there is much to think of—much still to endure and do; let us try and regain our scattered senses by sleep—our excellent Dawson insists upon our taking some refreshment. I am going to obey her; do you the same, and to-morrow we will all take counsel."

And Dawson was right; for though all really genteel heroines can fast, and do without rest *ad libitum*. we opine they would always do better with—and, like Dawson, we recommend them to eat and sleep while they may.

"Send Mrs. Dawson here," was the Colonel's order when he found that his daughter did not appear at breakfast. "Have you seen Miss Templeton?" when she obeyed the summons; and on her replying in the affirmative, he continued, "How is she?"

"Very far from well, sir—she can not move one of her arms, which is dreadfully hurt by some accident. I ventured yesterday, on my own authority, to send for Mr. Curtis."

"You have done quite right, and I thank you; let me see Mr. Curtis myself to-day;" for his color changed when he heard that Constance had met with so severe an *accident*—"and as to this business," he added, walking away, "I shall not, of course, be long baffled in my search."

"I have locked the rooms," she said; "they were in great disorder—perhaps I had better see to them, and keep out the rest."

"Certainly, I leave that to you;" and curtseying herself out, away trotted the diplomate in petticoats—no rare character, by the way—to feed and comfort her two pets.

Constance when she awoke, was suffering acute pain from her arm, which was so frightfully swollen as to hinder any attempt to dress herself beyond a loose wrapper; but a cradle having been adjusted, she hastened to her mother, who had been apprised by Dawson that she had hurt her arm.

"Mamma, you are not to fret about it," said she, parrying her mother's anxious inquiries; "some day you shall know all."

"And thou wert struck for me?" sighed Mrs. Templeton, unconsciously repeating, if not the words, the idea of Macduff.

"And now, dear mamma, have you any plan?"

"None till I am free—except that it is to the Rectory I must manage to escape;" and, after careful deliberation, Constance decided on trying to walk there, even in her dishabille, directly her father left the house, which he was pretty sure to do. In this she succeeded, and came back so comforted that she declared, if her arm were but well, she was equal to any thing, for she was commanded to tell her mother, their doors would be open for her, by night as well as by day.

It was not, however, till Mrs. Templeton had been concealed three whole days, that it was thought safe for her to emerge from her hiding-place, for Cooper seemed to be perpetually hovering round the place; and Mrs. Dawson, who fancied she had seen him play hide-and-seek in the shrubbery, entered the garden very late one evening, from Mrs. Templeton's rooms, and, sure enough, there he was, and had it been her mistress, this dirty myrmidon would have raised the alarm, and probably have seized her.

"Dear me, Mr. Cooper, is it you? I thought

it was a thief," she remarked with wonderful coolness.

"No, it is only I," he replied.

"Oh! it is all the same," was her ambiguous rejoinder; "but, dear me! what are you doing here at this hour?"

"I may ask the same of you," was his very natural retort.

"Why, I have been so occupied lately with Miss Templeton, and the dreadful doings here, that I really want a little fresh air."

"I should have thought the breezes in the house might have satisfied you," replied he, trying to conciliate her with a jest; "but I will now say good night."

Convinced by this, that the utmost caution was necessary, Mrs. Templeton still remained hid; but on the third evening, Dawson, having ascertained that Cooper was with the Colonel, strongly advised that the opportunity should not be lost. She volunteered to see her safe, and bring back a message to poor Constance, who, when she felt her mother's tears and kisses on her cheeks, was struck, for the first time, with the dreadful idea that this was no ordinary parting; and, scarcely able to bear the thought, she was on the point of rushing after her, when she remembered that this selfish indulgence might compromise the safety of her she so devotedly loved.

Dawson returned with a smiling countenance; she had waited till her lady had been received, unnoticed by the servants.

Tears flowed abundantly as Constance, accompanied by Dawson, passed through her mother's rooms. How desolate they looked—though that was but imaginary, for all traces of the devastation caused by the progress of passion through them had been removed, and there was now the same order as if Mrs. Templeton had left them for merely a few hours; and yet both felt there was a difference, as they stood looking around.

"Miss Templeton," said Dawson, always keeping in mind the needful and the comfortable, "I took to-night a very small parcel for my lady's immediate use. I advise that we pack up and arrange all we can, and while we can, in case we have an opportunity to forward more: it is better, my dear young lady, to be busy when we have trials—so, as early as you like to-morrow, we will begin."

"Dear Mrs. Dawson," said Constance, convinced of the good sense of this counsel, "all this is sadly encroaching on your kindness."

"You never mind me, Miss Constance, I will rest when all is done; the Colonel shall not find me negligent in my housekeeping, and this is my affair."

"Ah!" she said, when she went at night to bathe the arm now much reduced in size, "little did I ever think this house, once so peaceful, would be so changed."

> "A merry place, 'tis said in days of yore,
> But something ails it now—the place is cursed,"

was the mental comment of Constance.

"My dear master," continued Dawson, so loving and gentle—so kind to all about him—I did think that perhaps an Ashley might again dwell here, when you all first came—and since then I have fancied—but—no matter; only it gave me great pleasure to hear that the little innocent, lately born has that name, to my ears the sweetest ever pronounced.

"Ah," said Constance, small chance of my infant nephew ever reigning here. But if an Ashley ever does, he shall take all our debt of gratitude to you on his shoulders, and pay it too, still leaving us your debtors for kindness through many long years.

CHAPTER LXV.

"——— The fiend looked up, and knew
His mounted scale aloft; nor more; but fled
Murm'ring, and with him fled the shades of night."
MILTON.

THE result of a long consultation at the Rectory was, that Mrs. Templeton should, early the next morning, set off to town, in company with Miss Newman; Mr. Morton was in Paris, so that impediment to her accepting this friendly offer was removed, and, as it had been by some contrivance that her arrival had been concealed from the servants, the sooner she left the better.

Circumstances must now quickly decide Mrs. Templeton's future proceedings, for all felt that a crisis had arrived. Lord Grantham was the only one who could move in the matter; to his wife she, therefore, wrote, informing her of what had happened, and entreating that, till they heard further from her, no step might be taken. She felt that Constance was held as a hostage, and on this account she strongly insisted that her brother should remain passive.

The Doctor wrote to stop Ashley, who was on the eve of starting for the Continent, having half promised the Wests that he would spend all of the long vacation he could at St. Petersburg.

But the play was not yet played out.

On the third morning after her mother's departure, Constance, still feeling languid and dreadfully depressed, was seated in the small drawing-room, listlessly turning over the pages of a book, but thinking of the events of the last two years, and of the share her father had had in all their sorrow, when the butler entered, so closely followed by another person that he could hardly prevent her entrance as he stammered out, "It is a mistake, I will send Mrs. Dawson—this person, Miss Templeton," looking at his young mistress. But "this person," thus ambiguously designated confidently stepped forth to announce herself, saying, with a sneer, "Miss Templeton will do as well; and made Constance aware that she was in the presence—in the same room, with the wretched creature who had worked all their woe.

She rose, deliberately, haughtily, and without look or word passed out by the window.

Knitting her brows till they met, the shameless intruder, provoked to have had a servant witness her discomfiture, turned her fierce looks on the man, who stood with the door in his hand, and that expression of civil impertinence on his face which his class find so easy to assume. She threw a card on the table rudely bidding him give that to his master.

"Am I to be subject to this?" cried Constance, when she reached her room, her cheeks burning with indignation; "is there no one to protect me from this insult?"—and then there rushed across her mind, almost for the first time for many days, so fully had sorrow and anxiety occupied her, that there was, there ought to be, one, able and willing to save, protect, and shelter them both.

Hubert Forrester, where art thou?—while she to whom thou art affianced is in grief and peril. Art thou impatiently hoping to hear good tidings from her?—art thou eagerly anticipating the time when thou shalt return, to claim her as thine own—thy loved and loving bride? or art thou gazing on one not more fair, and in her smiles forgetting her whose heart is heavy with sorrow?

And while thinking of Hubert, of Helen, of all those who ought to be near, but were so far away, Constance sat and wept.

One step she resolved to take: to appeal to her father for security against this insulting, this degrading intrusion; for she was well aware of the discreditable reports which prevailed regarding her recent visitor, and for this purpose she now was as desirous of an interview with him as she had previously shunned it.

This was not quite so easy, as Colonel Templeton was still continuing his search. At length they met, at dinner.

"I am sorry, Constance, to see you look so ill," was his cool remark, "and still more sorry your arm is hurt. You must, of course, know that it was accidental."

"I am better, thank you," she replied; "but an exceedingly unpleasant event has occurred, which I must appeal to your sense of propriety to prevent in future;" and she pointed to the card.

A singular expression passed over his face, and there was a short pause before he replied,

"You must not expect me to mount guard at the hall-door. Your plotting mother has seen fit to abandon her home, and during her absence you must protect yourself."

"I shall, then, endeavor to do so," said she, fully resolved on a measure which every loving impulse prompted, and which further exposure to so intolerable a degradation, she fully believed, would quite justify.

The next day she met her relentless persecutor in the park; and though, by the Colonel's express commands, the strictest privacy was preserved, Constance was not going to make the open defiance of these a *casus belli*.

The following day, matters were brought to a climax. Constance was arranging some flowers in the same room she had occupied when before intruded on, and which opened to the terrace; Dawson was with her, and had just arranged her sling when both were startled by a shadow at the open window, and a voice saying:

"Good-morning, Miss Templeton; I came to speak to the Colonel about—" when Dawson, whose presence seemed to have been quite overlooked, stepped briskly forward, and Constance, trembling with indignation, quitted the room.

"O! Mrs. Dawson,' coolly observed the dauntless Mrs. Captain, for she it really was, "I came up to see about a pony carriage the Colonel, last night, said he no longer wanted, and which he promised to lend me. I had no idea I should have the pleasure of finding any of the ladies here, having understood they had introduced the fashion of running away.

"I have heard Mr. Curtis say, it is quite proper to do so when there is danger of fever and contagion, or of encountering any other dreadful thing; it is bad to be near what may infect in any way."

Without noticing this retort, valiant Mrs. Captain, as if pursuing her speech, went on: "So I came, expecting to find the poor Colonel a widower bewitched."

"As to a widower," replied the seemingly-literal housekeeper, "with such a sweet, honorable lady for his wife, we all hope he will never live to be that; but as for being bewitched, some of our country folk believe in the power of an evil eye; and at present," added she, demurely, and looking full at the female *militaire*, "I confess I am of that number."

"Very likely," was the cavalier reply; "old and uneducated persons often have strange ideas and ways."

"Respectable and reputable ways are, indeed, so strange to some people, that they do not know how to behave to those who maintain them; so I must go, but I refer you to the stablemen; they, perhaps, will understand you better than I can;" and thus saying she quickly stepped back and closed the window on the enemy, whose tactics being thus circumvented, walked away, treasuring up this new affront against the great pay-day which she hoped was near at hand.

"Ah! this is very dreadful," said Dawson, to herself as she retreated, after gaining the victory; "something terrible will come of it: to think of allowing his innocent daughter to be insulted by this— Ah! it is too bad;" and she went in pursuit of Constance, whom she found writing, while the crimson spot of outraged feeling burned on each cheek.

"My dear old friend," said she, turning toward her, "this can not be—I have been told to protect myself. I shall obey; and in joining my dear, ill-used mother, I shall alone be safe."

"Dear Miss Constance," cried Dawson, "have you thought well—pardon me—but would it not be better to consult the Doctor? Excuse my freedom, dear young lady, but Mr. Forrester—"

"Would be the last to recommend the endurance of this," interrupted she, with impetuosity. "I shall see Dr. Vernon, to claim his temporary protection. I shall certainly not add to the list of terrified runaways, but, in a few days, I shall leave this place, perhaps forever. One by one we have been driven forth," she added, in a tone of deep sadness: "even you feel that I have no alternative, in order to avoid the risk of being domesticated with such infamy;" and she rose and rapidly paced the room. Then, stopping before her mother's portrait, and remembering what had so lately happened, she said, "This must be removed and secured from all chance of profanation; it shall be taken from the frame and placed in the slip. I know you will be sure to keep it from harm. To-morrow I shall see the Rector."

Constance had done well to trust her cause to the Vernons; at first the excellent Doctor would not hear of the step she contemplated, but insisted

that she should remain with them. But Mrs. Vernon opposed this as strongly as Constance. They both reminded him of the Colonel's unbending nature, of his insensibility to any appeals the Doctor could make, and the impropriety of allowing Constance to be again exposed to insult.

"Mrs. Templeton," she said, "has at last made a move, and those who know what she has suffered must own that to advise her return would be most cruel and unwise. He will never allow Constance to be here—perhaps carry out his threat, and take her abroad. How unfortunate that Hubert—that the Forresters should be away."

"Were they here, nothing would induce me to apply to them," answered Constance, so decidedly, that, though Mrs. Vernon made no remark, the manner and tone startled her. "Neither could I have applied to Cecilia. No; much as I shrink from intruding another fugitive on Miss Newman's hospitality, there I shall go; for there I shall find my dear mother. The difficulty is, how to reach her so as not to be traced."

"Alas! dear girl," said Mrs. Vernon, looking at the sweet, care-worn face; "this indeed is difficult, or I myself would see you safe in your mother's arms."

"Try and forget that I am scarcely nineteen—fancy that I have already been accustomed to rough it; you do not know how strong and brave I am."

"But, dear Constance," said Caroline, tenderly embracing her, "what will Hubert think of this?"

"Hubert's opinion must, on this occasion, coincide with mine, or it would be disregarded;" and a slight color tinged her pale cheeks as she added significantly, "he has been long expected in England, but this does not carry me to London."

"I see but one way," said Mrs. Vernon; "you can not go alone—none of us dare accompany you, but Miss Goddard can; I will take the responsibility of this plan, and also of Lucy and Inez Morton, till her return."

"Dear Mrs. Vernon—" said Constance, starting up.

"Stop and listen; you must both walk to the place from which your mamma and I set out; it is several miles distant, and it will, at once, try your boasted strength."

"Oh! if Miss Goddard will kindly disregard it," returned Constance, anxiously.

"I will answer for her; she is a most experienced traveler, and quite old enough to be considered a sufficient escort. I will, to-day, arrange that; now, dear child, have you money?"

"Yes, quite enough for the journey."

We linger not on the parting with Dawson, nor on the struggle that arose in the mind and heart of Constance as she looked her last look on all familiar objects; but she faltered not in her resolve; and thus, without disguise, and apparently without fear, did she take her first independent step into the world.

CHAPTER LXVI.

"What sacrifice of reverence, duty, watching,
Although I could put off the use of sleep,
What dangers, though in never so horrid shapes,
Can I, and with a thankful willingness, suffer."
MASSINGER.

Miss GODDARD would not admit that this hasty departure could the least inconvenience her; and by gradually calling the attention of Constance from her own troubles, saved her from finding the journey very tedious.

They arrived so late, that Mrs. Templeton was preparing for bed; but scarcely had Miss Newman announced the new comer, before Constance was on her bosom. No matter what had brought her, joy was the result. She asked no questions then; it was enough that she looked on her treasure and felt her warm embrace. "My pale darling," she murmured, and again she showered kisses on that sorrowful young face.

"But Miss Goddard, who has been so kind, dearest mamma, throw on your shawl, and let us thank her, and send messages to the friends who so truly and steadily cling to us. Ah! Miss Newman," as that lady entered, "you have another claimant on your goodness."

"Not one too many, my dear; Miss Goddard will leave directly—she is used to eating and sleeping in a carriage; bid her adieu, and then I shall order you some refreshment and bed."

"Let me share mamma's room, may I?" And after having informed them both of the event that had driven her forth a wanderer, sweet was the sleep that fell on her fair lids.

Not so her mother, who complained of violent headache, which increased so much, that being accompanied with feverish symptoms, their kind hostess sent for the family doctor, whose fears of illness were soon ver fied.

A month of danger succeeded, with several days of agonized suspense, during which Mrs. Templeton seemed haunted by the terrible sounds of her husband's frantic outbreak in her rooms at the Priory.

At last a gracious Providence sent a blessing with the remedies; fever subsided, and the danger was over. But so much had she been enfeebled, and so greatly had the nervous system been overtried and shaken, that still the greatest care was needed.

And Constance—who can tell what a dreadful time that had been to her? the whole responsibility of decision rested on her. Friends might suggest and advise, but she could alone dictate and decide.

This time the Colonel redoubled his endeavors to trace them, for he knew Constance was with her mother; he had never doubted but that she could at once have informed him where Mrs. Templeton was; and now, could he but find her, his vengeance would be doubly gratified. After many days of useless search and inquiry, the Colonel and Cooper proceeded to town, that wily emissary suggesting, that at no place were they so likely to be found as at that which had afforded shelter to Helen, and hinted, as if from a sudden thought, that this was a very good idea; and calling on his lawyer, whom he took with them, thither the Colonel drove.

Ashley, who now occupied Madame Stöpsel's apartments, had not felt at liberty to name any part of his mother's news regarding Mrs. Templeton to her, therefore she was ignorant of all late events

Thus was the state of matters, when, on his return home, after having received a most disheartening report of Mrs. Templeton, he was met by Mr. Stöpsel, and informed of a visit his wife had that very day received.

Gretchen was seated quietly and happily at her work, humming a German song, an especial favorite of Reginald's; and occasionally glancing around, where every thing reminded her of Helen; for Ashley had been particular in retaining all exactly as the Wests had left it, and she was in his sitting room, when a ring at the house-bell was promptly answered by the servant, the only one who was at home.

Before Gretchen reached the door, attracted by voices and the sound of approaching steps, it was violently burst open by Colonel Templeton, who, closely followed by two others, rudely entered the parlor, exclaiming, "Woman! tell me instantly where is your mistress?" and seeing the door open which led to what had been, by courtesy, termed Helen's boudoir, he darted forward, his quick glance detecting many objects which, to him, were proofs that at last he was right. So thought Cooper and the lawyer, and both trembled at what might be the consequence of success.

Gretchen, quick as lightning, understood it all —at last then, what she had for years expected, and wondered that it could have been so long delayed, had come to pass. Mrs. Templeton had been driven from her home!

Throwing down a large easy chair, and tearing aside two curtains, which only concealed a bookcase, well filled with volumes, that Mr. Sloper saw at a glance were law books, he rushed out of the room up stairs, uttering oaths and threats in wild fury.

He burst into Ashley's bed-room, where he saw traces of a gentleman's apartment only; thence into Gretchen's room, and that belonging to the servants, but nothing here met his glance that justified his conduct. At last he entered the little room which had served for a nursery; and here the pretty cot, Mrs. Vernon's gift, met his eye; he started, he paused—but the evil spirits in his heart whispered. "Seek her, she is here;" and again he descended to the parlor.

But Gretchen was now ready for him.

"Woman!" he thundered, "where is my wife?"

"In God's keeping," she replied, "and there you can never go to find her."

"Bandy not words with me;" his fury passing all bound, he advanced toward her, a small cane vibrating in his grasp.

But she was thoroughly roused, and quite as much excited as he. "Touch me at your peril," she almost shrieked, rather than spoke; "if you lay a finger on me I will fell you to the ground—yes, and then spurn you; the strength of a giant is in my arms!" and to look at her well made muscular form, this did not seem an empty boast; "and it shall strike not for myself only, but for the trembling young wife, and pay you with interest the blow that bruised her, poor, unprotected angel. Coward and ruffian, it shall pay you for tearing your innocent baby girl from her arms, to pawn her to one of your infamous paramours, till money was raised by the sale of our clothes—yes, ours, for mine went as well."

"Devil! stop!" roared the Colonel, almost beside himself at this goading; "once for all, tell me where is my wife?—where is Constance?"

"And my other darling gone—murdered, perhaps," screamed the frenzied woman; "look at him," she said, pointing, "he has been a thief—it is easy for him to be a murderer."

"Answer me," he repeated, in a low tone, that sounded ominous.

"This railing is useless," interposed Mr. Sloper.

"It is not," she burst forth, terrible in her fearless vehemence; "ask him what he did with the pearls he stole from her dressing-case while she slept. Hannchen," she cried, partly opening the door, "look after a policeman, and if I scream, call him, and give these fellows in charge; they have no business here."

"We have, Mrs. Stöpsel," said Cooper, for the first time speaking.

"And who are you?" she asked, as if now she only noticed him. "Oh! you are the agent—the man who lives by the shame of his sister—the spy—the informer—the cheat—a pretty set you are, to break into a defenseless woman's house. I wish my gentleman lodger had been here; he would have horsewhipped that unmanly fellow there, and kicked him out; nor would it have been the first time he met with his deserts," touching her lip with a most insulting and irritating laugh. The cane fell, but so gently, for she saw it, as scarcely to touch her, while her vigorous hand dealt a slap that sounded with fearful distinctness. A loud scream rose from her at the same moment, and Hannchen, literally obeying her orders, bawled for the police

"Let me go, let me go," cried the Colonel, struggling to free himself from the grasp of his alarmed companions; "I shall murder her."

"No you won't," she replied, decisively, "there are witnesses; where have you put my dear mistress and her child, you wretch? Du Himmel!" she exclaimed, a national ejaculation which was habitual to her when excited; "my innocents suffer—and that monster lives!" And as a policeman now actually appeared, she said, "Clear the house of these fellows; they have come after no good, and one has struck me—that one, he protends he has come here for his wife?"

"Mrs Stöpsel," began Cooper.

"Be off every one, or I will give you in charge if you come prowling about here, and send you all to the Rathhaus."

"There is no lady here," said the policeman; "what is it all about?" as, marshaled by him, they went out, she double-locking the door after them.

"We are seeking a lady and her daughter, who have lately left their home" said Mr Sloper, heartily disgusted with the whole matter.

"Not here," replied the man; "the lodger is a gentleman—and these are very respectable people," and convinced that they were wrong in their conjectures, the discomfited party regained the carriage and drove off.

Meanwhile, Gretchen, no longer sustained by her hatred and anger, was paying a gentle penalty

for the indulgence of these agreeable feelings, and a violent flood of tears, in which, from sympathy, Hannchen joined, ended in an attack of hysterics; and when Stopsel came home he found his house in most admired disorder.

In answer to his reiterated inquiry, "What is all this?" she told him what had happened. Even his somewhat phlegmatic nature was stirred as he listened, the more easily, perhaps, as he perceived the effect this unwarrantable intrusion had had on his wife, to whom he was truly attached; and though his sympathy was expressed as strongly as she could possibly desire, he concluded by exhorting her to try and calm herself, adding, "My wife, it is not good for thee to be so angry."

"It is good, my Franz, to be angry in such a cause," was her energetic reply.

"But thou art suffering, and that grieves me," was his philosophical remark.

"Ah! thy good and true heart can not imagine the baseness and wickedness of his; but, Franz, we must be up and doing. I shall have neither rest nor peace till I know what has become of my lambs."

And the worthy pair were discussing all practicable means for ascertaining the facts, when, by the arrival of Mr. Vernon, they learned all.

Relieved of her worst fears, but alarmed at his account of Mrs. Templeton's state, Gretchen so earnestly implored permission to go and, at least, look at them, that Ashley seconded her entreaties; and, accompanied by him, she set off.

Ashley's heart beat with unusual violence as he waited with Gretchen in the dining-room, where Miss Newman left them to fetch Constance. The door opens, and a figure like an angel, all in white, glides in. "Liebes Mutterchen!"—"Thou most precious darling!" and she is folded, almost wrapped up, in a fond embrace. Ashley turned away half unmanned; the movement made Constance start.

"And you here, dear Ashley?" she said. "Ah! true and unwearied friend, always near, always ready; and she held out her hand, which he took in his trembling grasp, and for the first time looked in that face which to him seemed as if made to give us an idea of heaven. But, oh how changed! and yet how touching in its pale, sad loveliness! The eyes, usually sparkling with mirth and intelligence, were now heavy and dim with tears; the dimpled mouth wore an expression of intense anxiety; and the graceful elastic form was bowed down with the heaviness that lay at her heart.

Ashley felt as if he longed to fall at her feet and worship her with the enthusiasm of an idolater, since to him was denied the richer blessing of taking her to his heart, and drying her tears with his loving kisses.

"And the mistress, my dearest?" asked Gretchen.

"Poor mamma is the same, certainly not better!" and tears fell abundantly but quietly.

"May I not help to nurse her?"

"Ah! Gretchen, that would be a comfort; but already we have intruded beyond all bounds."

There is a gentle rustling of silks, and then the kind face of Miss Newman was seen at the door. "It will be an unspeakable relief to my responsibility, my dear Constance," she said, "if your valued friend can share our vigils. If you could but think this house quite at your disposal, you would make *me* feel more at home."

And Gretchen, made happy by having seen one of her innocent lambs, as she called them, returned to ask, and obtain, leave of absence from her indulgent husband.

Frequent were the calls of Ashley; but except when he wished for any particular direction, he never saw Constance. He hardly knew whether he repined at this; for every interview only served to deepen his love; and though, if left to himself, he would, perhaps, never have denied himself this dangerous privilege, he tried to believe that the disappointment was good—that he even wished it; and by all those fallacies with which men cheat themselves, he fancied he proved his firmness and consistency.

He one day called when Mrs. Templeton was in imminent danger, and it was a question about informing Helen. Only a week before this, letters had been received from St. Petersburg, filled with accounts of the very satisfactory position Reginald occupied, and of the health and happiness of them all. "Besides," said Constance, with quivering lips, "oh! Ashley, Dr. C—— says, before they would hear"—but she could not proceed, and for a brief moment hid her face on his shoulder, as if to shut out the terrible image.

And how felt Ashley?

> "Light was the touch, but it thrilled to the bone,
> And never did clasp of one so dear,
> Strike on the pulse with such feeling of fear."

He stood motionless, almost breathless—it was but for a moment; she then raised her tearless, colorless face and continued more calmly, "With regard to my uncle, I shall delay only till to-morrow; and, till then, farewell!—take my thanks and blessing." And he stood alone, scarcely comprehending any thing, but that he was alone.

But Heaven was merciful, and Mrs. Templeton lived; and when amendment once began, her excellent constitution regained strength rapidly. She was soon able to see her friends, to discuss the future, and to listen, with grateful delight, to the letters from St. Petersburg, and from other quarters, which reached her through Mrs. Vernon.

She herself wrote to Lord Grantham, promising to summon him to a consultation directly her strength permitted; and finally it was settled that she and Constance should take Ashley's place at the Stopsels.

CHAPTER LXVII.

> "Each line and lineament of it in the drawing,
> So punctually observed, that, had it moved,
> In so much 'twere herself."
> MASSINGER.

"ARE these all the letters that have arrived?" inquired the Colonel when he returned, after an absence of more than a week.

"All, Colonel," was the reply.

"Then send Mrs. Dawson."

"Well, sir," said she, as she made her appearance, trying to make the two words sound as anxious as she could.

"Well," he replied; "unless you have discovered something, there is nothing to tell. I am harassed to death," and he looked ill and weary. "I suppose *you* will be leaving me next," he observed, with a kind of half-laugh.

"No, sir," she replied; "so long as you please to keep me, I shall never go. Here I was born, and here, or near here, I hope to die."

"Well, well," he said, feeling that it was the place, not respect for him, that kept her, but still glad she remained, as her services were more than ever needful—"then that is settled; and now, I hope, we shall go on properly."

"So far as I am concerned; but," she said, drawing up her neatly-dressed figure, "I must beg you, sir, to see that my character is protected."

"Why, you old fool!" said her master, smiling, in spite of his pre-occupation, at what he called her goosey-gander prudery, "who is going to injure your character?—you are surely not afraid of me?"

"Oh no, sir!" replied Dawson, demurely; "it is not bad people of your sex I fear; but a woman is never safe from improper people of her own; and I must take the liberty of saying that I never can go on comfortably if all sorts of disrespectables, and such like, from the village, come about the premises."

"What is the woman driving at? Speak out. What do you mean to insinuate?"

"I insinuate nothing, Colonel; I only believe what all Seabrooke rings with."

"By heavens! you must also believe you are dealing with Job. What do you mean?"

"No, sir, I do not mistake you for Job; he was a good man, and a righteous," was her aggravating reply. "What I mean is, that if that woman from Cooper's is to show her brazen face here, I must decline the situation."

"It is well the woman with the brazen face does not hear you," he observed, tickled at the idea such a rencounter suggested, "or there would be a regular row."

"Very likely, sir," was the cool rejoinder; "but if she can say six words, I have always an odd half-dozen to spare in return."

"Well, I will see about it," was his concluding remark; for though he had, in the affair with Constance, seemed very indifferent while she spoke, such was not his real feeling, and conjecturing what had led to her departure, he had fully resolved not to have his wishes regarding Mrs. Captain's absence from the Priory a matter of doubt; for this purpose he at once rode down to the village, secretly hoping that she would see the necessity of quietly yielding to his representations; for he was not yet quite prepared to make her see how far she had injured her own cause by having driven Constance to such an extremity.

"When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war," is almost a proverb; and when two such spirits as the Colonel and Captain encounter in strife, it is war to the knife; and certainly they now proved that, neither in word nor deed, were they fitted for members of a peace society. Prohibition was met by open rebellion—reproach roused recrimination; when, happily, Augustus came tearing in, and brought the dispute to an abrupt termination.

"And now let it be understood," said the Colonel, as he rose to depart, "that we have no more visits at the Priory, and in the course of the day I shall send down the pony-carriage you have set your heart on."

And, to the great scandal of the village, the elegant little chaise belonging to Mrs. Templeton was seen driving hither and thither with Mrs. Captain and her young Jehu, the ne'er-do-weel Augustus.

But though the possession of this was a triumph, proving her ascendency over the tyrannical master of the Priory, it was a poor substitute for that which had been for years the object of all her plans, and for which she had lately played so desperate and destructive a game

To become mistress of the Priory, either legally or illegally, she would hazard and compromise much more than she had; and having succeeded in driving away those whose just claims had drawn on them her most vindictive hostility, it was irritating in the extreme to meet with such determined opposition from one whom she had hitherto generally ruled with despotic sway.

About a week after this, and when Cooper had returned from a fruitless expedition to Craigalan, Mrs. Dawson presented herself before the Colonel with marks of real distress, both in countenance and manner.

"Betsey, sir," said she, "has been arranging those rooms up stairs, and on lifting a portfolio this was found behind it."

It was the note of farewell which Constance had written to her father, and which in the agitation of departure she had forgotten to give Dawson; it had been accidentally thrown aside, and was discovered only that morning. Laying it on the table, she withdrew.

It *was* then as he suspected; Constance had been driven forth by an intrusion, which he owned, too late, he should have prevented. He had never intended that she should so literally have construed his peevish refusal to protect her; now, but for this outrageous insult she at least might have been left him; and in proportion as he constantly felt her loss, so did his anger rise against the impudent cause of it, and feelings of indifference and annoyance which had long been smouldering toward the whole crew at the cottage were now exasperated to fury, none the less strong for being suppressed; while he firmly resolved that, in some way, they, or rather she, should smart for what he now suffered through her insolent interference.

"This must be seen to," he muttered, as with a lowering brow he again read his innocent child's letter; it was only a few lines, but these seemed to sink into his heart as if a branding iron impressed him there: even the haughty tone, evident throughout, failed to rouse his anger; the total absence alike of tender or reproachful expressions strangely touched him; he fancied the proud look on that beautiful face, as she wrote these few words, and almost—almost a feeling of sorrow, a pang of remorse smote him. Then, suddenly thinking that, as this paper had

been so unexpectedly found, there might be others in which he might find a clue to direct his researches, he rang, and ordered all the portfolios to be brought.

He eagerly examined the contents; but a few spirited sketches of scenery, some half-finished copies of various heads from the antique, and attempts at original portraits were all he found in one. In another, there was a more choice collection; again and again a copy of Mrs. Templeton's portrait in crayons, and water-color—again Mrs. Templeton, an original sketch, much later—another, more highly finished, in which there was an idea borrowed from Murillo's "Assumption of the Virgin," where this beloved mother was still the prominent figure, while charming heads, representing Helen, Constance, the animated brunette beauty of Caroline Vernon, with one or two other faces unknown to him, looked forth from wings and clouds.

But, good heavens! what is this? for as a pendent to the rich, glowing complexion of Miss Vernon was a face which, as he looked, caused his own to blanch with amazement and fear, and which seemed to stop the current of circulation. It formed a striking and effective contrast to the joyously bright countenance of Constance, on whose snowy throat the soft, dark ringlets that adorned its exquisite head rested. But how came it here? by what magic was that face, which had long been shrouded in the grave, made to turn its loving eyes on him?

With a trembling hand he laid it aside; and again minutely looked over every scrap of paper or ivory he found. On the former were attempts at the same head, and on one large sheet an extremely clever crayon copy, including the bust and hands. He was still more perplexed when on the finger he saw a ring of peculiar but well-remembered fashion; and in the hand one of those Spanish fans so celebrated in the toilette details of the graceful Andalusians—here, also, the mantilla and national costume were preserved, the whole bringing back to him the memory of days long past—of love betrayed, of happiness and life destroyed.

But where was the original painting? and how had Constance ever seen it? for this was no fancy of hers, but a copy, the beautiful, living original of which seemed now once again before him.

The more he thought and looked the more was he agitated and bewildered; and then to know that when he would freely have given thousands to obtain authentic intelligence of any thing connected with the history of that portrait, this extraordinary discovery should be made at the very moment when the one who could, perhaps, have enlightened him was gone.

Here was a key to that mystery which for years had been his hindrance and torment, actually in his hands, and yet the secret itself was as impenetrably locked up from him as ever; and he paced up and down the library devising fresh plans for relieving himself from a state of suspense and thrall which had long been almost unbearable; and had his eagerness to trace his wife and daughter suffered diminution, this, this alone would have revived it with additional force.

One morning a larger supply of letters than usual filled the bag; the first the Colonel drew forth bore the Grantham seal, and was addressed in the free, firm writing of her Ladyship; and though the contents purported to be from her Lord, it was evident that they were finished off and pointed by my Lady's sharp pen, and as he read the severe and cutting recapitulation of his meanness and tyranny, his falsehood and dishonor, it made him writhe, while conscience whispered that the castigation was scarcely equal to his deserts; but rousing himself, and tossing aside the letter, he remarked, "This is my active Lady, not my lazy Lord; only let me catch my pretty Constance, and I will show them what I can and will do;" for though he knew his wife could set him at defiance, he also knew he should then have the power to paralyze her every movement.

Another letter—ah! and in that well-known hand which of late years had ever made the strong man tremble like an infant! What now? and he opened it with desperate courage. Another prohibition, and just as he was exulting over what success would enable him to do. How can his domestic affairs interest the writer and call forth a threat that strikes more home than any of the former? why must he stop further search for his wife and daughter? He sat lost in thought, half afraid of again bringing to light the contents of a bag which had already furnished food for such bitter reflection, when Cooper knocked and obtained admittance.

"I am sorry to say, Colonel, that Von Steinburg has sent down about that odd five thousand, which has been standing for some time."

"And must stand for some time longer, and so you may tell him; I am paying more than double interest, and that ought to satisfy the swindling rascal."

"I expect it is because others also have found out that he is a swindling rascal, that he is in such a deuced hurry; the fact is, he must cut and run."

"Well, the sooner the better; he must wait my convenience."

"But he says he will not; he is at my house. I had great difficulty in persuading him not to come up."

"But I tell you, and you know it, I have not the money; there have been enormous payments lately, and to pay more I must make tremendous sacrifices."

"I know it; now I think he has come to try what compromise he can make, for I really believe he has, in some way, committed himself; and I think if you could make him a reasonable offer, he would readily take it as payment in full."

"Any thing to get rid of him, but how to do this immediately is difficult."

"Let me have Ryecroft as a security, and I will do my best: perhaps Maria can help—"

"Raise it as you will, only send that fellow away."

And the so-called Baron, who felt the hot breath of justice in eager pursuit, and who had a little pet plan which he was desirous to make sure of before he left the hospitable shores of "perfidious Albion," had sneaked down to see

what he could do, and sneaked back with a thousand pounds, as full discharge for a gambling, cheating debt of five thousand!

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"What! keep a week away? seven days and nights? eight score eight hours? and love's absent hours? Oh! weary reckoning."—SHAKSPEARE.

"MAMMA," said Constance, when they were quite settled in their snug retreat, and Mrs. Templeton's pale cheek began to show a little tinge of color, "if it will not weary you, I should like to talk about myself."

"It can not tire me, darling, when you and Helen occupy very nearly all my thoughts."

"Then read that first, and you will perceive the cause of my request;" and placing a letter in her mother's hand she left the room, but not before Mrs. Templeton perceived that her eyes looked red with recent weeping.

"CONSTANCE TO HUBERT.

"Whether you are informed of the events which have lately occurred, or not, I am ignorant, but in either case various circumstances render the course which I ought to pursue no longer doubtful. More than two months have elapsed since I heard from you, and grievous changes have happened since then. My dearest mother and myself are no longer at our beautiful Priory. I can not bring myself to enter into details—suffice it, that all our best friends acknowledge there was no alternative. In this changed state of affairs, Hubert, I give you back your promise, not because I am now portionless—I know and honor your character in this respect too well to suppose for a moment that that would influence you—neither do I allude to the deep sorrow which has so changed me—this your generous kindness would seek to lessen—but I have long felt that our marriage would never have been pleasant to Mr. and Mrs. Forrester. Their marked neglect, their systematic avoidance, convince me of this; and though out of their great love for you they have consented, it has been with reluctance. Is not this true? ah! you know it is. Nor is this all: I fear I shall pain you, and willingly would I avoid it—but I ask it of you as a favor, I demand it of you as a duty—examine your own conduct—question your own heart—and tell me, have you really, truly, continued to love me as when you asked me to share your lot? Let no false notions of honor betray you into a mistake; no unsolicited and miscalled compassion lead you to conceal the truth; the happiness of both—perhaps of a third—is involved in a strict investigation of your own feelings: sophistry here would not only be dishonorable, but cruel; if you have learned to love another, I conjure you tell me, and let me be no obstacle to your happiness; my best wishes—my most friendly interest will, I trust, ever be yours. C. F. T."

"And it has come to this at last," thought Mrs. Templeton with a sigh, but as if greatly relieved. "How needlessly have I disquieted myself! His reply I anticipate; for weak though he be, he is too honorable to withstand this appeal. I must still be patient, and wait;" and for some minutes she sat as if again reading the letter, though her thoughts were now far away. At length Constance returned, and went up to her, asking, "Is it yes, mamma?"

"Yes, quite yes," was her emphatic answer; "I entirely approve of what you have done; let this go at once, for I think you will agree with me, that we must suspend our final opinion till we have the reply."

"Perhaps you are right; I wish we could have it soon. I will add, that the answer must be sent to the Rectory, for we can not run any risk of being discovered."

"Do; and then we must hold a Chancellor of the Exchequer meeting."

"And who will form the Opposition, mamma?" asked she, unwilling to check her mother's cheerfulness by indulging in gloom about herself.

"Oh, Ashley is the leader, and a formidable one, too, for he leads his father, who has written Mr. Morton over to his will, having previously talked over your uncle Cecil: however, in spite of this formidable array, we will have our own way, and with economy and management I foresee great doings."

"Yes; and you must accustom yourself to see me out of my expensive white muslins, even in summer; but, in spite of that," she said, laughing at the remembrance of her childish fancies, "I shall be incorrigible, for I shall wear good, strong, warranted to wash, blue"

Ashley arrived as expected, armed with his financial statements; and though he tried hard to persuade Mrs. Templeton that she ought, she must, permit his father to advance her a few hundreds, she observed, that facts and figures were stubborn things, and that she had already not only enough for their wants, but for their whims, glancing at Constance, and making Ashley smile at the idea of the true blue in which she meant to become famous. "And," continued she, "I am so little a candidate for the honor of heroineship, that I shall not have the least hesitation in reclaiming the small income I allow Reginald, directly their present handsome salary is regularly paid. Constance fully enters into my views."

"Fully, mamma: and though you so disdainfully repudiate heroineship, I am not quite sure that I do not still cling to a romantic vision, in which I am shown working at something to eke out our scanty means; and perhaps, after all, I may turn out an industrious specimen of one who has seen better days, and had losses."

After interviews such as these—and, alas! for Ashley's peace, they were frequent—he invariably returned to his solitary chambers out of sorts, out of spirits! What can Hubert Forrester be about? was his constant thought; surely every event that happens only the more evidently shows the need of his presence. Why does he not give Constance a home where she can fearlessly protect her sweet mother? Good heavens! why, in his place, I—but he would stop—not always to lecture himself—not always to condemn Hubert—for he would remember with a feeling of agony that his arrival

would take from him what was his daily delight, the cherished privilege of watching over and guarding both of these defenseless beings.

Lord Grantham and his wife came at the very first summons, and nobly, generously did they entreat Mrs. Templeton to let them openly espouse her cause.

"No, Cecil—no, Henrietta, it must not be. The calm I now enjoy has been unknown to me ever since I married. Look at me, in spite of that violent illness from which I have not yet quite recovered: I am better than I have been for years, and my spirits are recovering their elasticity. It was always my intention, directly my girls married or attained their majority, to insist on a separation; besides, were my retreat discovered by your intervention, what would become of Constance? No, let us wait."

"And the Forresters?" asked Lady Grantham.

"Of them I can not yet speak—a few weeks must decide that matter; till then I leave Constance to her own reflections."

"Ellinor is right," said Lady Grantham, as they returned from this interview; "already, out of these frightful events, good seems arising."

"Yes, and most sincerely do I rejoice that she is by almost any means, freed from that detestable rascal's power—but what on earth could have made a girl like Constance fall in love with Hubert Forrester?" inquired Lord Grantham; "he has nothing but good looks and good temper to recommend him."

"And you count those nothing?" she replied, much amused at the unwonted energy with which he made this remark; "most girls would think them quite enough, without his being encumbered with Forest Hill and Hargraves as inevitable appendages."

"Most girls! yes—but Constance is not like most girls: she is one of the most intelligent as well as most beautiful creatures I ever saw; she would be lost on that pompous, proud old man as well as on his empty-headed son."

Something like this thought his wife when she said: "Ah! there are few Reginalds or Ashleys."

Hubert duly received Constance's letter, which found him still idling away his time at Naples. A host of different feelings rose tumultuously in his heart as he read it: shame at his own conduct—mortification at the seeming case with which Constance absolved him from his promise; but with both was mixed a throb of scarcely acknowledged exultation at the thought that he was free; though for this his generous nature reproached him as he read the simple allusion to her changed and saddened position. How nobly she had done him justice! Could he take advantage of this and accept the freedom she offered? and then offended vanity suggested that she did not write as if this were a sacrifice; but conscience here reminded him of one to whom he had already whispered words of love, spite of his self-reproaches at this double treachery; and the thought that he might now do so openly, fearlessly, honorably, decided him; and even had it not, the sight of that young face which brightened at his approach would speedily have settled the question; and long, long before he replied to Constance he was the accepted lover of Beatrice, though the Duca positively insisted on receiving his father's sanction before he would consent to their marriage.

This consent Hubert confidently reckoned on gaining, but weeks passed in all the happiness of his recent betrothment before Hubert could resolve to tear himself from Beatrice; and alas! alas! for man's constancy that so it should be, but it was not till he was arranging his desk, preparatory to traveling, that he remembered he had not replied to Constance! that must be done at once, and he wrote—

"From your letter I received the first intimation of changes, to which you do but allude. This you must believe, or my silence under the supposed knowledge must have aroused your well-merited indignation and contempt. Constance, in one respect you do me but strict justice; no altered circumstances, no saddening events, would have had any effect on my feelings; but with your solemn appeal before my eyes I dare not venture to disobey you; forgive, but do not despise me when I confess that you have discovered the truth. I have nothing to urge in justification of my conduct. I take back the promise which, pardon the remark, you so sternly, so calmly return; but I accept with joy and gratitude the friendship and interest you offer in exchange.—H. F."

This dispatched, and his remaining preparations completed, Hubert set out for England, having informed his family of his speedy return. The news reached them at Craigalan, and they now claimed Laurette's promise to return with them, and remain till Lady Anne's marriage.

Not till their return to the Sinclairs did they hear of the fresh catastrophe at the Priory. Laurette's policy had been to keep them and Hubert in ignorance as long as possible; for she dreaded lest the impetuosity of the latter should bring him home directly and hasten his marriage, as she knew enough of his generous character to feel sure that he would consider what had happened as only giving Constance an additional claim to his love and protection. Faint as it was, there remained hope so long as he continued unmarried, and she resolved that her most strenuous endeavors should be used with his parents to cause such a rupture between them and her uncle, as would make the last play her game, by means of his authority over her cousin.

She omitted no opportunity of adding fresh fuel to the fire which the Forrester pride had kindled; and while affecting to exonerate Constance, she contrived to throw the ignominy of the whole affair on her; and she so far succeeded, that by the time they reached home, a communication was all but written to Colonel Templeton, formally declining further intercourse between the two families.

But the first letter opened was one from Hubert, dated Paris, in which he said it would quickly be followed by his arrival; and though Laurette urged this as another motive for prompt measures on the part of his father, so that the initiative might be taken before he came, Mr. Forrester thought the matter one in which his dignity was so deeply concerned, that every move on his side should be performed with due deliberation and care.

While the honor of the Forresters was thus

weighed in one scale against the *finesse* of Laurette in the other. Hubert's haste in performing the journey brought him in time to prove that neither of these had any weight with him; and Mr. Forrester felt inexpressibly relieved when he ascertained, from a few sentences Hubert let fall, that nothing having reference to Constance had influenced his return; and before the day was over he received the astounding intelligence that he was free—free by the act of Constance herself! he was thunderstruck—rejected! his son! the contract broken, and with his heir! and by her! Never was elderly gentleman, to borrow a nautical phrase, so taken aback. And then the astonishing, the incomprehensible indifference of Hubert; or was this merely assumed to hide the wound which his love and his pride had received?

Hubert's gayety was indeed a riddle to them all; for though on hearing a few particulars connected with the departure of Mrs. Templeton and her daughter he was much shocked, there was nothing in his manner that indicated the rejected lover's melancholy.

The evening of his return Laurette was seated alone and pondering over this anomaly, when Hubert entered.

"Ah! Laurette," he exclaimed, "what a happiness to find you alone; and taking a seat he looked so intently at her, and with so strange an expression, that her heart beat violently. Is it—can it be? was the unfinished mental inquiry, while his own embarrassment and continued silence increased her agitation

"Laurette," he at length said, and his whole manner betokened deep feeling, "you have always been my friend; when I was a boy, and you an accomplished woman"—Laurette shivered—"you screened or explained away my follies; help me this time, and you bind me to you indissolubly; not me alone, but us." She felt faint, but the strong will overcame the feeling. "I am captive, heart and soul, to a lovely girl in Italy, Beatrice di St. Angelo—you turn away; I see you are displeased."

"Go on," she gasped, with an emotion which he happily ascribed to condemnation of his fickleness.

"Well, my dear friend, she—blessed angel!—loves me; her father consents, provided—mind, provided mine does. This, I assured him, he would readily do; and at the time I believed all I said But during my solitary journey I have had leisure to reflect; and though resolved, firmly resolved, never to give up Beatrice, I begin to dread my father's opposition. His prejudices, his peculiar notions and views, will, I fear, start up in formidable array against my wishes. My dear mother shares all these, but I can soon persuade her to yield, and so, in time, I can my father: but the Duca will brook no hesitation, for his Italian pride equals our English; and God knows what the consequence might be, for my sweet Beatrice is not strong."

This long explanation had given Laurette an opportunity to rally, though her cheek was ashy pale, and her voice faltered as she said: "Hubert, you have made me giddy with your confession. I can offer you no hope. Give me time to consider, and to-morrow let us talk of it."

"Thanks for your interest," replied he, taking her hand and looking so kindly at her she could scarcely bear it, "a thousand thanks. I trust all to you; but you are tired."

"Rather; and rather overcome also," she said, with truth, and she hastened to her own room.

The next day, by her advice, he mentioned the matter to his father.

"Hubert, are you mad, or do you believe me to be so? What!—a Papist!—a foreigner!—a residence abroad!—impossible! Name it no more, for I never will consent."

"I am deeply grieved to hear this," was the reply; "but, my dear father, my happiness, my honor, are equally concerned. I had no doubt of your consent, and therefore acted on this assurance."

"What you have done, you alone must answer for; for me, I shall be bound by nothing of the kind."

"But, sir—"

"But, Hubert, I desire that there may be no more arguing. I never can consent to receive a foreigner as the future mistress of my property."

"I confidently hope you will relent, sir, or I really can not answer for the consequences."

"The consequences can not be worse, when already my son threatens me."

"Nay, father—"

"Do not interrupt me; let this interview be final. I forbid you to proceed in this matter; and now leave me."

Judging by past experience that he had better not urge too much, Hubert obeyed; and to say the truth, not much daunted by this commencement, laid his plans for a second attack, in which his hopes represented him as victorious. How could it be otherwise? Was he not an only son and heir?

CHAPTER LXIX.

"Elle étoit de ce monde,
Où les plus belles choses
Ont le pire destin;
Et rose, elle a vécu
Ce que vivent les roses,
L'espace d'un matin."

Only son and heir!—ah! how much error and misery do these words cause!

Hubert not only had the rich properties of Forest Hill and Hargraves, with the large fortune his father had accumulated, but he was also the last of two old and honorable families; but Mr. and Mrs. Forrester forgot that society could not understand the overwhelming importance which *they* attached to this position. In the world, Hubert was only one of the many; his sickness, his health, his joys or sorrows excited no interest beyond his own circle—a circle whose diameter was unusually small, owing to the proud exclusiveness or shy fastidiousness of his parents.

Hubert wished to go to a public school; no, he must be educated at home, where his acquaintance was limited to the very few country families who were neighbors; subsequently Reginald West, and, later still, Victor Morton, were his companions; and though between him and the latter the

contrast was evident in almost every respect, a strong friendship ever united them.

Then came the contest about the University. Hubert preferred Cambridge; there Ashley and Reginald would have been his associates; but his father decided for Oxford, at which place Hubert remained little more than a year; and, in spite of extraordinary indulgences, it seemed as if a system of opposition had been regularly organized by both father and son; there was always some compromise—some feeble medium measure, which destroyed the grace of yielding in both.

Happily the refinement of Hubert's taste and feelings kept him from all low and ignoble pleasures, even his love for the beautiful was in his case a protection; vice, to him, was always coarse and repellent, and never lost its hideous mien. But his taste wanted elevation; his character, firmness and decision—his life, an aim. Hitherto, all had been harmony with him, and his handsome exterior and fascinating manners were types of his intellect and feelings; but there was nothing grand, majestic, sublime; and on seeing and watching him you were tempted to ask, "Is the beginning of such an existence to be the reflex of a similar end?"

It is said that a celebrated foreign musical amateur, and one also well versed in human nature, after having listened to a young *débutante*, whose singing was generally much admired, was asked his opinion. In his idiomatic way, he replied, "She has the fine organ, but she vant vone grand disappointment before she touch the heart!"

Before the fruit attains perfection, it must be watered by the rain, as well as shone on by the sun.

Poor Mrs. Forrester, when informed by her husband of all that had passed, felt heart-sick at the discord which she foresaw; and fully entering into all his objections, anticipated with dread the result of her dear Hubert's fruitless appeals. Laurette could give her no comfort; for though she said it was a sad entanglement, she was so shocked at the idea of popery, that she out-did Mrs. Forrester in her expressions of horror; and then her objections to foreigners, and Italians especially, were equally in excess; besides, as she failed not to observe, to think that Hubert would be expected to reside chiefly abroad!—it was too bad of the St. Angelo family—they quite forget what was due to an Englishman of birth and station.

Left to himself, the father had time to view the proposal in all its most objectionable aspects. If he did not think of the Pope as always lighting fires to burn heretics, he believed him very often presiding at some other diabolical performance. If he did not consider every foreign title a fiction, and every Duca or Conte a myth, he had some notion that they all dealt in wine, macaroni, and olives—modern antiques, original copies, and plaster casts; and to think that he should be asked to unite his son with one of their daughters! impossible—and thrice impossible!—and this time he felt really strong in the goodness of his cause. Then, also, came the recollection of the beautiful high-bred girl, whom he had so unkindly slighted; the English girl of noble descent, whom he had not thought worthy of his son—the son she had since rejected! There was bitterness in this reflection.

Hubert, after a second and more peremptory refusal, left Forest Hill, and went in sullen disappointment to the discomforts of Hargrave, which was so far altered as to be stripped of all farm-like comforts, and yet not sufficiently advanced to compensate for this by its mansion-like elegancies. After a week of solitary, self-imposed exile, Hubert wrote to his father, announcing his determination to brave his displeasure and follow his own idea of what, as a man of honor, he was bound to do. He deeply lamented any thing like disunion where all had formerly been peace and love; but he indirectly reproached his father for the vacillation which had constantly marked his conduct when *he* had been concerned; and by the help of a little sophistry proved that Mr. Forrester was answerable for his passion for Beatrice by having banished him from home.

And the result was a surrender, but still not a frank or complete one, for it was some days before Hubert obtained such a consent as he knew would alone satisfy the scruples of the Duca, or of those few relics Italy yet possesses to remind her of the noble in name and deed, of whom she once had many. This was wrung from him by the almost frantic vehemence of Hubert after he had received a letter from Beatrice, which roused him as nothing before had ever done.

She spoke of her anxiety to see him, and hinted, though very slightly, at her increased indisposition, which still kept them at Naples.

Hubert was changed—no indecision now; there was command in his look, in his voice, as he hastened the preparations for starting, without a minute's unnecessary delay. And never did Laurette forget that not one word of farewell was left for her, not one evidence that she was even remembered; there was no room for her—the heart, the thoughts, were filled by the image of another.

And now Heaven grant that he may find quick passage across the water; he does; night and day, night and day, the then fatiguing journey was pursued. His servant gave up at Florence, but with Hubert it was on, on—stop not; nor did he till he reached Naples—reached the Palazzo of the Duca. A horrible foreboding of ill had forbidden him the rest another might have found; he was helped out by the servants, who quickly summoned the Duca, for he had fainted.

His first word on recovering was "Beatrice?"

"Is very ill," was the sorrowful reply; "but your arrival, which she has so pined for, will be a restorative."

"Infinite mercy now be praised!" said Hubert, who was with difficulty persuaded to take much needed rest and refreshment before he saw her. And when he did—merciful powers! can it be—is this to be the end? for his quick eye, which had last seen her in comparative health, perceived a change—and oh! such a change!

He pressed her to his heart; he kissed her flushed cheek, now painted by that insidious enemy, which also sent the sparkle to her beautiful eyes and gave her a treacherous and deceptive strength. With anguish that can not be told Hubert read it all; his love rendered him only more cognizant of the truth—and he had the

won her but to lose her! and his heart seemed breaking as it echoed back his last words.

Ah! how he cursed the delay that had deprived him of all those precious, precious hours he might have spent in watching and caring for her; how he execrated those prejudices which, by prolonging his absence, had perhaps increased the danger and needlessly pained her by anxiety.

After this meeting he sought the Duca; and though it was with difficulty he brought himself to give words to his fears, the very imminence of the danger made him desperate. He named his wish for further advice, for the father seemed not yet sensible of the truth. And when fresh opinions corroborated Hubert's dread, even then he could not, would not, believe such misery was awaiting him; and as day by day brought its false but flattering fluctuations, he would appeal to Hubert, and ask him if eyes so bright, if a face so animated, could have the icy touch of death so near?

But Hubert, hopeless and heart-broken, did not share in his disbelief; every day some fresh symptom alarmed him, for the remembrance that the mother of Beatrice was an English lady, and had died young, filled him with the most agonizing fears.

About ten days after his return he was with her, listening to her expressions of pleasure at again seeing him after her anxiety during his absence: "But that is past—and you are here once more—not soon again to leave us."

"My beautiful! my own!" he murmured, "we part no more;" but as he said so, he shuddered to think no voice from his heart repeated his words, while the ravages of disease on that loved form were more than ever perceptible.

Beatrice, fondly laid her head on his bosom, saying: "Thanks, dear Hubert, for that assurance, for you can not, after this, again leave me."

"Never, never, my beloved!" again kissing her fair brow; and, as if worn out with fatigue, she soon fell asleep with his arm round her, and his face, to her so glorious in its beauty, bent over her, and his loving eyes watching her—and so, she died!

CHAPTER LXX.

"And therefore is Love said to be a child,
Because, in choice, he is so oft beguiled."
SHAKSPEARE.

As days changed to weeks, and still no reply came from Hubert, Mrs. Templeton found it difficult to adhere to her resolution, that they would not talk of the matter, especially as she saw that Constance was looking anxious and harassed. She was restless before the arrival of the post, and evidently depressed and disappointed afterward, though nothing could be more unwearied than her efforts to hide this from her mother.

Stacey had not yet recovered from the intoxicating effects of his one-volume great success, or, as Mr. Moore patiently remarked, had not yet got to the end of his tether; and though this sudden falling off had greatly disappointed him, as he was was really much interested in the completion of the memoirs, he good naturedly hoped that Stacey, of whose talents he had a high opinion, would, in the end, justify his expectations.

At present, both to Mr. Turner and Ashley, this seemed very unlikely. He was gayly fluttering about saloons and drawing-rooms; he was the leader in all private theatricals—managed, wrote, sang, and played; and thus, at once the Protens of fashionable society, and the lion of fiddle-faddle literary coteries, there was no chance of his voluntarily quitting them to become the laborious author or the domestic man.

He had at first been enthusiastic in his admiration of Mrs Templeton and her daughter, but soon even they failed to attract, when perfumed notes from Lady Rose or Lady Blanche enticed him within the charmed circle of fashionable life and its attendant gayeties.

Though all this unprofitable, indeed injurious, adulation turned Stacey's head, happily it did not destroy his kindness or affection for his wife. True it is, she was perpetually left at home to work hard for the necessaries of life, while he was working hard to amuse his noble and titled friends; true, the money he made by an occasional contribution to a magazine or some gay volume of songs was soon absorbed by the expense which attended this association with wealth and luxury; still, when he had money, he never failed to make her some present, which though perhaps too costly to wear, being offered with the intention to please, was as such accepted with thanks.

When at home, he was happy, and made her so, and was exceedingly amused at her professional industry, calling her an absurd little bee, a money-loving little miser—wondered what she could possibly do with the sixpences she was so busily collecting, and talked like a dreamer or poet of the life they would lead when he obtained his appointment; for, in addition to all the other causes which helped to bewilder him, some friend, more than usually indiscreet, had hinted at a snug little sinecure, and promised to name him to Lords A, B, C, and all the lords to the end of the alphabet, some of whom would be sure to give it.

Stacey was a poet; had he never read, or had he forgotten, Spenser's experience, which he so forcibly tells as a warning to all expectants for place and preferment?

At last the expected letter from Italy arrived, after Constance had become weary with waiting and suspense. Mrs. Templeton felt a shade of disappointment steal over her as she noticed the eagerness with which it was received, the trembling anxiety with which it was read; it was, as she feared, and Constance was weeping over this proof of Hubert's fickleness.

Silently she drew near and attempted to remove her hand from her face.

"It is not sorrow, mamma," said Constance; "but I have waited so long for this, that I at last began to dread what it might contain when it did come. Read it dear;" and she put the brief reply into Mrs. Templeton's hand.

"I see that Hubert accepts his release," was the reply; "but still, dear child, I do not understand all this emotion."

"Neither do I—that is—quite," answered she; "but if you have patience to listen to my confession, perhaps between us we may make it clear."

"I shall not be happy till we do—so begin at once; here, sit on this ottoman close by me. And now—volume first, chapter one."

"Oh, mamma! you are already laughing at me; but never mind, with you for my only critic, I shall not tremble very violently. You know how much we went through during Helen's terrible trial; there was no one to help or comfort us. At this time Hubert came very often; he was so kind, so cheering, and—well, I may as well say it—so handsome, that I learned to expect his appearance as almost the only happy thing."

"My poor girl," said Mrs. Templeton, smoothing her rich curls.

"And this went on; I could not trouble you with all my anxieties while you had so many of your own; but Herbert listened so patiently, and encouraged me so kindly to hope for better days, that somehow he himself became associated with those future and brighter times. At last, having taken his share of my grief, he proposed to take me; and, to my feeling, there was something so ungrateful in the idea of not returning his love, that I believed I did—that I must, or ought, or some fancy of that kind—and—but you know the rest. Then we went to Craigalan, and there for the first time I saw what society could really produce. At Grantham also, after Cecilia's wedding, I had an opportunity of associating with many not older than Hubert, who had in some honorable pursuit won credit and renown; and I came home with my mind in a very different state from that in which it had been a few months earlier. Hubert's letters also, though kind and cheerful, after a time invariably disappointed me; besides, I could not but be struck with the difference between his long-delayed and brief correspondence and that constant interchange of thought and feeling which existed during the short, happy period which followed Helen's engagement. I was neither so vain nor so foolish as to fancy that I could ever inspire such an affection as our dear Helen could still—else that pass. By degrees, however, I began to doubt whether Hubert really did love me—and here Laurette helped to open my eyes. Then Hubert returned—and now, dear mamma, comes my confession. You have no idea how changed he seemed to me—so different from what I had fancied, in short, so unlike what I believed I loved; and yet I was very glad to see him, and really liked him very much—only I was so conscious of his deficiencies, that I scarcely felt that respect which I had been romantic enough to think it essential to entertain toward my husband."

"No romance, dear child, no romance is this requirement—no love is secure that is not based on it."

"But I must try and be concise: this, and a neglect which I felt very keenly in the conduct of both Mr. and Mrs. Forrester—hints and insinuations from more than one person—our changed position—his scarcely pardonable silence—induced me, after deep, and, I must say, painful reflection, to write the letter of which you approved."

"But, my love, why are you so anxious for a reply, and why so excited when it came?"

"Because, after I had taken that decided step, I feared I had misjudged Hubert; I thought, if he still really loved me, how I must have pained him. And above all, I feared, yes, that is the feeling—I feared he might refuse to take back his promise—might, from some of those terrible mistakes which cause so much sorrow, feel bound, now, more especially, to continue our engagement."

"And then, Constance?"

"Then, I should, I suppose, have married him; and though with Hubert's amiability and generosity, that would never have been a very pitiable lot, I greatly prefer my freedom—and the blessed privilege of devoting myself to you, and of making your happiness, instead of his, the great object of my life, particularly as he has found what he considers so good a substitute."

"Much that you have said hardly surprises me," replied Mrs. Templeton; "the estimate you have only lately formed of Hubert's character has always been mine. Constance, darling, I was disappointed that you had given yourself to him; but doing him, as you have done, full justice, I had no objections that sufficiently authorized my interference, and believed it was the mother's vanity which pronounced him not quite equal to my own noble-minded, intelligent girl. But I can scarcely express to you the indignation I have felt at the behavior of the elder Forresters—unkind and disrespectful in the extreme, as it has uniformly been—yet I have always thought that they were weak enough to be influenced by an interested party—by Laurette Sinclair; you look surprised—did it never occur to you that she loves Hubert?"

"You surprise me still more by that question, Laurette! the fastidious Laurette! who used to take a tiresome pleasure in pointing out Hubert's faults and failings?"

"To me this is not so extraordinary as to you. However, the result of this measure, which you have had the moral courage to take, is to me most satisfactory, as I began to fear you had, in a fit of romantic generosity, or—do not be offended—of jealous pride, made a greater sacrifice than you were aware of. Henceforth Hubert will be remembered as one whom we both admire for much that is good, but with no deeper feelings."

"Exactly so; I should at this moment rejoice to see him, and could honestly congratulate him on his marriage with another; so now I hope you are at rest on my account. And you really think Laurette has been playing a part?"

"I do; I detect her agency in many things. And now that we fully understand each other, I may say I rejoice truly that you are neither bound by promises, the performance of which I could never have sincerely rejoiced at, nor broken-hearted at the fickleness which has set you free. It is evident that gratitude on your part and sympathy on Hubert's were mistaken for that affection without which, I do not say marriage is misery, but which is necessary to render it a state of real happiness."

"But though *you* judge me so leniently, dear mamma, I feel deeply humiliated when I think what people generally will think of me; you just now spoke of Hubert's fickleness—is not that the word they will apply to me?"

"Some, probably, may; not so those who best

know you; but better, far better, that friends should join in condemning you, than that any morbid dread of their censure should have deterred you from taking this step. To have persisted in your engagement, after the knowledge you had obtained of your own feelings, would have been to encounter sorrows much more poignant than the condemnation of all you most love. I almost tremble to think how near you were to that great evil, a mistaken marriage. Better, even at the altar itself, to pause and turn back, than to run the risk of passing a life of misery for both."

"But so many reasons, mamma—"

"I anticipate all you would urge, and yet I repeat what I have said; it may seem an encouragement to rash engagements; it may appear to weaken the solemnity of a promise; it may sound like an excuse for indifference to the feelings of another; but again I say, turn back even from the altar, if your further acquaintance with yourself or the character of another should lead you to see you have been mistaken."

After a pause Constance said: "As there is no necessity to revert to this correspondence, I should prefer no allusion being made, even to our best friends."

"Certainly, my love; you have a right to prescribe in this matter."

Laurette had scarcely alluded to Hubert during the single interview she had with Caroline before she went to Lady Westrough's. Her engagement there she determined to fulfill, though even her powers of dissimulation were unable to hide the change so apparent in her looks and manner. Nor did she give way when she heard of Hubert's dreadful loss and of his subsequent dangerous illness. She had a part to play, a secret to keep, and pride gave her strength. Like Calantha, she could say, "On to the dance."

And when the wedding and its subsequent gayety was over, she returned to Craigalan, which for a long time she never left.

Caroline, when she wrote to Ashley, named Hubert's return; and as he daily expected his appearance at the Heath, Ashley kept away till the news came that Hubert had again left England.

Had he seen Constance? if so, why had it never been mentioned? why any need of concealment? surely, and he felt humbled at the thought, surely Mrs. Templeton—Constance, had not read the truth in any inadvertency of manner and wished thus to spare him pain? And so much did this fear torment him, that it was long before he recovered that external serenity which he had so carefully tried to maintain.

CHAPTER LXXI.

"Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to Heaven." SHAKSPEARE.

DURING all this time, nothing could be more gloomy than the interior of the Priory. It seemed as if the old monastic silence, which had so long been banished, had returned; and that the spirits of those who, ages ago, had abjured all cheerfulness and pleasure still haunted it, diffusing everywhere the influence of their solitary and ascetic lives. Whole suites of rooms were dismantled; ranges of windows were closed; and by the Colonel's express desire, Mrs Dawson made great reductions in all connected with her department, while a similar plan of economy was extended to the out-door arrangements. Doctor Vernon alone called, but he never obtained an interview. Except on business, the Colonel rarely left the limits of his estate, in the details and improvement of which he was unusually interested. Fits of gloom were succeeded by uncontrollable restlessness, and the habit of indulging in wine seemed now confirmed, though there was, apparently, method even in that. Mr. Sloper was now often closeted with him, to the exclusion of Cooper, with whom, on several occasions, the Colonel had been very short and peremptory, so much so, that the worthy agent carried his complaints to the foot of the throne—namely, to Mrs. Captain, who in her wisdom recommended patience; and as this was by no means what she herself ever practiced, unless some great and certain reward was in view, he was disposed to be guided by her.

But a blow fell on her which demanded all her stock of this most excellent virtue. This was the marriage of Juliet with Steinberg, for as to the Von or the Baron they were equally apocryphal. Instead of leaving England with the money he had procured from Cooper, he remained till he had persuaded the ill-regulated girl that, as Madame la Baronne, she would at once assume a rank that would dazzle her mother into compliance; and one fine day he and Juliet were united for better and worse—or for worse only.

The rage of Mrs. Mordaunt defies description; her bitter disappointment might almost have moved pity, for she really was, in her way, very fond of her children, and no one knew better than she the delusion under which Juliet had acted—none foresaw more clearly the fate that awaited her; the past life of her swindling, infamous son-in-law was no mystery to her; she was as well acquainted with his various offenses as he with the various prisons to which those offenses had led him; and she saw the vain, silly Juliet at once the dupe and the victim of one little better than a felon.

Another disgrace also was near. Ruth, who had been flattered and bribed into the commission of the basest treachery, was in her turn to be betrayed. No longer needed, she was to be thrown aside—driven from the roof of her seducer when her state most required compassion.

Thus were affairs when the Colonel one evening came to Cooper's house, and after some conversation, which arose out of a meeting they had had that morning with Mr. Sloper, Colonel Templeton remarked:

"I am more than usually anxious to free myself from that debt which Sloper has continued to stave off so long, and to do so would make almost any sacrifice, though to raise money on the property is almost as bad as to owe it. I wish to God some one would take it and set me free of all incumbrances."

"You need not be long wishing that," quickly observed Mrs. Captain; "why, you might raise

double what you want by making some one with plenty of ready money your heir; and I wonder old Sloper was not sharp enough to make the proposal."

"Perhaps he would," replied the Colonel, laughing, "if I had given him any encouragement; for he anticipated your scheme, and named a good round sum which many would be ready to offer as an equivalent."

"Then why did you not close with the bargain?" asked she, her face flushing with eagerness.

"Because," answered the Colonel dryly, "they might not be those I mean to let reign after me; one year's income would very nearly clear me—your annuity, let me tell you, cut out a good slice."

"And suppose I let you have that back, and Cooper used his endeavors to free you, how would that help you?"

"How? why, if he procured me efficient help, and I resold that annuity, with the next two years' rents, I should be comparatively free; for never again will I touch cards or dice—never again lose a year's income with a set of sharpers."

"And what will you give to the one who helps so quickly to set you free?"

"A deed of gift of the property—provided I like the offerer as well as the offer."

"Ah! but you might live to be as old as old Parr, and then who would gain?"

"I shall never live to be old," was the gloomy reply, and there was a silence; but he broke it by saying, "Of course, you expect that at my death you will find something worth picking up; talk this over with Cooper, and it'a gift of part, or even the whole, will put me to rights, why, then, let me know."

And so effectually was it talked over with Cooper, that in a very short time the annuity was reassigned, and a sum so large offered as filled the Colonel with amazement as to how it had been procured, till suspicion suggested that he was only enjoying his own again, and the Seabrooke property—the property which had descended through many generations of the honored and honorable Ashleys—was made the inheritance of —— *O tempora! O mores!* "to what base uses we may return."

Throughout this wholesale disinheriting, the only token that Colonel Templeton gave of retaining the least recollection of those whose claims upon him were of the holiest and most sacred kind was, that he most strictly limited this gift to the property as entailed by the late Horace Ashley. Every thing else he bequeathed to his daughter Constance Franciska.

"And now," he said, as he signed this important document, which had been drawn up with great secrecy by a legal friend of Cooper's, "my mind is relieved of a load; and though I am in no hurry to make way for you, I wish you joy of your fine inheritance when it becomes yours."

And on his return, in uncommon spirits, he informed Mrs. Dawson, to whom he had become much attached, that he had that day done what would make the hair of all stand on end when it was known; and added, that it had given him more pleasure than any thing since he had become master of Seabrooke.

CHAPTER LXXII

"My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife."
Othello.

"I AM presenting myself at a very unreasonable hour, dear Mrs. Templeton," said Ashley, as he one morning entered while they were taking breakfast, "but read that, and you will see that I have no alternative."

"And while mamma does so," said Constance, looking so happy and so lovely in her dark-blue autumnal dress, that he for a minute forgot himself, while his eyes rested on her with delight, "you shall have a cup of our most excellent coffee; for I expect you have, as usual, forgotten yourself while thinking of us;" and he felt there was more truth in this remark than she was aware of.

"Your mother will tell you there was no time for much thought of either coffee or tea;" and turning to Mrs. Templeton he continued, "I have already seen Mr. Turner, and he advises no delay."

"Here is the note, Constance," said her mother handing it over to her.

"To ASHLEY VERNON, ESQ.

"*Sir:* My honored Lord desires me to inform you, that if Mr. Reginald is still from England, he hopes you will not lose any time in coming here. My Lady has gone, but Mrs. Melville will not. By my Lord's desire I write also to Mr. Manning. Please to see him, and come together.

"Honored sir, your most obedient servant,

"ROBERT ROBERTS."

"Lord Ernest's servant?" asked she.

"Yes; I think there is no doubt of what I should do. Still, in Reginald's absence, I did not choose to act without referring to you."

"I agree with Mr. Turner; go at once. And what a terrible catastrophe the note alludes to," remarked Mrs. Templeton.

"Terrible, indeed! Mr. Turner says he expected this long ago. To hear him, you would think him the veriest cynic you ever met; and yet, to watch him act, there is not a kinder heart beating."

"I think Mr. Turner one of the most delightful old men I ever saw," said Constance; "he and Mr. Moore between them share my best affections, and I am puzzled how I shall settle it when they both propose." And then remarking her mother's covert smile, she blushed violently, and gave Ashley so much sugar in his coffee that he was obliged to cry, "Hold!"

"You must contrive to let me see these equally-favored rivals," said Mrs. Templeton, who never felt at liberty to visit.

At Old Court, affairs were in so complicated a state that Ashley was truly glad to have the help of Mr. Manning; and they learned from Roberts that Lady Ernest had made no mystery of her departure, and, in a letter left for her husband, had attempted to justify her conduct by reminding him of his.

"What a wretch must this mother be!" exclaimed Ashley, indignantly; "she knew this girl loved another—she must have known the kind of

life to which she was dooming her, and yet no compassion withheld her."

And still this indefatigable intriguer was trying to maintain her position and still laying her plans. She seemed disposed to carry matters with a high hand, having decided on assuming the character of an ill-used woman; but Mr. Manning quickly reduced her from her tragedy stilts and imitation heroics to a more suitable level, that of petitioner for favors.

The conduct of this mean termagant had made an enemy of every individual in the house. The housekeeper insinuated that before her luggage was allowed to go it had better be examined, and Lady Ernest's waiting-woman insisted on the necessity of some one helping her to find various articles of value belonging to her mistress, which had gone since her ladyship had.

But the first thing toward restoring order being her absence, Mr. Manning declined all inspection of her effects, and even persuaded Lord Ernest to send her fifty pounds, which he however kept till she and her movables were safely lodged in a post-chaise, which at length carried her off.

"Congratulate me," said he, returning to Ashley; "and remember, I deserve a laurel crown, for, believe me, it is no despicable victory that which is gained over such a virago."

"And what do you now mean to advise?"

"A divorce, if possible; this fellow with whom she is gone was, it seems, her accepted lover before the nefarious plot of offering her up here entered the head of her Jezebel mother; let him now be enabled to marry her."

"But why am I summoned?" asked Ashley, annoyed to find himself where, apparently, he was not needed.

"I suppose Lord Ernest identifies you with Mr. West; and, upon the whole, it is well that he should have some one to represent him."

For the first time Ashley now saw his Lordship, a gentlemanly, but nervous, weak-minded man, precisely the character suited to Mrs. Melville's views, who committed a great error when she relinquished her scheme of marrying him herself. "She would have succeeded, with a little more patience and a good deal more bullying," remarked Mr. Manning when afterward talking over the matter with Ashley.

"And now, my Lord," said Mr. Manning, in a cheerful tone, and after he had introduced Mr. Ashley Vernon, "as you are once more master of your own castle, I presume you are ready to proceed to business. Mr. Vernon's time is valuable, and he wishes, if possible, to leave to-morrow morning."

"Do not let us be in a hurry," replied Lord Ernest. "I hope Mr. Vernon will contrive to make himself comfortable here. Tell Roberts to see to it. And do you not think, then, that Lord Westrough will come?"

"I imagine not; he spoke of being much occupied with his daughter's marriage, and the inconvenience of being absent just now."

"Ah! that reminds me I always promised Lady Anne a wedding present; see that it is done at once. It was to be five thousand pounds, I believe; and suppose I add a hundred for a trinket or some fancy—see to it at once."

"Depend on me," said Mr. Manning; "perhaps you will draw the check now," for he thought that was the only way in which he could see about it.

Then, with evident uneasiness, glaring at Ashley, he asked, "Poor Reginald! What will he say, Mr. Vernon?"

"Nothing but what is kind and generous," he answered.

"Yes, yes, of course; but this is a sad affair; they never should have come here. And now about Reginald—God forgive me for the misery I have caused! But I did not intend it, poor fellow! And now sent out to Russia, with his pretty wife and child! Mr. Vernon, do you think they can forgive me?"

"I believe, sir," said Ashley, "that Reginald has never once thought such a thing necessary. He is too noble-minded to harbor resentment; and as to any step you took, with a view to add to your own happiness, he would have been the first to rejoice at it."

"Ah! but it never did add to my happiness; it brought always misery, and now shame and ruin. See to it, Mr. Manning. Remember, he is my heir; he must come back and take care of me. Will his wife forgive me, Mr. Vernon? She must have suffered a great deal; it all comes to my mind now; other terrible events made me forget it. How has Reginald managed?"

"He has worked hard for his living, sir," returned Ashley, his handsome face glowing with friendly enthusiasm; "he has toiled early and late; he has made himself a name which will not soon be forgotten among men of talent; he has gained friends, of whom any one might be proud; and he has a beautiful, loving wife, who would make him happy anywhere."

"Now God be praised! God bless them!" exclaimed Lord Ernest, tears coursing down his cheeks. "Write to him for me—I can not; and tell him every thing. Tell him, also, that I have given him all I have. See to it immediately, Mr. Manning."

Order and quiet having been restored to Old Court, the following day the two gentlemen departed.

"My first business shall be to prepare the deed in Mr. West's favor," said Mr. Manning, "then I shall be able to broach the delicate matter of the divorce, for the necessity of which, at present, Lord Ernest appears quite unconscious. You perceive Mr. Vernon, the character we have to deal with. After this luckless marriage, when I was most urgent with Lord Ernest to make the best reparation he could to Mr. West, I was repeatedly put off with the most flimsy excuses."

When Ashley arrived at Chambers, he found a voluminous packet, franked by the ambassador, from Russia. This was eagerly opened, it being the first that had arrived since the last sad news of Mrs. Templeton's illness had reached St. Petersburg. He found a letter to himself, in which Reginald declared that nothing would be thought a sacrifice if Mrs. Templeton wished for their presence in England. Inclosed were letters to Mrs. Templeton, which Ashley decided on taking himself when he went to make his report of proceedings at Old Court. The next letter was from Caroline: she informed him of the sudden departure of the Forresters for Italy, whither they were hastening in consequence of bad news, but of what

nature she could not inform him, as Mrs. Forrester's note to her mother seemed to assume that they knew more than they really did, and referred them to Laurette for particulars. She entreated him to see Mrs Templeton and Constance immediately, fancying that the latter must be in great sorrow, as she could think of nothing less than that Hubert was ill.

Ashley was astonished and perplexed beyond all expression. Only two days ago he had seen them, and remarked, not only that Mrs. Templeton seemed daily to be exchanging her depression for the most gratifying cheerfulness, but that Constance, who had lately looked both anxious and ill, was in the most charming spirits.

He looked at the date of Caroline's letter: the news must have reached the Forresters before he left for Lord Ernest's; strange, therefore, that information had not been sent to Mrs. Templeton; for Ashley never for a moment supposed that the Forest Hill family were not informed of all relating to her and Constance.

"Poor Constance!" sighed Ashley, "the sweet smiles with which your dear face was decked when I last saw you, will be sadly changed." But as his tidings from Russia were so satisfactory, he determined that no wish to avoid the pain of beholding her distress should delay his giving the comfort the last was sure to impart.

But, good heavens! can he see aright? there is Constance flying out of the boudoir, and greeting him with a voice, look, and manner more suited to some Euphrosyne, than to her who had received bad news from the one beloved.

"Oh, mamma! here is Ashley again;" and linking her arm in his she led him to her mother.

"No one more welcome," was the smiling reply; "but you are tired? you have bad news?"

"No, the contrary," he replied, making a powerful effort; "I have in my hands what I know you will think the best that ever were written," handing her the Russian packet.

"From Helen! from Reginald!" she cried, turning pale with emotion; and tearing off the envelopes, she gave part to Constance, while she herself wept tears of pleasure, and kissed the signature again and again.

"I shall go and call on Mrs. Stacey," said he, feeling they were best left alone with their letters; and when in about an hour he returned, he found that Madame Stopsel had been called in to share with them the joy at the account the "blessed darlings" gave of themselves.

"These letters," said he, "have arrived quite *à propos* to the changes at Old Court;" and he proceeded to give the result of his visit there.

"I oppose Reginald's return," she said, when this was named as Lord Ernest's wish; "he is no longer alone. He hints at the probability of their absence being shorter than it was at first expected, and seems to think that, in any case, his position is fixed; and speaks with pride of the friendship the young Duchess of Isleford has formed for Helen. Happy mother that I am," said she, her eyes bright with tears, and kissing Constance, who had glided to her side. "So you see, dear Ashley, I am worldly-wise enough to prefer that Reginald should hold fast what his own worth and exertion have gained."

"And now," he said, hesitating and looking strangely confused, "if you could spare me a few minutes."

But Constance was gone even before he concluded; and as she slowly ascended the stairs, a strange thought flashed across her mind, while a kind of spasm seized her heart and made her feel faint. "Ashley is going to be married!" and she sat down trembling and sad. Instead of again reading Helen's letter, as she had intended, she remained lost in meditation, scarcely conscious of the contradictory and conflicting nature of her thoughts, but with a keen sense that they were painful, when she was roused by Gretchen's voice, who came with hungry and thirsty ears for further news from St. Petersburg—and Constance proceeded to gratify her.

But hush! there is a step—the garden gate closes—Ashley, then, is gone.

Left alone with Mrs. Templeton, he silently put his sister's letter into her hand; he watched the expression of gravity and sorrow which overspread her face; but though she said, "This is very sad, I grieve much for them—poor Hubert!" there was not the least reference to Constance—strange! what could it mean? At last, after reading it partly through again, she observed, "How very sorry Constance will be to learn this."

"I had expected that you both already knew, perhaps, even more than Caroline; but my first glance at you convinced me that I should be the earliest to bring tidings of this sorrow."

"It is indeed sorrow," she replied; "for though we can only imagine or guess the truth, it is evident that no trifling cause could have taken either Mr. or Mrs. Forrester to Italy."

"And without writing to you?" he remarked abruptly; and then added, "pardon me but—"

"But you can not understand it," interrupted Mrs. Templeton; "it will, however, be clear to you, my dear Ashley, when I tell you that Constance has returned his promise to Hubert, and that he accepted it."

"Good God! it makes me giddy," he replied, turning very pale. But affecting not to remark his emotion she proceeded; "Various events have long been leading to this."

"And—and Constance?" he asked, vainly endeavoring to speak with a steady voice.

"And Constance," she calmly continued, "was the one to propose it to me. Let me, however, exonerate Hubert; before our changed circumstances occurred, to her this step seemed desirable; it is not the result of any indifference on his part *since* she became portionless. The measure had my entire concurrence, and with the result I am perfectly satisfied. Having said this much, though Constance is morbidly sensitive about having it known, I feel that you, as one of our dearest friends, have a right to learn more;" and she proceeded to give him an account of the various reasons which had induced Constance to come to this decision.

Ashley thanked her for this mark of her confidence; though as to the reasons she gave he scarcely remembered one—the result, the unexpected, the astonishing result, was what alone filled his mind; he mechanically took his hat, but left his sister and Reginald's letters, and without further adieu departed.

Instead of being offended at this unpoliteness,

Mrs. Templeton smiled as she went to seek Constance, and implore her pardon for her breach of trust. By her mother's look she knew that something unusual had been communicated, and still, with this strange apprehensive feeling predominant, she longed—yet dreaded—to hear the first words.

"Ashley has been telling me what I am greatly surprised at," she remarked, "and, indeed, what grieves me also."

"Dear mamma, why should it grieve you?" asked Constance, impressed with the correctness of her own interpretation.

"How should it do otherwise? and you, I am sure, will be grieved as well;" and almost to her daughter's relief, she proceeded, without interruption, to relate all that had passed, pleading the impossibility of concealing the real state of the case from Ashley.

"Oh! mamma, what must he think of me!" was her first remark; pardon her egotism, pardon her selfishness, her insensibility, all you who would have acted differently—for her second was, "Poor, dear Hubert! ill, and very ill, I fear, or his parents would not have been sent for. And Laurette, how are we to learn from her! for lately she has never written to us."

"We must patiently bear this suspense; we are always laying Ashley, and Ashley's time, so much under contribution, that I hesitate to encroach, or I would entreat him to call at the Westroughs, where Laurette now is."

"Oh, do—he is always so kind;" and the first question was now again the last. "What will he think of me? how fickle I must appear—and he, of all people, to know it."

"But why so, Constance? the truth must become generally known before long; and I confess that I think our old friends may hold themselves slighted to be informed of the fact from a third party."

"In that case, mamma, use your own wise judgment. I give it up. And after all, I believe I did not fear any one so much as Ashley. You have no idea how strict and stern he is about promises. Caroline says she is sure he never could love a second time; therefore he would be very severe on all caprices and fancies. Perhaps he may despise me for my conduct."

"Dismiss all these imaginary apprehensions, my dear child: Ashley, I am sure, will not be so unjust. A girl of seventeen may be allowed to mistake gratitude and sisterly kindness for a deeper feeling without being condemned as fickle and capricious. I hope, dearest, that you may still some day tell me you agree with those who disbelieve in second love, even while asking my blessing on your more experienced choice."

"No, no, mamma," said Constance, shaking her head and still looking both grave and troubled; while, contrary to her usual anxiety when her daughter showed symptoms of depression, Mrs Templeton was rather well pleased to perceive that such was now the fact.

It was well for Ashley that, on returning home, he found business of importance awaiting him; still, before he did any thing else, he answered Caroline's letter, entreating her to obtain all the information she could from Laurette, and to let him know the result. He did not feel at liberty to relate the startling disclosure Mrs. Templeton had made to him, rightly conjecturing that, if she wished it published, she would do so; and by the time several other matters of a professional nature had been transacted, he felt himself at liberty to think uninterruptedly over what he had heard.

Constance free! no longer the affianced of another! was the idea that seemed to banish all others; and even when he partly recovered from the tumult of feeling into which this unexpected news had thrown him, the recollection that the ties which had bound her to Hubert were severed, mixed and interfered with all his thoughts.

At first a bounding sensation of joy showed him but too plainly how vain had been his belief, that the hopelessness of his love had enabled him to conquer it. Then, as a check to something very like pleasure, came the question, what, though she had rejected Hubert, did it follow that she could love him? perhaps, after all, she had, from a feeling of womanly pride, released him, while she herself retained all her old affection; and his noble heart felt sad at the thought; suppose she also should be the victim of an unrequited love?

Distracted with all these conflicting emotions, poor Ashley bitterly reproached the false reliance he had had on himself in having lately so much sought her society. Where was his consistency? where his self-government? and he determined henceforth that these meetings, so precious, should be interdicted; that the delightful evenings spent at the Heath should cease. And then, with the contradiction so natural, he asked, wherefore this stern denial of his only pleasure? besides, his duty as a friend called him there, and let the consequence be fatal as it might to his peace, there he would go; and happily for his overtired state, with this magnanimous and really happy resolution he retired to rest, and rose the next morning with a half-saddened, half-joyous anticipation that he should soon again be obliged to see Mrs. Templeton.

She, in the mean time, at once made use of the permission Constance had given, and wrote to inform Mrs. Vernon of the exact state of matters between Constance and Hubert, expressing at the same time the anxiety they both felt to hear further news of the Forresters.

But time passed, and still no direct information reached them. From one of Mr. Morton's numerous correspondents they learned the sad history of the death of Beatrice—of Hubert's alarming illness—the summons to his parents, and their arrival; but no news reached them that at all relieved their anxiety.

Again, but indirectly, they heard; this time from Victor Morton, who was on his return to England, after what he termed his lengthened banishment. He had stopped at Naples, and hearing of the sorrow that had fallen on the family of the Duca, he felt sure, from remarks which he had made two years ago, that Hubert must be in some degree a sharer in this grief.

Victor said that though better, Hubert would not listen to any proposal for his leaving Naples, his greatest comfort being the society of the bereaved Duca; that at first he almost furiously refused to see his parents—but happily the tears

of his mother and the entreaties of his father had prevailed. His letter concluded with an intimation that he hoped to be in England shortly after Christmas.

This sad account was very distressing to those who, while aware of Hubert's failings, loved him for his many amiable qualities; and when Ashley looked at the tearful countenance of Constance it was with a sharp pang he said to himself: "Ah! she deceived herself, and little knew how much she still loves him;" while his manner, which had unconsciously become graver and more reserved, was to her a proof that he classed her among the frivolous and changeable, perhaps the cold-hearted; and so it sometimes happened that Ashley came and departed without seeing her, and ascribed her absence to her wish to conceal the distress she felt about Hubert.

Constance had now no difficulty in deciding that she had, at last, clearly and truly understood her feelings toward Hubert. She had discovered that her dread of Ashley's contempt had a deeper source than she had at first imagined; it was neither pride nor self-love which had shrunk from his expected censure, and with something like terror she acknowledged to herself that she loved Ashley Vernon!

Ah! how could it be otherwise? was he not the constant theme of praise with Mrs. Stacey and Gretchen? did not her mother regard him and speak of him as one of the noblest of human beings? were not the letters they received from St. Petersburg eloquent in his praise? and did not her own heart echo back again and again all that others spoke and thought?

How different was the value she set upon his approbation from any thing she had ever before prized, and oh! how infinitely superior did he appear to any one she had ever met.

"But what will he care for my thoughts of him? Beyond the kind and friendly manner so habitual to him in his general intercourse, what can I expect? nothing. Perhaps he has already given his love;" and at this thought Constance hid her face in her hands and wept.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

"She is mine own!
And I as rich in having such a jewel
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl."
SHAKSPEARE.

At length Laurette heard from Mrs. Forrester, who gave her a long and melancholy account of all that had happened. Sorrow had broken down the barriers which pride and reserve had raised, and the terms in which she spoke of Laurette, and expressed her fear that all hope of Hubert's early return to England was vain, opened the flood-gates of that grief which she had so long and so stoically repressed. She copied all of Mrs. Forrester's letters which could interest Caroline, merely saying, as regarded herself, that the dissipation and gayety attending Lady Anne's marriage rendered the quiet of Craigalan quite needful; and assuming that the Vernons were in correspondence with her aunt and cousin, she sent a very kind message to them both.

Ashley took the letter to Mrs. Templeton without delay, as he believed that Constance was spending the day with Miss Turner, which, however, proved a mistake. His manner was so unlike his usual self-possession, that Mrs. Templeton, who had lately watched both him and Constance with no little anxiety, and who saw in his looks to-day something that betokened a change of feeling or thought, expressed her fears that he was ill.

"No," he said, faintly smiling, "not ill, but ill at ease in mind—restless and unhappy;" and perceiving the concern her looks plainly expressed, he abruptly added! "I have resolved that this shall terminate one way or the other. Dear Mrs. Templeton, you must see, you must know, that Constance is—that I love her—have loved her for years—have never ceased to do so—that, hopeless as her engagement rendered it, still I could not free myself from her influence—that even now, while watching with agony, that can not be told, her distress for another, I think only of her—dream only of her. Heaven help me! her very sorrow makes me love her the more;" and overcome with emotion he turned away and shaded his face.

Mrs. Templeton sat pale, and, at first, speechless; she was not sure of the state of Constance's feeling; she could but guess.

How she longed to say "hope" to the noble, generous heart whose deep and enduring love had been shown to her; how she longed to say, "Take her—to thee I give her freely, fearlessly;" but if she had mistaken the nature of the sentiments of Constance, what additional sorrow might she not cause.

"Ashley," she at length said, very quietly, and the friendly tone fell soothingly on his quivering nerves, "why not tell all this to Constance herself? what makes you think your love so hopeless?"

"Because," he replied, with something like asperity, "she still loves another. She has mistaken herself, or why this distress, this anxiety about Italy?"

"You are in an error regarding all this. I am convinced that though a friendly concern, natural to a kind and affectionate nature, makes Constance sympathize with the Forresters, there is no other feeling; nay, I am convinced that from the very first there has been nothing beyond deep gratitude for attentions and services when suffering and sorrow were under our own roof; if I were not fully convinced of this, how do you suppose I could rejoice, as I truly do, at the dissolution of this engagement? Listen calmly to me," observing that his face flushed and his looks became more animated; "much, and by far the greater part, of the depression you have remarked, arises from the dread my darling felt that what she persists in calling her fickleness and indecision had sunk her in your estimation—that you must henceforth think of her as one infirm of purpose and incapable of understanding her own feelings; the great value she sets on your approbation makes her dread its loss."

"And Constance could fancy all this?" he exclaimed, impetuously. "Good heavens! how I

have been misunderstood. Constance, whom I all but worship—what have I said or done to cause this mistake? Oh! tell her so, dear Mrs. Templeton; let me no longer appear a harsh censor, when, I vow to you, I think all she does perfect—yes, perfect."

"You must tell her this yourself, my dear Ashley and receive it as a favorable omen that here she is, and that you have my best wishes for your success;" and before he could reply or protest, she went to meet Constance, who had been out with Gretchen, leaving him in the little boudoir.

"There is a letter waiting you from Caroline," said her mother, motioning to the sitting-room, while she went up-stairs to hope and pray that the long-cherished wish of her heart might be on the eve of accomplishment; for Ashley's love had been discovered by her even before Hubert proposed, and it was the superior estimation in which she held him that had made her feel keenly disappointed when young Forrester was accepted.

Hastily discarding bonnet and cloak, Constance went forward and opened the door. There stood Ashley: what made Constance feel faint and wish herself far away? Surely not the sight of that handsome face and form—surely not the expression of those splendid eyes? But quickly rallying, she said. "Mamma told me there was a letter from dear Caroline;" and eagerly taking it from him, as he silently handed it to her, she began the perusal.

How he noted the changes of her beautiful countenance as she read—how critically he observed that, though sad, she did not look wretched—and what a sigh of relief did he give when, folding up the letter, she remarked: "Poor Mrs. Forrester, my heart aches for her—and Hubert, too, to have his happiness thus overcast at its early dawn." This did not sound like the language of a blighted heart, nor did the sympathy of her manner betoken any exclusively personal feelings; and hope, which had first awoke when Mrs Templeton spoke, was now felt in every pulse.

Rather astonished at his silence she looked up, and the eloquent features she gazed at told the whole history: the treasured secret, the jealously guarded feelings of years, were there written as plainly as in a book. He took the trembling hand that offered him the letter, and gently retaining it, said, while his rich voice shook with emotion:

"Constance I have loved you for years; I still love you—must ever love you;" and growing bolder, as something in her attitude and face encouraged his fast increasing hope, he drew her toward him—"tell me," he continued, and there was almost a solemn earnestness in his whole manner, "tell me; but oh, tell me not that it is hopeless?"

For the second time in her life the sweet face was hid on his shoulder—but not now, as in the exclusiveness of her desolation, to be withdrawn pale and sorrow-stricken: oh no! not so—she was folded in a loving embrace to his tried and true heart, while a distinct but gentle "No," burst from her lips—and Time and his minutes passed unheeded by—

> "For who with clear account remarks
> The ebbing of his glass,
> When all its sands are diamond sparks,
> Which dazzle as they pass?"

Poor Mrs. Templeton, meanwhile, was agitated by the alternations of fear and hope, the latter gaining strength as her watch told that an hour had passed since Constance had entered; for she justly conjectured that a refusal need not occupy more than a few minutes.

At length she descended, and the first look at the perfectly radiant countenance of Ashley told the tale of successful and accepted love.

"Dear Mrs. Templeton, congratulate me," said he, leading Constance forward.

"And who is to condole with me?" she asked, trying to conceal her emotion.

"You shall never be allowed to need condolence," was his animated reply.

"I believe you—I know that you say well. For years I have hoped for this, even when hope seemed almost madness; I have long read your secret, my son, and sighed to know that you were not happy; ah! when shall we learn to wait and trust? This blessed day compensates for all."

"May I come again this evening?" he inquired, a bright smile lighting up his face as he looked at Constance, whose arm was affectionately thrown round her mother.

"If you feel inclined—only if," was her cheerful answer; "but now farewell."

CHAPTER LXXIV.

"——— Justice
Must lay her balance by, and use her sword."
MASSINGER.

"I AM sorry to disturb and trouble you, sir," said Mrs. Dawson to the Colonel, "but really my conscience will not allow me to keep silent any longer."

"And what has made your conscience so desirous of hearing you talk just now?"

"Why, sir, it is rather a long and unpleasant story; but, if you have time, I really should be very glad if you would listen."

"Very well," he replied, scarcely, however, removing his eyes from his papers; "begin; only remember that *I* am not your conscience, nor so determined to make you break silence; therefore be brief."

"I shall do my best, Colonel, as I always do; no one can accuse me of chatter and gossip"—and as he discreetly made no reply, she proceeded. "You remember Ruth, sir, the young lady's-maid"—he nodded—"well, sir, long before trouble came upon us so fast and heavy, there were suspicions of her honesty: I do not mean that she stole, but there was no doubt of her being leagued with the low-born enemies of this house, and that, through some bribe or another, she was induced to carry down to that den of—of iniquity—all the news she could collect here."

"And you are not far wrong," he remarked, recollecting that it was through her that traces of Helen's flight had been discovered. "Go on."

"Well, sir, before the last dreadful blow was struck—"

"Woman! are you mad?" he exclaimed, with blazing eyes and pale face. "How dare you?"—

but reading in Mrs. Dawson's astonished and alarmed manner her total ignorance of the literal meaning he attached to her words, he more quietly repeated—"go on! go on!"

"Yes, sir, only I am so fluttered-like. So, sir, just before the last blow fell she was dismissed; she then openly went to those people, and, to shorten my story, was turned out by the women there in disgrace and shame, and took refuge in some place provided for her by the kindness of Mrs. Sims. You remember Mrs. Sims, Colonel, the milliner?"—he assented. "Ruth's wretched, drunken old father would have killed her had she gone home. I myself, angry as I was, could not let the miserable girl perish, so, without consulting you, sir, I have, partly at my own cost, but chiefly at yours, helped her." Another nod. "Mr. Curtis has applied to Cooper, but he is as hard and brazen as possible, and the woman with him the same; they will do nothing for her or the child, but taunt and insult her without mercy. The whole village is astir; the Reverend Doctor has even interfered; and to say the truth, I expect mischief will happen if those people do not in some way right her, or leave the place. Cooper promised her marriage, and the poor fool believed him, and so sold herself to work their dirty work and help their base schemes; for I am bold to say, with the rest of our folk, it is mainly through them that these evil days have fallen on the Priory."

"And what do you, and the rest of our folk, expect me to do? I can not make him marry this wench."

"Dismiss him, sir, and get rid of the whole crew," she said, almost surprised at her own courage.

"Soon said, but not so soon done."

"Easy enough, sir, if you do but resolve on it; besides, if they care for themselves, they will really be glad of a hint to depart."

"In that case," he remarked, as if he mused over her alternative, "I will, perhaps, see about it. And so this girl was the tale-bearer?"

"Yes, sir; and through her tales that woman ventured up here, and by her insolence drove away that blessed angel;" and tears started to her eyes as she recalled the mournful indignation of Constance at this insult.

"Then she deserves all she meets with," was his fierce reply; "and you, I forbid your sending her a scrap; give it to the hounds rather. Let her starve and die!"

"No, sir," she replied, with spirit; "you must forgive me for being disobedient. Visit in the right quarter the mischief and misery, and I shall be glad; she is now paying the penalty of *her* sin, and why should they escape?"

"Perhaps you are right; but they shall not escape," he said, uttering a terrible oath and violently striking the table. "Send Robin with the horses"

And, followed by the groom, he rode toward the village, his brow more gloomy, and he himself evidently more irritable than usual, though he called at several places before he paused at Mr. Cooper's.

What then and there befell, Robin never heard, it being now cold enough for closed doors and windows; nor is it well to chronicle the wicked words of wicked doers—when threat roused threat—when fury opened the prison-house and brought to light crimes long ago suspected—when rage grew careless and gave word to deeds that had hitherto been carefully concealed—and when unhallowed wishes for evil were loudly and fiercely expressed.

But the result of this was the arrival of Mr. Sloper—the departure of Cooper and Augustus, and, after a while, of Mrs. Captain also, though the house was still kept ready for the latter, who occasionally re-appeared on the scene.

A respectable man now assumed the management of the property; planting was continued on an extensive scale, and such timely changes made as materially benefited the tenantry, so that the faithful old housekeeper began to think that it was not yet too late for sunny times again to shine on her cherished Seabrooke, and that the faces she loved might once more smile there.

Even her master came in for his full share of her benevolent wishes—

> "O wad ye tak a thought an' men',
> Ye aiblins might,"

was often the tenor, though not the words, of her meditations; and vigilantly did she watch for any indications that a change had come over his feelings toward her beloved lady and the two fair daughters, but alas! in vain; while with grief she perceived that the habit of indulging in wine became gradually stronger and stronger.

"There, dear mamma, you will not have to complain of your companionless state any longer," said Constance, as she collected numerous loose sheets of manuscript; "my task is over, I have just written the last word of my translation; and it only remains to be proved what was truth and what flattery in Ashley's criticism."

"How so?" inquired her mother.

"If the editor should black-ball my contribution, I shall certainly charge him with having lured me on with false pretenses. And now, as a reward for your kind help in copying my blotted pages, and your patiently-endured curiosity, I shall tell you what I mean to do with the proceeds—always provided," she added, laughing, "that I am not the girl who reckoned her chickens too soon—I mean to buy little Isabel one of those pretty dresses I saw when I went to town with Miss Newman; next—or first, perhaps—I mean to buy a capital, easy, self-adjusting spring chair for dear old Gretchen."

"And so it is this you have been toiling for?"

"Yes, but it has been really a labor of love. Oh! there is a pleasure even in poverty, when it leads to these little acts of self-denial."

"Dear Constance, you make me laugh, and yet you are very absurd; poverty, my child, what do you know of poverty? why, we are rich—we rank among the wealthy classes—our little economies do us good in every way. Oh! no," she added, gravely, "in real poverty there is no pleasure; there may be, there often is, contentment, and the reward which honest industry ever brings; but these spring not from poverty, but the successful struggle against it. When you were born, my treasure, I knew what poverty was; many a restless night, many an anxious day, many a heart-ache, did it inflict on me. When you first saw light, on the border of that lake after which

you are named, strangers ministered to my wants, and I with scarcely a faint hope of ever being able to repay them; so I left it to Him who has said, 'Cast thy bread on the waters.'"

Too much moved to speak, Constance sat looking with fond reverence on her mother, who continued: "It was the recollection of the ignorance and helplessness against which I had then to struggle, the results of my aristocratic education, that made me so anxious you and Helen should be taught many things not usually cared for by the wealthy. To Helen this has been of the greatest use. And you, my love, in marrying Ashley, do not marry a man of large property, though his profession and private resources will make him quite independent."

"But Ashley will not listen to me when I tell him he will have a portionless bride."

"I do not wonder at that," returned her mother, quietly; "you and Helen are wealth enough for any reasonable man—now do not laugh at your mother's partial folly. Do you expect Mrs. Stacey this evening?"

"Yes. Mr. Stacey promised to accompany her: he has composed a graceful little song which she has set to music, and dedicated to her friends. I also expect that he will bring some chapters of that second volume, at the very name of which Mr. Turner always makes a wry face."

"He is very hard on Mr. Stacey," remarked Mrs. Templeton: "and because, under the influence of an unusual enthusiasm, he once wrote more in a few months than most others could have done in treble the time, he expects him to keep up that pace. I sometimes think that, sensible and intelligent as he is, he makes no allowance for the peculiar temperament, which, I suppose, ever accompanies much imagination."

"I think, dear mamma, you rather mistake Mr. Turner, who is, on the contrary, always ready to make extraordinary concession to poetic influence, and to grant it great indulgencies. It is Mr. Stacey's infatuation for his present style of life which he censures as well as laments; he says that a fashionable, frivolous life of mere gayety destroys all that is majestic and sublime in thought and feeling; he thinks that its influence is destructive to his fine imagination, as well as injurious to his pecuniary prospects."

"Probably he is correct," said Mrs. Templeton; "and as we do not come under the head of frivolous or fashionable, I may conscientiously enjoy the pleasure of his society, especially as his excellent wife will be gratified by having her share of it also.

"I sometimes think," said Constance, "it must be rather a trial to Mrs. Stacey to visit so little in those circles where her husband is so much courted."

"It shows her rare good sense," replied her mother, "that her friends can only guess at her feelings. Nothing is more dangerous or undignified than for a woman to make her husband's conduct the subject of her complaint and conversation. I believe that people who introduce their sorrows or vexations at every visit, end by entirely blunting the sympathy of their best friends—while, by being dwelt upon, and by constant repetition, these trials acquire an imaginary prominence and intensity. If we can cure an evil by consulting another, by all means let us use the privilege; if not, let us silently bear it;" and this remark, coming as it did from one who enforced it by the example of her whole married life, was not lost on the hearer.

Spring had long set in, and though many circumstances kept Constance from sharing very largely in its gayeties, there were still so many opportunities for availing herself of exhibitions, concerts, and the society of two or three valued friends, that to her, whose life had been so quiet, it seemed now very much like dissipation.

Mrs. Vernon and Caroline, whose delight had been unbounded when Ashley carried, in person, the news of his unexpected happiness, spent some weeks at Mr. Morton's, where Victor's arrival in June completed their joyful party. Of course Mrs. Templeton could rarely accompany her daughter—she knew not that, to the great surprise of all around him, her husband had suddenly, soon after her departure, ceased all further pursuit or even inquiry, so that the dread of him and his emissaries still perpetually haunted her; but the peaceful life she now enjoyed, the happy prospects which seemed opening to her children, and the seeing society so much in accordance with her tastes and wishes, made her feel that a happy calm had suddenly succeeded the many years of storm and gloom which had followed her marriage.

The more she saw of Ashley, who, no longer burdened with feelings it was so difficult and painful to conceal, was the life and soul of these happy parties, the more was she certain that with him the happiness of Constance was secure. His enlarged views on all subjects, his extensive and rare information, his dispassionate judgment and refined taste, all rendered him a fit guide to one whose quick perception of the beautiful and fastidious rejection of all that was not perfect, required the help of his philosophical analysis—one who needed his comprehensive views to teach her to see order and harmony where her impatient glance had failed to discover them.

And spring went, and summer brought its wealth of sweet scents and beautiful flowers; and in its turn gave place to autumn's rich and glorious sun-sets and magnificent tints, when once more Reginald earnestly pressed Ashley to visit them at St. Petersburg.

"Go," said Constance; "last year we hindered you—and this, I hope, will be your final opportunity, for Helen confidently talks of a return next spring."

"Besides, I want your impartial opinion of my little Russian granddaughter," urged Mrs. Templeton, "which, according to Helen's description, is the most extraordinary child ever born."

"And she only three days old when that discovery was made," remarked Constance; "poor little thing! I hope he will not find her crushed beneath the load of names which her courtier-like parents and ducal sponsors think it necessary to give her."

"As you both evidently want to get rid of me," said Ashley, "I really think I shall take this opportunity of seeing a city not quite so accessible as Paris, and have the benefit, also, of seeing it under such favorable auspices. But I must tell you of a circumstance which occurred

last night at Basingstoke House, where I dined with several agreeable and distinguished guests—among others, Lord and Lady Hurstwood, and our friend Stacey. But my anecdote is for you, Constance, not for mamma, whose mantle is so large, she throws it over the follies and weaknesses of every one.

"Mamma's ears will be shut as long as you desire—and as to the width of her mantle, beware lest it be too scanty to cover the keen satire of Ashley Vernon," was Mrs. Templeton's cheerful reply.

"Now, Ashley, begin—I am all ready and attentive," said Constance.

"I was seated," said he, "nearly opposite to Stacey, who had on one side of him Lady Hurstwood, and the conversation had turned on several parties which had been lately given in the noble and fashionable world, when some one happened to remark, that he had recently dined at the Marquis of D.'s, and there had had the pleasure of meeting Professor Soames and Dr. Weaver, both men of note in the scientific world, but who have attained that eminence solely by their own talent and exertion. Upon which, Stacey, with the most insufferable *petit maître* air of affectation imaginable, drawled out, 'Good God! what will the world come to next?' and as this exquisite and becoming ebullition of disdain was apparently addressed to Lady Hurstwood, fancy her, with her undemonstrative manner and irresistible smile, replying, quite unconscious of saying any thing sarcastic, 'Perhaps you may be invited to meet them!' I caught Stacey's eye, and assure you I found it difficult to keep my countenance as I did so."

"Excellent," said Constance; "I can imagine Cecilia saying this, and without the least idea of having said any thing severe. Mamma, are you listening, or are you still pretending deafness?"

"I not only hear, but I see the whole, nor could any one make Cecilia comprehend that she had made any thing but a polite remark. Her good sense, high notions of propriety, and affectionate nature make me love and respect her greatly, but as a child, and to this moment she never could readily understand any thing that was not literal; and the way in which Laurette used to perplex her, by her witty allusions and satirical remarks, often made me smile."

"But this is not all," resumed Ashley; "imagine her coming to Stacey and me and telling us that these very gentlemen were to be at the Dowager Duchess of Isleford's *soirée* next week, and offering to have tickets sent to us. Of course I accepted with delight, and so, in fact, did Stacey, though I reminded him that the consequence would probably be an introduction to these scientific celebrities.

"'It is on that very account I am desirous you should be there,' was her ladyship's *naïve* reply. 'I thought Mr. Stacey would be pleased to be acquainted with two literary gentlemen whom the Duchess so greatly respects.' Stacey was as ready to laugh at his folly as I; he is too amiable ever to be ill-tempered or disagreeable; but all this only convinces me that he must take his own course. I wished him to accompany me to St. Petersburg, but he told me of so many Lady Roberts and Lord Johns who would die of *ennui* during the autumnal months, spent in the country, without his aid, that I could not run the risk of having such a hecatomb of illustrious victims lying on my conscience.

"We shall yet see Mr. Stacey take that place among men of genius to which his superior talents entitle him," said Mrs. Templeton. "At present he is not aware of his responsibility to himself or society. He perpetually reminds me of a child playing with diamonds, unconscious of their value and regardless of their injury or loss; but there is a strain of honorable feeling through all his levity, and a generosity with all his selfishness, which make me hope that the day will come when those who have borne with his folly and imprudence will be fully repaid."

"Dear Mrs. Templeton, your candor and charity make me ashamed of my severity.

"Not so, Ashley, I also censure—but it is the thoughtless, shallow society who lure him on; let him but once be convinced of their heartlessness, let him find that the promises of a snug little place, to quote his own words, are of no worth, and we shall see him lean on his own resources, and then only become aware of their strength and value."

But Ashley did not tell all the reasons he had for wishing to draw Stacey out of this destructive vortex, which was turning his head and hastening him to ruin: he was desirous to keep him from running deeply in debt, and again involving Mrs. Stacey in the difficulties which beset them a few years ago.

"Another dispatch from St. Petersburg?" observed Mrs. Templeton, as Constance eagerly opened her letter; "Ashley now relieves both Helen and Reginald of all labor in the home department of correspondence.

"Oh! mamma," said she, scarcely lifting her eyes from the well-covered paper, while a smile and a blush spread over her animated face, "it is really very kind of Ashley to send us such frequent and long accounts, and I must not have you ungrateful to him."

"And if I could be so wicked," replied her mother, "you seem always quite ready to supply my deficiencies, though why I am, by my gratitude, to pay your debts for what is exclusively your own, I do not clearly comprehend."

"Because incurring the debt makes *me* so happy."

"I am answered, dear child; but when you *do* come to any information that particularly concerns me, let me know, that is all; perhaps by the time I have written to Lady Grantham, you may have reached that insignificant portion of your pamphlet."

"Now, mamma, you are malicious this morning; so, to punish you, I shall carry my letter and myself away."

"I suppose that is called turning the tables," said she, laughing; "give me a kiss for furnishing you with the excuse for picking a quarrel, and run away."

And so she did, with her precious letter. No comparisons *now* between herself and Helen—no reference now to Reginald as the complete letter-writer—he was entirely eclipsed, and Ashley in the ascendant. "How could it be otherwise?" she asked herself—"who could write such delight-

ful letters as he?—so affectionate, so intellectual—so graceful—so"—but words are wanting. Happy, happy Constance.

CHAPTER LXXV.

"——— Oh! thus she stood—
Even with such life of majesty (warm life,
As now it coldly stands) when first I wooed her.
I am astonished—" *Winter's Tale.*

WINTER had set in, with its gloom and cheerfulness—its cold and fires. Melancholy winds howled and moaned around and about, but were scarcely heard amid the sound of merry voices and gleesome laughter which arose from many a bright fireside. But Christmas, with its social parties and family gatherings, had passed away, and children who were overcome by the effects of turkey and twelfth cake, now began to count the days that were left of their holidays; while the seniors, having recruited from the fatigue of dinner giving and dancing, began to count the cost thereof, and some of them to think they had paid too dear for their whistle when Gunner and Howell sent in their bills.

At the Priory all this was unknown; there were no holidays—an all-spare life never has them—no family gatherings, for evil passions had driven all away, and solemn silence, gloom, and unhappiness reign in the vast and splendid rooms of Scarbrooke Priory.

Mrs. Dawson confidentially assured Mrs. Sims that she really did not think she could stand this state of things another Christmas. That was the second when, according to her estimate, had been all thrown away—lost like; and nothing could be more dismal than the life her master led; she declared he seemed melancholy mad, fell off in his food, and attended to nothing but the improvement of the property; though that, she said, was all quite right.

"It is my opinion," remarked Mrs. Sims, "that it is all along of these Coopers; why, she was down here only a few weeks ago, and what for, I should like to know? No good, I am sure."

"No, indeed," replied Mrs. Dawson. "And think of the assurance of madam—she came up to the Priory, and I saw, by the Colonel's manner, that he was all in a secret rage like; she wanted, forsooth, to see the house!—but before I would have unlocked the doors for that purpose, I would have thrown the keys down the well and left the place forever, though that would be heart-breaking for me. But, for once, my master was clear right: he said, 'No! she must wait;' and, all in my hearing, went on to say, but very quietly, 'I advise you to be patient.'"

"Why, goodness me, Mrs. Dawson!" exclaimed her friend, "sure there is no meaning in those words?" and she looked so expressively at her, that the old lady felt sick and faint, as a vague terror possessed her with a glimpse of the truth.

"Oh, no!" she said, in a voice that shook with indignation and alarm; "he never could be so base as all that. If I thought it—but it is impossible!"—and she fell into a fit of musing that was not dispelled when Mrs. Sims, heaving a deep sigh, or rather groan, remarked, "Well, well, those who live the longest will see.

Dawson's account fell far short of the reality. Colonel Templeton had said, "Evil, be thou my good!" and he must abide by his choice. Providence ever vindicates its ways, though man are often too blind to see it.

"Have you any idea whether Mr. Morton is at the Hermitage?" he inquired one day of the housekeeper.

"I rather think he is, sir. Robin saw his black servant yesterday, and he said his master was expected. I suppose, sir, you know that young Mr. Morton is to marry Miss Vernon this spring? It has been a long engagement."

"I heard of it some time ago. Will they live here?"

"At Bridge-end, I am told, sir; Mr. Morton is having the place laid out in grand order."

"Ont he is the purchaser of Bridge-end?" observed the Colonel.

"Yes, sir, and I am told that the young ladies are coming to the Rectory in the course of a few weeks. You never saw them, I think, sir?"

"No; it was altogether a stupid matter, managed by that scoundrel Cooper, for the purpose, I believe, of making a quarrel. However, I must break the ice now myself, as I want to turn the road by the Hermitage, and change a piece of ground, which, I find, I can not do without the consent of the occupant—always some confounded impediment in my way!" he muttered.

And in furtherance of his object he set out to make his first visit at the Hermitage since Mr. Morton had been the tenant.

On arriving he was ushered into a small room, comfortably arranged as a library, where he was left to remark at leisure the many singular and foreign-looking objects which formed part of the furniture, all evidently choice and rare. Engaged in the survey, which interested him, and made him unconscious of the flight of time, he walked from one object to another till he approached a door, which, he remembered, led to the largest room the Hermitage contained. This stood already more than half open; and though really too well bred to have intruded, under ordinary circumstances, he may be pardoned for now pushing it wide open, as the partial glance showed the furniture of this room to be costly and curious in the extreme. The whole arrangement was so un-English, at so vaguely and faintly reminded him of a shadowy something connected with years long, long gone by, that he so far forgot himself as to enter.

Directly opposite the wide bay window, an improvement of Mr. Morton's, hung a large, quaintly-carved frame, evidently encircling a painting; but though the general effect of the furniture was gay, as well as rich, and the chintzes and hangings of a cheerful hue, this was covered with a black velvet curtain, heavy with deep bullion fringe.

Urged on by an irresistible impulse, with a face from which every vestige of color had fled, with a step that desperation had rendered firm, but with a trembling hand, he drew aside the thick, black folds.

A cry, as from one in the extremity of terror

and agony, burst from his lips; the velvet dropped from his nerveless grasp, and, like one who collects all his strength for some great effort, he staggered into the adjoining room, and fell heavily on the carpet.

What ghastly object had met his view?—what hideous and appalling semblance had, as it were, blasted his sight? Could that lovely, smiling face strike terror? Could those loving eyes dart dagger-looks? Could those young lips, "parted with virgin breath," utter words so fearful that the listener would stop his ears and pray for deafness? Ah! no; but

> "Conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in a several tale,
> And every tale condemns me for a villain!"

When Colonel Templeton recovered, he was in the small library; and glancing fearfully around, as he struggled to recall his recollection of what had passed, he was relieved to see that the door of the room which contained an object so full of terror to him was shut, and the African servant of Mr. Morton engaged in bathing his hands and temples.

"Ah! he do now—he look round," remarked the sable nurse to another person, the woman who had admitted him, and who, thinking that her master was still at home, had gone in search of him, and thus given time for the Colonel's survey.

"I am quite well now," he said, having listened to this explanation, without understanding a word that was uttered. "A sudden dizziness to which I am subject—that is all—I will see Mr. Morton another time."

"Strange—unaccountable—what brought it there?" he half audibly muttered as he walked home. "Yet it is not the original painting—can I be mistaken? I can not—I can not—the same singular sort of frame—the ring, the fan. Great God! what does it all mean? alive, yet dead—in England—fool, coward that I was not to know more!" and he paused, as if to retrace his steps, but the shiver that shook him from head to foot forbade the effort, and as he walked on, the clear, sharp air revived both body and mind.

"After all," and he tried to call up a scornful smile at his own weakness, but the attempt was ineffectual—after all, it may be but a copy prized for its exquisite loveliness—as well it may be," he added with a groan; "it must, it shall be so—and those sketches in the portfolio are copies of a copy;" and endeavoring to reassure himself by this supposition, his first act, when he reached the Priory, was again to examine the portfolios, with the contents of which he had become well acquainted.

Yes, there it was, that most lovely face!

All day the remembrance of what he had seen rose vividly before him; at night, the portrait haunted his dreams; yet not this, but one full-length, which he seemed so plainly to recognize, that the very room in which he had first beheld it was, as it were, around him—and there, in one particular spot, is the portrait. No, not so, it is alive, it moves—it looks at him, and he feels himself shudder before the steadfast gaze of those large mournful eyes—again it changes—it fades—it is gone—and the frame contains a blank, over which slowly falls a heavy black pall, and he awakes. Heaven be praised! it is but a dream!

It is one, however, from which he is not yet freed; in the broad daylight, it is there—it walks by his side, it sits at his table—it mingles with his every thought—it interferes with all his occupations—it never leaves him.

Worn out, excited, and feverish, driven half mad with the perpetual presence of this specter of his conscience, which had haunted him during the whole day, he hoped to find relief in sleep, and drained glass after glass to insure its soothing influence.

At length he ascended the stairs to gain his room; but as he raised his eyes—there, at the top—in the corridor, stands this smiling terror; it seems to pause at the door of his daughter's sitting-room, which he had never entered since Constance left him; and here he loses sight of his shadowy persecutor. Rendered desperate, he bursts open the door, but recoils with a loud cry, for there, in the space which he well remembered—ah! had he not cause—there, where the portrait of his ill-used wife stood—now in her place, was this mysterious visitant; once more a loud cry resounds through the desolate house, and is heard by the alarmed Mrs. Dawson and his own servant.

They hastened toward him, and found him like one entranced, gazing with looks of horror on the blank pier from which Constance had removed her mother's portrait, having, however, left the frame.

Mrs. Dawson was the first to rally; she took the candlestick from his trembling and unresisting hand, and beckoning to his servant to follow, led the way to his room; then desiring to be fetched when he was in bed, she gave him a composing draught, and quietly took her station by the fire. Contrary to his usual custom, he was passive under this treatment, and very soon fell into a refreshing sleep, which lasted till late the next day. when he arose calm but languid, and pleading fatigue declined an interview even with his agent; and, under one pretext or another, kept Mrs. Dawson with him the greater part of the day.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

> "*Jaffier.* Now, thank Heaven!—
> *Pierre.* Thank Heaven! for what?
> *Jaffier.* That I'm not worth a groat."
> *Venice Preserved.*

"This is very painful news, Constance," said Mrs. Templeton, handing her a note

"Very sad, indeed; what can be done?"

"Go at once, my dear, and see if Mr. Stopsel be still at home Hark! I hear his voice; run and ask him to step here."

"We have had very bad news from our friend Mrs. Stacey," she said as he entered; "a seizure for debt, and we can not tell what we had better do. You would greatly oblige us if you could call there before you go to business."

"Of course, madam, I will."

"Thank you;" and having hastily dismissed him with the message, she and Constance looked at each other for a few minutes in silent dismay.

"Can you ascertain from the note where Mr. Stacey is?"

"Indeed, mamma, it is so incoherent, I can not, but I expect he is at home, and that it is her alarm on his account which has so excited her."

"The best thing," said Mrs. Templeton, "will be for me to go with Gretchen, and see how matters really are. So far as I can help them, it shall be done at once; but I fear the little I can immediately offer will be of no use; let us hold a consultation of ways and means with Gretchen. There is no doubt but that we can give comfortable shelter to Mrs. Stacey and her little girl."

"Oh! easily, dear mamma; there is Helen's cot will do beautifully for Isabel, and a small bed can be contrived in the same room for her mother; but you may leave that to me, while you go and see what funds you have."

But, alas! the funds were low, for this was toward the middle of February; and Mrs. Templeton, for the first time since she left the Priory, felt that she was poor.

When she reached the Staceys, she found all there distress and confusion; poor Mrs. Stacey looked the very picture of woe, nor did he look much better; while to all the sorrow that his wife felt, was added, in his case, the consciousness that his imprudence, folly, and vanity had led to this catastrophe.

Mrs. Templeton had soon ascertained that her aid would scarcely lessen the difficulty; for if the rent were paid, other claimants would become importunate, and press forward with bills to a very ruinous amount.

The landlord, who was by no means one of those dramatic, stony-hearted monsters who sell the bed and turn the wife bonnetless and shoeless out of doors, listened respectfully to Mrs. Templeton's proposals that he should take that part of his debt which her means enabled her to discharge at once, and wait till an arrangement could be effected by which all could be cleared off.

"I am really very sorry, ma'am, to seem harsh, but I and my family depend chiefly on my rents. Upward of half-a-year is due. Mr. Stacey will own that I have always been patient."

"I do," said Stacey, thus appealed to. "My dear Mrs. Templeton, let the law take its course—it is but just; and were I the only one punished, I should say no matter how severe the penalty. But it really does cut me to the heart to see my wife and child homeless through my folly."

"That they shall not be for one moment," interrupted she; "all is ready for them at our cottage: my daughter expects them, and Isabel will at once return with Gretchen. I shall remain, and see how I can serve Mrs. Stacey."

Quite overcome, he buried his face in his hands and sobbed, while his wife, attempting to comfort him, wept aloud. Mrs. Templeton and the landlord left them together.

"Unfortunately," she said, "this gentleman's best friend is out of town, and probably will be away for two or three days. Unless others come forward, what will be the consequence?"

"Why, if others press for their money—and I do hear it is to the tune of some hundreds—my advice would be, go at once to prison." Mrs. Templeton started. "Why, 'you see, madam, it will be much better than to incur the expense of a lock-up house."

Disheartened at this prospect she returned, and found Mrs. Stacey, woman-like, still engaged in the task of consolation.

"I have decided on taking the only course now left me," said Stacey; "I give myself and all up."

"But not before you have applied to your friends. Ashley will be in town in a few days."

"And were he now here, not with my consent should he be involved; there is no one to whom, with the least propriety or self-respect, I could send. Lister has already advanced me upward of two hundred pounds; Mr. Moore has been so annoyed and vexed at my procrastination, that to him I could not turn, if I would; no, this time I must take what I have earned. My poor Susan, do not look so sad. I know nothing is less to be depended on than a promise made in my circumstances, but I feel very strongly that, only let me work myself out of this, and it shall be my last scrape. I have seen at last, I hope," he added, with bitterness, "that I was not courted for my sense—but for my folly; not for my worth—but my worthlessness; the draught is unpalatable, but if I swallow it bravely, it will prove wholesome."

And the next day, bidding his wife cheer up and hope for a perfect cure, this imprudent man of genius folded his gay pinions for a while—for of what use would they be in a prison?

This time Stacey learned what the inside of a prison really was.

Ashley, who was unexpectedly detained at Cambridge, wrote to Mr. Turner, requesting him to act for him, and free Stacey; but he received such a letter in reply, as convinced him that that rigid respecter of cause and effect would not interfere with the natural course of what he called a beautiful arrangement; and though at first vexed, and inclined to be angry at the Cato-like severity of the old lawyer, on re-perusing his letter, Ashley felt that Mr. Turner was right; indeed, it was useless to think otherwise, for till he could personally interfere, he knew that he must perforce remain passive.

Directly he returned he went to the Heath, and from Mrs. Templeton learned all particulars. Stacey had given a list of his debts, and, without including Mr. Lister's, they amounted to nearly six hundred pounds.

"Mr. Turner," said she, "who has in a very friendly manner called here about the affair, has convinced me that his seeming harshness is but kindness in disguise. Mr. Moore agrees with him—though I really believe that if a thousand pounds would at once and permanently bring Mr. Stacey to his senses, it would be cheerfully given. The latter, at first, would not hear of the sale of his effects, but his sturdier friend says, let the law take its course."

"Just like him," said Ashley; "*le roy le veult*; and yet I know that he is thinking how he can be kind as well as wise at the same time; but still I shall try and break a lance with him."

And Ashley did, but—was beaten.

"Now listen to good sense," said Mr. Turner; "this is the second time since his marriage that he has been in a similar difficulty; now let him suffer—this is his own view of the matter. It is

from no morbid spirit of martyrdom—from nothing ungrateful or ungracious, but at present he decidedly declines the help of his friends. I have seen him, and for the first time he has impressed me with a favorable opinion of his sense. I find, also, that he has no contemptible store of what he calls fragments—these he is now busily arranging. Let him find how far he can help himself, it will strengthen self-respect and self-reliance."

"I own that you are quite right; but I own, also, that I shrink from the idea of this bright singing-bird shut up in so dark a cage."

"Tush! nonsense! he will sing all the better and the stronger when he comes out; besides, he will have grown wiser, and will not suffer himself to be caught so again."

Ashley laughed, and then went to visit Stacey; and had he felt any sentimental grief on his account, the appearance and conversation of the prisoner would have cured him.

Not because Stacey was gay, or callous to his degradation. On the contrary, he lamented his condition, but in an honest, manly tone, reserving all his sympathy for his wife, of whom he spoke with the most respectful affection, and referred, almost with tears of gratitude, to the kindness of his real and sterling friends. He also talked of the collection he was making of his patch-work pieces, hoping by their sale to realize a sum that, by lessening his liabilities, would encourage him to persevere and resume the great work—the completion of the memoirs. He frankly avowed his dislike to his present situation, but declined all attempt to free him by any help but his own. And Ashley left him, with a strong conviction rising in his mind, that this was the crisis in Stacey's moral and mental health, and an almost equally strong hope that he would come out of it fully cured.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to scour us."
Lear.

Two days were passed by Colonel Templeton in a state of inactivity and depression, quite contrary to his general habits. During that time Mrs. Dawson was frequently with him; she brought her knitting at his desire, and, after she had prepared his evening coffee, remained for, perhaps, an hour, encouraged by him to chatter on the theme most pleasant to her—former days at the Priory, when all was so happy, and when the master was so good. Sometimes he appeared really to listen to her, at others he was evidently lost in his own thoughts; and when she was not with him, she conjectured, from various remarks made by his new agent, that he was occupied in looking over and arranging his papers.

On the third morning, after breakfast, during which he scarcely took more than a cup of coffee, Mrs. Dawson remarked, "I fear, sir, you are not very well—perhaps a little advice from Mr. Curtis—"

But he stopped her, saying, "He must advise an opiate, then, for I have not closed my eyes the whole night;" nor was it likely that sleep could have visited him when his mind was agitated by the many harassing recollections in which he had voluntarily indulged; for a sudden thought had the previous evening struck him—he had followed it up, till it led to a determination of great importance.

He felt sure that, by some means, Constance could give him a clue by which a strange interference, of many years' duration, could be traced to its source—by which, perhaps, he could free himself from the trammels that had hampered almost all his movements and plans. He would, therefore, write to Lord Grantham—put himself in his hands—so that he might again have Constance with him, if not perpetually—that perhaps was expecting too much—but as an occasional guest, as a companion, as a comforter. This purpose it was that had driven away both sleep and rest; and as a good preparation, he said, the next time Dawson entered, "I should like that painting which hangs over the piano in the west suite, removed to my bedroom;" but but he did not lift his eyes from a book which he held—"have it done at once, if you please."

"Certainly, sir," she replied, while her mental remark was, "now, goodness be praised for that—who knows what it may lead to? and if these two beautiful faces are not ready to look at him, the next time he goes into his room—my name is not Elizabeth Dawson."

And in pursuance of this prompt obedience, the frame containing the portraits of his daughters was removed; but as he had not said where it was to be hung, she had it carefully placed on a portfolio-stand looking toward the head of the bed.

While this was being done, he had ordered his horse, resolved to go at once to the Hermitage, and try to learn how it was that a painting, which had so fearfully excited him, had come into the possession of Mr. Morton. Though some days had passed since that memorable evening, when the scorpion stings of conscience and remorse had driven him almost mad—and though there had been no return of that frightful paroxysm—there had been but little peace of mind for him. He would now seek every means of solving the mystery which, not now for the first time, had tormented him, but which, for ten or twelve years, had met and oppos'd him at every turn. Let the consequences be what they might, he would brave and endure them—nothing could be so insupportable as this haunting secret.

If Mr. Morton should prove unable to inform him of any thing, he might, from his extensive acquaintance and knowledge, be able to help his research. But whether at home or not—once more he would see that portrait—would look at it quietly, if that were possible, and note all the points of resemblance, so as to feel sure that it was actually a copy of one which he well remembered.

"It is very cold, sir," said Mrs. Dawson, who must have some thing to watch over and take care of; "and you have not your great-coat on."

"Ah! I forgot it—you are right, it is very cold," he replied; and she noticed that he shivered and looked deadly pale as she helped him to

put it on, while, spite of the difference which expression always gives, there was a something in the eyes and style of the face that painfully reminded her of Constance.

"Mr. Morton is not at home, sir; we expect him this evening," said the servant.

"In that case I will alight and leave a note;" and, preceded by the woman, he once more entered the small book-room—when she began officiously to arrange writing materials.

"It is rather dark here," he observed; and she, eager to pay him respect, opened the door of the next room—*that room*—and wheeled a writing-table in o the wide bay

"Thank you, I will leave the note here;" and he proceeded to write, and actually continued to do so after she had left. The note was very concise; he folded it carefully—lighted a taper, and firmly pressed his signet-ring on the wax.

"And now," he said, while his heart beat loudly and painfully. He had never once turned his eyes toward the place—but he knew that it was there! He s epped forward, and was conscious that a change passed over his face, as slowly, but with a firm hand, he removed the velvet folds.

Yes—glorious in its almost girlish beauty there it was—and the antique ring on the taper finger—and the fan, look! it is the same. Ah! and that smile, not about the mouth only, but over the whole of the faultless face. He wrung his hands in agony; he pressed them over his eyes, to shut out the remembrance of the injured original—still the sweet smile was there—he shed scalding tears, and it smiled on. "My God! my God!" he cried, "she is dead, and my cruelty killed her!—wretch! monster that I am—but thou—thou art bitterly avenged!" and again he gazed at it, till his eyes saw nothing for the tears that blinded them—and, reverently closing the curtain, he bowed his head, and left the room!

The servant appeared to receive his message; but the Colonel was so deeply plunged in thought that she did not like to speak; and slowly, and with difficulty, mounting his horse, he rode away.

His mood was so strange, that Robin, more than once, rode by his side, without being reprimanded; and thus they proceeded till they reached a gen le slope, which terminated very near to the Priory t rrace. At this point, Robin saw his master press his hands together, and then wildly toss them above his head, while a cry broke from him The bridle fell and touched the horse, which started and stumbled, for the ground was slippery from a February frost, and the Colonel, without the least attempt to save himself, fell heavily on the hard ground.

"Help! help!" shouted the groom, at the pitch of his voice; happily he was heard by two men working in the grounds. "Mr. Curtis! Mr. Curtis! fetch him at once, mount my horse!" was the sens ble order of Robin, to one of them. His master lay motionless "Quick! fetch a sofa, a mattress any thing we can lay him on;" he stooped to move him, a groan gave a sign of life, part of his dress was loosened, and by the time they had gently and carefully raised him, Mr. Curtis came.

"Send to the Rectory, and one of you start off for Dr. G. I must have help here,' were the first directions of Mr. Curtis. Further examination proved that his skillful eye had not exaggerated the case, and when Dr. G. arrived, he looked as grave and anxious as his coadjutor.

In reply to Dr. Vernon he answered: "It is impossible to say at once what is the extent of injury—or the imminence of the danger. As Colonel Templeton is unable to give directions, you had better do all that is requisite—and be prepared for any emergency."

And as Dr. Vernon thought the most requisite step was to summon Mrs. Templeton and Constance, he immediately requested his wife to undertake the painful task of bringing them, while he remained to watch over the sufferer.

A fractured limb was at once discovered; but it was feared that other and more dangerous injuries had been received, which they could not yet ascertain; for he never spoke, but deep groans broke forth when any attempt was made to move him. Before the next morning, however, internal hurt was discovered: and the joint opinion was, that the worst result was to be apprehended. As consciousness returned, so did sensibility, so did suffering, for every breath seemed to be drawn with agony.

Mrs Vernon, who, during her rapid journey, had had time to think of all that had better be done, decided upon trying to secure the attendance of one of the first surgeons of the day. This she was happily enabled to do; so that, before she saw Mrs. Templeton, she had the satisfaction of knowing that he and his assistant were already on their way to the Priory.

The distress of Constance, on learning the dreadful cause of Mrs. Vernon's visit, was at first overwhelming; how often had she and her mother talked over the past, and sometimes ventured to speculate on the time, when some of its bitter effects having passed away, the spirit of repentance might alight on one heart, and again permit of forgiveness and peace; and when, once more, they might see their loved—their beautiful home. How were they now summoned? Not by the holy spirit of peace and love, but because the angel of death was hovering over it, and because pain racked the body, and evil passions the mind, of its owner.

Mrs. Templeton, though pale while listening to the recital of this fearful accident, was calm and collected—capable of making all the necessary arrangements for their immediate departure. How could it be expected that she should feel miserable, and incapable of listening to reason? For years her heart had been crushed—trampled on—till nothing remained for the cherished idol of her youth but the sentiments of humanity which would have been roused for almost any sufferer; and not for a moment did she hesitate about obeying Dr. Vernon's desire for her presence.

Painful as it was to her, under circumstances so shocking, to make even a mental allusion to past scenes, she felt that she must trust her cause to Constance, unless repulsed: and this she hardly expected; her place was by her father's bedside, and she wept to think that a prohibition she did not expect was almost certain to await her mother.

When they arrived they were met by Dawson, who received them with the first cheerful look which

had shone on her kind face since the Colonel was brought in. The medical men, after an examination, were in consultation; after which the London surgeon saw Dr. Vernon, and candidly admitted that, unless most unexpected success attended the measures agreed on, there was no hope. All had been skillfully done, but the injuries were of a nature that seemed far beyond the reach of remedy; a few days, even less, might decide the case. The patient was now dozing, and must not be disturbed.

"Oh, Dawson! has papa asked for me?" inquired the weeping Constance.

"Till within the last few hours, my poor master has been conscious of nothing but the dreadful pain," was the reply, for she could not bear to say that he had not.

"Do the doctors give hope?" asked Mrs. Templeton.

"I fear not," she answered; and then proceeded to tell, as well as she could, how the accident happened.

And in the room of suffering, what was there going on? Had sleep shed its balmy influence there? Alas, no! The eyes were closed and all was still and motionless: but who may tell the pangs which memory and remorse were inflicting? memory, that in rapid succession brought back the scenes of his past life!—remorse, that reminded him of his evil deeds! How they rise and disappear, these phantoms of his brain!

Where is she, the fond, trusting girl who had loved him, and died because she had? In the grave, to which, in her young beauty, his treachery had consigned her! And his gentle wife, and her two innocent girls? Gone, gone!—and he thought of the last, whom his harshness had driven forth—should he no more see that graceful figure by his side?—never again feel her innocent kiss on his burning brow? But, as he tried to turn and shake off the waking nightmare which had tortured him, his feverish hand was gently pressed by the cool, soft touch he so well remembered.

"Dear papa," said a gentle voice; and the eyes he had so often dreamed of were bent affectionately on him, as he looked up with astonishment.

A faint smile, a feeble return of her caressing pressure, and Constance knew that she was welcome.

"Now God be praised for this mercy!" was her silent ejaculation; and tenderly removing the hair from his hot, throbbing forehead, once more he felt her kiss of love; and as he looked at her, she seemed an angel sent to chase away the busy demons who had lately allowed him neither rest nor peace; for, again trying to press her hand, he fell asleep—a sleep which lasted nearly two hours, and which was calm and refreshing.

And she sat by his side, for the first time realizing all that had happened, and waiting with trembling eagerness for the slight signal which should justify her in sending for her mother, without the terrible danger of her presence being forbidden.

And still Constance remained in deep and solemn thought, scarcely moving, except to raise a warning hand when any one approached the door, till her father awoke refreshed, but very weak. "Curtis," was all he could say, and to him she resigned her place, only again to resume it when the surgeon had helped to change the patient's position. "The Colonel will be easier now," he said; but she remarked that his countenance was very grave. And thus in silence and suffering passed another hour, when again Mr. Curtis appeared, to give him the refreshment of change of position and some restorative; he then administered an opiate, and sent Constance to take the rest she so greatly needed.

"Oh, mamma!" she said, bursting into an hysterical fit of weeping, for she was worn out with anxiety and fatigue; "is there no hope?"

"Constance," said Doctor Vernon, for Mrs. Templeton could not speak; "I fear there is none—but will he see me, will he see us?"

"Not yet," she replied, observing that her mother looked eagerly up; "but he seems much pleased to find me here."

"Now try and take something," said Mrs. Vernon, "and then lie down;" which she did, and slept—till her mother roused her, saying her father had asked for her.

"Life is fast ebbing, but pain is ceasing," said Mr. Curtis to the Doctor; "God grant that he may yet wish to see you and Mrs. Templeton. He rambles, and asks for persons whom I never heard of."

When Constance again entered the room, her father put out his hand. "Dr. Vernon is here, dear papa," she said; "would you like to see him?"

"No, you—only you," taking her hand as if to secure her.

"The portfolio!" he said; and seeing the puzzled expression of her face, he added, "Dawson."

She was summoned—"The portfolio"—and the exertion made him faint.

"What does papa mean?" she asked.

"Oh! it is your portfolio, Miss Templeton, with all those portraits—here it is;" and as he revived, his looks lighted up for a moment, when they laid it on the bed. He glanced at Constance, but seemed too feeble to say more, and hoping it was her mother's likeness he wanted, she sought for it—and came to the one surrounded by so many cherub faces. He laid his finger on the one that seemed now to mingle with every thought, and a faint "more!" was heard. At last her spirited outline of the full-sized head appeared—he put out his hand to take it.

Constance gave it him; he looked at her with an expression that brought tears into her eyes, and made Dawson sob aloud; but he could not articulate; she tried to read what that extraordinary expression meant—but still keeping the paper, he looked from one to the other—so anxious, so eager, so piteous was the look, that Constance felt faint; at last he riveted his eyes on the paper, and fresh feelings seemed to arise in his heart; for the gaze, though intent, was soft, tender, loving, and a calm stole over the lately agonized countenance.

"Fetch mamma, quick," whispered Constance; in a few minutes Mrs. Templeton appeared at the door; but without removing his eyes, and making a powerful but unavailing effort to speak, he laid his hand gently on the smiling face, and with a deep sob expired!

Mrs. Templeton advanced, and gazing mourn-

fully on the inanimate form of her husband, raised the weeping Constance, who had sunk on her knees—and consigning her to Dawson's care, closed the door after them, and remained for some time alone with the dead!

When she descended, traces of deep feeling were on her face. "I shall not leave this place," she said to Doctor Vernon; and requesting him to settle with Ashley, who was hourly expected, all that was proper, again Mrs. Templeton prepared to sleep under that roof from which violence and terror had once driven her. The voice which had sent her forth was forever silent—the heart which had harbored such ungovernable passions had ceased to beat—he had gone from this world—let him be remembered by those who remain, with sorrow, pity, and forgiveness.

And soon the news spreads that the master of the Priory is numbered with the dead; and soon the funeral procession tells that he is being carried to his last earthly resting-place; ashes to ashes! dust to dust; and is this the end of all things? On earth, it is the end.

Reginald was far away; Lord Grantham declined to attend; but Mr. Morton and Victor was there—some said, as their representatives, for they took precedence of Ashley.

Constance was really ill. Poor girl! how she wept! how dreadful, how stunning seemed the events of the last fortnight! Her father suddenly summoned away in so dreadful a manner, apparently to the last implacable, unforgiving to those she best loved; but her mother should never know this—she came, believing that her husband had sent for her; and Constance determined not to deprive her of the consolation this belief gave her.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

"O! my gentle brother,
Have we thus met?" *Cymbeline.*

The following day came, ushered in with all the glory of the infant spring. The clear atmosphere, the sparkling stream, the bright sunshine, and joyous songs of the birds seemed painfully out of keeping with the sorrow which lay so heavily at her young heart—for Constance had once loved her father dearly.

She and her mother were taking their breakfast in their room, which Dawson's kind and prompt attention had made so comfortable, when the sound of wheels disturbed them.

"Mr. Sloper, of course, has every thing provided for him?" asked Mrs. Templeton.

"Certainly, madam, and I bring a message from him, appointing twelve, as arranged between him and the Doctor yesterday, for an interview."

"We will be punctual," said her mistress; "but who was that who arrived so early?"

"A stranger, who has asked for Mr. Sloper."

Again wheels; but this time, that was not the only sound; though happily Mrs. Templeton and her daughter, who had just gone to the sitting-room of the latter, heard nothing of it.

Perhaps the first in the village who knew of the Colonel's death was Mrs. Captain Mordaunt; but it would be offensive to relate all that passed between her and her man-confidant when the consequence of this was discussed. Hardly could the female hatefulness refrain from, at once, proclaiming her rights; but her less interested associate persuaded her that this would be but a needless provoking of popular indignation, of which, though she professed to despise it, she was not wholly regardless.

But the morning after the funeral her impatience would brook no further delay. Without the womanly decency of mourning, even in garb, for him by whose will she inherited so rich a possession, she drove in full-blown pride and arrogance to the grand entrance. Here she was met by the butler, and one who was an entire stranger to her,—the gentleman who had just preceded her.

Without announcing herself, she attempted to pass at once into the house; but the former civilly, though effectually, barred the passage.

"Make way!" she said, imperiously.

"I must first know for whom," was his quiet remark, "as none but the friends of the family can be admitted."

"Fellow!" she said, "make way for the lawful possessor of the place."

"That I shall readily do," replied he; "but till then, I have strict orders to prevent all intrusion."

"You are pleased to be insolent, but you will change your tune and tone too, when you know what I bring with me. Stranger as you think me, I will soon make all here feel who is mistress: once more, make way, and let me pass into my own house!"

At these words, the butler, who had effectually aided the stranger's evident intention, to keep Mrs. Captain from obtaining an entrance, started and changed color, for her words fearfully corroborated a rumor which he had heard in more than one quarter, and she, attempting to take advantage of his surprise, quickly moved toward the entrance; when Mr. Morton, in deep mourning, and looking pale and ill, appeared from the inner hall.

"What is all this unseemly altercation?" he inquired, addressing the stranger.

"Only sir," he replied, "that this woman who, I think, must be mad, wants to effect a violent entry, and raves about her rights."

"An insolent Jack-in-office! what do you mean?" she began.

"Silence!" said the calm, resolute voice of Mr. Morton; "what do you mean by this conduct? what do you want at this house, to which your plots and iniquity have already brought sorrow enough. Woman," he said, sternly, "go back, leave this place at once, and forever, you and your infamous partner."

But though she quailed at first, her dauntless character did not dispose her so readily to fly the field; backed as she was by that important document, a copy of which she had with her.

"And who are you, to dictate to me?" she asked; "go away, indeed! this place is mine, and here I stay—remove me who dares. Why, long ago, it was given to me; and I have proofs, to convince all who venture to dispute it. Go away!

never! it is mine—and let me see who will dare to contest it with me."

"Look at me then. I dispute it; look at me, and remember the scene which occurred that night at Paris, when one of your dupes lost, at a throw, the splendid income of one year, and when you were the decoy; yes, look at me—but listen also—I know your whole career—the whole infamy of it; wretched woman! if I can not make you feel for the sorrows of those you have so foully wronged, I will at least prevent the intrusion of your hateful presence on them. Listen to me, while I tell you that he whom you lured on to ruin has avenged both them and himself. If, as you say, you have a paper which gives you a claim here, I tell you it is of no effect—there was no power to alienate," —she turned pale—"I repeat, no power to alienate."

"I do not believe it; but she evidently spoke according to her wish, not her conviction, for her whole manner was changed; "for the present enjoy your victory; my turn will come next;" and with these words she entered her chaise, the driver having been a hearer of the whole, as well as Mr. Sloper, who had been attracted by the loud altercation, and who evidently viewed the conduct of Mr. Morton with astonishment.

"Had you any idea of this claim?" asked Mr. Morton.

"None whatever; on the contrary, I have in my possession a document which at once invalidates it, unless"—and he stopped, as if struck with a new thought—"but all this had better be deferred till we assemble for business."

"Certainly," said Mr. Morton: "but I have come for the express purpose of seeing Mrs. Templeton and her daughter;" and sending up a few lines, requesting an interview, the servant brought an affirmative, and he remained with them till they were told Dr. Vernon and Ashley had arrived.

The latter met them on their entrance, and seated himself between the mother and daughter; when Mr. Sloper proceeded to unfold what purported to be the last will of Lionel Templeton, by which, in very few words, he bequeathed all the law permitted him to bequeath, to his dear daughter Constance Franciska.

He then folded the brief document—and sat without raising his eyes, for there was the neglected, forgotten widow present. At length, he added, "I can not permit this occasion to pass without stating that I ventured to remonstrate against this large bequest, knowing well that Miss Templeton would thank me for having done so."

"She does," said Ashley; and Constance raised her tearful eyes to him with an expression of grateful love.

"I believe," said Mr. Morton, who alone preserved his self-possession, "that we are all sure of your honorable feelings—and it is but proper you should be informed that the estate goes, by entail, to the heir-at-law. The late Colonel Templeton had a son by a first marriage, and that son lives—my nephew, the son of my half-sister, Inez Dormer—Victor Templeton, known as Victor Morton!"

"Good heavens! and my late client then—"

"Has known of the existence of this son for many years—when I first interposed to prevent the waste and ruin of the property; but he never knew who and where the boy was—reasons, which I hope all will think justify my conduct, having decided me to preserve this secret.

"Both the ladies are aware of the claim I make—my friend Dr. Vernon was partly informed before his daughter's engagement; but Victor and Mr. Ashley learned the whole only two days ago—as Mr. Templeton would, of course, desire to take his place at the funeral."

Ashley, leaving his father with the other gentlemen, led away Mrs. Templeton and Constance to their rooms; and whispering to the latter, "Victor," disappeared to fetch him.

Quite overcome with emotion, he folded them alternately to his heart—while the endearing words, "Mother! sister!" accompanied his affectionate kiss.

"Dear Victor," said Mrs. Templeton, "how wonderful all this seems, and how gracious is that Providence who brings as master and owner of our former home one we so truly love and respect!"

"Say not former home, dear mother! dear sister!—let it be *our* home, our common home, when we all have others. Helen's home—Reginald's home—Ashley's home—it is quite large enough, but still not so large as my heart, where long, very long, you have all dwelt—even before I knew I had a claim on your love in return. I have never known a real mother, though I have never wanted a mother's care and affection—and now I have such wealth of relatives, as, I believe, none ever had before."

Caroline was there to remain, if agreeable; and who can doubt the reply? and in the evening, while Mr. Morton, at the Rectory, was telling his strange tale, Victor was relating much to the same effect at the Priory, to Ashley and the three ladies.

"An Ashley," at last, Miss Vernon," said Mrs. Dawson, her whole frame trembling with pleasurable emotion, for Caroline, who could more calmly than Constance inform her of the extraordinary discovery, had been giving her an outline of the facts. "An Ashley," she repeated, "once more to reign over us, for you know, Miss, that he is to take the name—and, to make the blessing more secure, our sweet Miss Constance marries your noble brother—Mr. Ashley Vernon, ah! I once feared there was no hope of this—but God be praised for all his mercies! Bright and happy days will now come again to this dear old place; but oh! Miss Vernon, it is through great trials and sorrows that joy returns.'

"It is often thus,' said Caroline.

"'The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.'"

"Amen!" said the kind old lady; "and may His peace and love henceforth dwell among us."

CHAPTER LXXIX.

"Where shall the traitor rest,
He, the deceiver,
Who could win maiden's breast,
Ruin, and leave her?
Shame and dishonor sit
By his grave ever;
Blessings shall hallow it,—
Never, oh! never!" *Marmion.*

NOTHING could exceed the astonishment of the villagers, except their incredulity, when the wondrous tale was circulated among them. That Mr. Morton's son, as they still persisted in calling Victor, should be the heir of Seabrooke, was ridiculous; that the young hermit could be the late Colonel's son, was impossible. Nevertheless, there he was permitted to rule—there he was received, and there acknowledged as master.

One among them there was who would gladly, most gladly have believed in the illegality of his claim—who would almost have pawned her soul to have effected his dismissal; one who stormed, and raved, and threatened—but in vain; one, who, with her confederate, was met and defeated at every move.

So monstrous seemed the idea, that ever Colonel Templeton could have signed away this magnificent property for the equivalent said to have been given in exchange, that many, and especially Mr. Sloper, believed the deed a forgery; others, that it had been executed after dinner, when the Colonel was not sober; and these opinions both received strength from the fact, that it had been prepared and executed by a man who was avoided by every respectable lawyer as a disgrace to the profession.

"And now, my dear friend," said Doctor Vernon to Mr. Morton, when they were assembled in the Rectory drawing-room, "give us the account you promised."

It was the old story of the ungrateful guest—the old story of love, marriage, and desertion, ending in the early death of the gentle victim. Frequently, during the recital of the villainy by which a beloved sister had been remorselessly destroyed, Mr. Morton's indignation broke forth—checked again by his deep emotion when detailing her uncomplaining grief. "At last, Inez gave birth to a boy; the event failed to rouse her, though she could scarcely bear to lose sight of it; but why linger on all this, when the end is at hand? Month by month—week by week she faded, and it was evident to her poor mother and myself, that our beautiful darling—she who had been to us as an angel on earth—was soon to be taken from us, to be an angel in heaven.

"'Carlos—mother,' she said, a few weeks before she left us; 'I am his wife—Victor is his lawful child—defend my memory, defend the rights of my boy. Oh! Lionel, it is very cruel of thee to have forsaken us thus; I who loved thee so truly, so trustingly. Brother Carlos, promise me solemnly to protect my child—let him be yours—only yours—take him now in your arms—promise to bring him up as your son—receive him as my last, my dying gift—promise to keep and love him.' Need I say, I swore to cherish the boy as my own life? and when he was a year old, by his mother's dying bed, I repeated this oath. And, oh! Inez, witness how well I have kept it."

"This is too much, my dear friend," said Doctor Vernon, rising, and pacing backward and forward, in his excitement; "some other time."

"None so good as the present," replied Mr. Morton, struggling against his deep emotion; "permit me to proceed. After the death of this cherished sister, this idolized daughter, her mother lost all motive to exertion; her little grandson alone aroused her from the deep melancholy to which she yielded. She reproached herself as the cause of all our misfortunes; and when she found that her imprudent confidence during my absence, had so injured our property as to make it necessary that I should almost begin life anew, she would not be comforted—but endured rather than enjoyed life. Our property at Seville and Constantina was sold. I took a small but comfortable house near Seville for her, Victor, and our good Dolores, and then, in earnest, set about retrieving our affairs, though amid all this my inquiries were not suspended as regarded the fell destroyer of our peace. But with the uncertain information I had, this was not easy; sometimes, I fancied the name had been assumed—then some trace would appear to contradict this terrible surmise. I always had an impression, that in England only would my researches be successful; but business so claimed my attention, that the time could not be spared. Not to be prolix, three years after the death of Inez her mother died. Some time after this, having been eminently successful in my mercantile transactions, I married an English lady, with whose family I had become acquainted at Madeira. She was an heiress, and according to agreement, I took her name; and the first visit I paid to England since my boyhood was not more for the purpose of seeing after her property, than to state the object I had so much at heart to an eminent legal authority, and through whom, after many delays and disappointments, I traced my sister's destroyer. Everything corresponded—Lionel Templeton, with the English army, dates—all convinced me we were right; and when we came to follow him through the details of private life, there also, in his profligacy and extravagance, was corroborative evidence."

"I *must* interrupt you," said Mrs. Vernon, "my intense interest will not longer let me be silent; how does his marriage with my dear friend stand with reference to his first wife's death?"

"Happily for the present Mrs. Templeton, they were not married till nearly a year after my poor Inez died; he is thus saved the commission of a crowning piece of injustice, while these victims of his late ruffianly violence are saved from the terrible consequences. The knowledge of this fact has made my duty more easy of performance; for it would greatly have increased my difficulties had I constantly had the feeling that, in supporting and enforcing the rights of one, I necessarily inflicted sorrow and ignominy on three innocent and helpless beings.

"After his second marriage, we traced his career abroad—and the infamy of that man's conduct almost passes belief. We then found him the possessor of a splendid property, with a restricting clause which, at once, put him in our power. He was, in fact, only trustee to this fine

estate, and having ascertained this, it was no less my duty than my pleasure to watch his proceedings on behalf of his son. But this, at first, I was compelled to do by proxy. My wife's health, always delicate, began to show symptoms of that fatal disease by whose ravages she had been left the last of her race—my valued friend, Miss Newman, being her elder and half sister; and then began our wanderings in quest of the great blessing—health—to Italy, Greece, and, finally, Madeira, where she sleeps among so many of her kindred who had preceded her on this final journey. As, for many years, I had no means of ascertaining that Victor's position in life would be any thing beyond what my means would place him in, his education and pursuits had fitted him for the future merchant, nor were my plans much altered when I found that, ultimately, he had a noble inheritance secured to him. I was quite sure that, by instilling into his mind principles of honor and truth, and a high sense of his responsibility, in any condition of life to which he might be called, I was qualifying him for the performance of the duties which would devolve on him.

"For many years my reports from Seabrooke were such as gave me no pretext for interfering. But as I had made arrangements for residing in England, I resolved myself to visit a place which circumstances made so interesting to me; and after several vain attempts to find a suitable residence, I made the arrangement with Johnson which led to my taking the Hermitage. It was singular that my coming was attended with events which at once brought me into collision with the man whom I had such bitter cause to hate; and needless would it be for me to dilate on all the struggles I had, to discipline myself as never to permit my just indignation to betray me. The very idea of seeing the wretch who had so remorselessly sent to an early grave my beloved Inez made every nerve quiver, and sent the blood rushing through my veins as if it would burst them—I, who felt that I could, with pleasure, have felled him to the earth, and then have spurned him, should now be obliged to meet him with an appearance of calmness; yet it must be done, or I had better keep away—for as to risking a discovery, the bare thought distressed me beyond measure; for if he once learned that Victor was his son, I should have no longer power to retain him—besides, there was my solemn promise. Shortly after my arrival, he cut down a splendid plantation; this I was advised to permit, in order to justify a threat; it was sent—and with it were inclosed a copy of the certificates of his first marriage—information of the birth of a boy, and threats of exposure if he continued to trespass on the rights of that son; but nothing further was added—not even that Inez was dead.

"The effect of this was to send him to London, doubtless to consult some lawyer, as preparations for more cutting suddenly ceased; and so much importance did he seem to attach to the notice, that, the next year, he went himself to the scene of his diabolical treachery—for, singular enough, I was at Constantina at the very time he appeared there. But I imagined he learned little beyond the death of Inez and the birth of the child. Of late, I know there have been renewed efforts to trace and discover him; but this I anticipated, for I was certain when he came of age, his unprincipled father would require him to administer to his reckless selfishness by helping him to raise money. Anxious to obtain all the information I could of this man's general conduct and pursuits, so that I might know how to act in case of any emergency, by means of my extensive continental correspondents I easily obtained all I wanted; this also involved disclosures respecting his rascally agent and his female associate, both of whom were too well known in Paris to remain there, and where Colonel Templeton became acquainted with them on his return from his fruitless inquiries in Spain. He had stopped in that city, and there had involved himself in gambling transactions to the extent of more than a year's income.

"From these, I know he never till lately became free; for he was caught in the toils of a set of cheats and swindlers, some of whom polluted this sweet spot with their unhallowed presence. After he had driven his wife and daughter away, I ventured a step in their behalf, and warned him to desist from persecuting them; and this I enforced, when, through the bragging vanity of Cooper, I heard of the so-called mortgage that worthy held on Ryecroft, and which the Colonel knew very well was invalid.

"But my great difficulty rose from the attachment Victor very naturally formed for your fair daughter, Mrs. Vernon. Happily they were both so young that you were the first to propose delay. Long did I ponder on what was right, under this fresh aspect of affairs; and I decided on telling Victor immediately some part of the true case, and the whole to him and all your family before the marriage took place. Nor was it till the tragic termination of a life, in which we were so deeply interested, that I informed him who his father really was."

"This is an extraordinary case," said Mr. Sloper, who was present, and whom professional habits had made an attentive listener; "and it at once enables me to understand the reason of various questions and difficulties which were submitted to eminent counsel by the late Colonel. I remember well, trying to negotiate a loan of sixty thousand pounds—which was effected only by means of heavy life insurances. Nothing but desperate gambling, and the mismanagement of that rascal Cooper, could have rendered such measures necessary with an estate like that of the Priory."

CHAPTER LXXX.

"Then let the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound;"

Of course, Victor Templeton's marriage was postponed, and before it took place, Reginald, Helen, and their children arrived in England. Pass we over the meeting; such can never be truly described—words are useless where feelings deep as theirs prevail. Once more under one roof—once more all together, for Victor

would have it so—there was not one who did not acknowledge, "that sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

After a visit to Old Court, where Reginald introduced all his treasures, in July, when summer puts on her gayest, most gorgeous dress; when the sky with its glowing hues, and earth, with its field and forest of refreshing verdure, are rich in poetic imagery and suggestion, Charles Ashley left his quiet lakes and hills to perform the ceremony that united Victor and Caroline. Doctor Vernon was, of course, there, though *not* to assist, for Charles Vernon was quite equal to the dignified discharge of his duty without being *assisted* by any other reverend; though her father's blessing, when given in the vestry, made Caroline feel more than ever the solemnity of the duties she had undertaken, and the sacredness of the promise just made.

The ceremony was very quiet and private; owing to the recent events, none but the nearest relatives were present; but as the handsome young master of Seabrooke looked around, gratitude filled his heart as his bright eyes rested on many fair and noble forms, with all of whom he could claim kindred.

Once more, and, as he said, for the last time for many a year, he and his bride were bound for a continental tour of several months. At the end of that period they were to return and see how Mrs. Templeton had kept house for them.

During his absence, Sea-View Cottage had been enlarged and fitted up for her, though she was forbidden to entertain the preposterous notion that she was ever quietly to reside there; but she liked the idea of having it. Victor had, in the most generous manner, secured her a handsome income, and had presented each of his newly-found sisters with a noble portion—it was useless to remonstrate with him—"how could he and Caroline spend all they had, without help?"

And the following April, more than a year after her father's death, Constance was given, by this proud brother, to the happy Ashley Vernon—and the Doctor, being quite ready to assist in gaining such a daughter, married them.

Such a wedding, Mrs. Dawson and the delighted Gretchen declared, had never been seen, Templeton Ashley's joyous and generous nature on this occasion assembling all who could share in and understand his happiness.

The Hurstwoods, the Granthams, Mr. Turner and his sister; Stacey, who was working his way through his difficulties, and his now happy wife; even Mr. Moore was wiled out of his literary circle by the entreaty of his favorites, Constance and Ashley. Lady Dallas, always kind, and who had been peculiarly so during the season of trial, with her pretty Ada, were present—while Minnie was half wild with pleasure at the idea of being one of the bridesmaids to her dear friend Constance. These filled the house with gayety, while festivities on the most liberal scale were prepared for the tenantry and villagers.

Constance was as in a dream—her mother's blessing and farewell embrace roused her—and when seated in their carriage, with her loved and loving husband, she turned her beautiful eyes toward him, they were full of tears.

"Only for joy and gratitude, dear Ashley," she said, as he fondly kissed her, and fervently exclaimed, "God grant, sweet wife, that you may never shed them for any other cause!"

And so, amid the beauties and magnificence of nature, in which the Vicarage of Charles Vernon was placed, did his brother and lovely bride spend several weeks, before they set out for Scotland, on a visit to the Sinclairs, who were prevented, by Laurette's severe illness, from being present at the wedding.

Last words are proverbially tiresome; but as we hope the reader is seated by the cosy fireside, or under the greenwood tree, or on the sofa in the comfortable dressing-room, or, in short, anywhere most favorable to the exercise of good temper and kind feeling, we shall brave the proverb—for, the truth is, we are "loth to depart."

Laurette Sinclair never married—and never revisited Seabrooke.

Hubert Forrester remained abroad till the death of his father, which happened about two years after this, brought him to England; but though his former friendship with Victor was renewed, with great advantage to him, it was long before he recovered any thing like the former happy and gay feelings once so natural to him. But when he was more than thirty, and Minnie Dallas eighteen, he married her.

Lord Ernest lived some years after Reginald's return, happy in the happiness of his adopted son, and rejoicing to see that the course Reginald had marked out for himself was one that had led to credit and honor—when, at Lord Westrough's death, Reginald in the Upper House and Ashley in the Lower, were distinguished by the integrity and consistency of their conduct.

The next communication which passed between Mrs. Melville and Lord Ernest was about a year subsequent to her daughter's divorce. She then wrote, soliciting his aid in establishing a boarding house, somewhere toward the West End. This, like all the rest of his correspondence, was forwarded to Mr. Manning, with orders for him to act as he thought fit; and he did think fit to remit her one hundred pounds, at the same time strictly prohibiting any further application, and making her understand that all business matters were submitted to him.

Many years after this, when Mrs. Melville and her manœuvers were among the things that have been, and are forgotten, one of Mr. Manning's clients desired him to oppose a claim which was made on the property of his aunt, lately deceased, by the person with whom she had lodged; and Mr. Manning, having done what was requisite, was surprised, a few days after, by the appearance of a person in widow's weeds, named White, who proved to be the party claiming, and who was no other than the old arch-intriguer, Mrs. Melville.

She had passed through the usual grades of unsuccessful trickery, and now kept a lodging-house of third-class rate. The old lady, lately dead, came to lodge with her, was whimsical, and on the strength of her riches, was overbearing with her relatives, and after her residence with Mrs. White—(a name assumed to baffle creditors) suddenly estranged herself from all her former associates. The paper under which Mrs. White claim-

ed the five hundred pounds and all the personals lodged at her house, was disputed, and she had now come to see if she could make terms through the instrumentality of her former antagonist.

She informed him that her daughter was married, and, with her husband and family, lived in America; but that a small annuity, which her son-in-law granted her, was payable only while she kept from the shores of the New World. Of course, she considered herself an ill-used woman, and bitterly complained of her daughter's ingratitude; but here Mr. Manning stopped the torrent of her eloquence, and recalled her to the case in dispute. He strongly advised her not to bring further exposure and disgrace on herself by persisting in a claim which was, he scrupled not to say, a barefaced fraud. The only thing to which he would pledge himself, was to try and persuade his client to relinquish all claim to various articles which his aged relative had with her at the time of her death. This offer she seemed, at first, gracefully to accept; but, to keep up the farce, protested that, being a lone, unprotected female, she was shamefully defrauded of her legal rights, solemnly assuring Mr Manning that this five hundred pounds was but a small recompense for all that she had done for a lodger who used all her time and given her infinite trouble. This, Mr. Manning dryly admitted, was very likely, and significantly advised her never to take such trouble again. The result was, that his client proved tractable, and this was the last he ever heard of one whom he called a singularly clever woman, if she had but the sense to use her talents aright

Stacey, freed from duns and debts, occupied the Hermitage, and declared, that with such adjuncts as nature there presented, and the real excellences of character and intellect by which his friends were distinguished, he lived in the very Eldorado of poetry—under the direct influence of the true divine afflatus. Still, this did not prevent him from running up now and then to London, to see how prose went on in the nether world; but as he never failed to return with renewed enthusiasm to his Paradise, Eve always received her truant Adam with a smiling face

And Mrs. Templeton? her own words are: "My life is a perpetual hymn of praise and thankfulness—and a striving to prove, not that I deserve such goodness, but that I ever love the gracious hand which has hitherto helped me."

THE END.

THE

ROMANCE OF THE HAREM,

CHAPTER I.

Carimfil Hanoum, the beautiful young wife of Saifula Pasha, was sick even unto death; and her husband, who loved her tenderly, became well nigh maddened by grief. Long had the malady hung upon her; and her diamond eyes were languid, and her small hands so weak and wasted as to leave her scarcely strength sufficient to lift her feather fan, or to attach the jewels to her turban.

What was to be done? It signifies not of what province Saifula Pasha was Governor; suffice it, that it was so far distant from Constantinople, and so little visited by the wandering giaours, who of late years have overrun the East, that there was no hope of obtaining the advice of a Frank Hakeem, or doctor, who would, as a matter of course, have cured the Hanoum on his first visit; and the wise men and the wise women of the province had long fairly given up the case as desperate.

As time wore on, things grew worse and worse: and the Pasha waxed more moody and melancholy. The Hanoum, wearied alike of her diamonds, her birds, her slaves, and her husband, sighed for some new and hitherto untasted pleasure; but how was this to be procured? Her apartments had long been filled with the rarest flowers, and her languid palate tempted by the choicest fruits. Every satellite of the Pasha (and they were many!) lost himself in efforts to gratify her fancies; and still there was no satisfying them.

Carimfil Hanoum was a Circassian, lovely as a houri, and quite conscious of her power over the Pasha; gorgeous in her beauty, as the tulip after which she has been named; and capricious enough to have supplied all the harem of the Grand Seignior with whims. Some of her women even went so far as to say that their fair mistress affected more indisposition than she felt, in order to satisfy her love of power and change; and certain it is, that if the little beauty possessed the tact to do this, it completely answered her hopes, for the more exacting she became, the more the Pasha appeared to hang upon her smiles.

After this explanation of the state of affairs in the palace of the Pashalik, it may be believed with what delight the intelligence was received that a travelling slave-merchant on his way to Stamboul had halted in the city; and that among his slaves there was a Greek girl of incomparable beauty and great talent, whom he hoped to sell to the Sultan.

The Satrap,* preceded by two kavasses,† and followed by four of his chaoushes,‡ threw a purse to the pipe-bearer who brought him the news; and thrusting his feet into his slippers, too anxious to entrust the mission to an officer of his household, he hastened to the caravanserai, which was the temporary abode of the merchant Tahiz. An idea had instantly suggested itself, which he determined to realize. What were a few thousand piastres when put in competition with the happiness of his adored Carimfil? He would purchase this wonderful slave, and her talents should serve to beguile the ennui of his beautiful young wife.

The merchant prostrated himself to the earth as the shadow of the Pasha fell across his threshold; what evil might not this unexpected visit portend to his fortunes? But he was soon reassured by the bland "Khosh Bulduk—well found," which met his ear; and, after having traversed the floor on his knees to the feet of his visiter, and pressed the hem of his garment to his lips and brow, he meekly crossed his hands upon his breast, and ventured to raise his eyes.

"You have with you slaves of price, is it not so?" asked the Pasha, as he took possession of the low sofa.

"It is so, my lord;" was the reply.

"Whence are they? and are there any among them who are worthy that I should look upon them?"

"What shall I say to my lord? They are from many lands, and some of them are worthy even of his gracious notice, which will be to them as a light from Paradise."

"I will see them," said Saifula Pasha, as his chibouque-bearer knelt and presented to him his costly pipe of cherry wood lipped with amber; while his cafeghe approached with the tiny cup of porcelain, in its filligree stand, redolent of the perfumed mocha: "I will see them—if I may find pleasure in looking on them, Allah billir—Allah only knows. Bakalum—we shall see."

"Bashustun—on my head be it!" replied the merchant, as he performed the graceful salam aleikum,§ and left the apartment.

One by one the veiled beauties were led to the presence of the Satrap. There were gorge-

* Governor of a Province. † Police. ‡ Officers.
§ Eastern salutation.

ous Georgians, with their large, deep, flashing eyes, and their sparkling teeth, their finely-moulded figures, and jetty hair; languid Circassians, with their dreamy, dove-like glances, their snowy skins, and their exquisitely rounded limbs; and beauties from the Islands, with their languishing listless grace, and sweetly-toned voices. But the fair Greek girl did not appear; and as the last of the bright train withdrew, and the merchant again prostrated himself before the Pasha, he asked calmly—"Are there no more?"

"None, may it please my lord. Evallah! there are a few Kurdish women, but they are bosh—nothing."

"Kiupek—dog!" said the Satrap sternly: "Do you lie to my beard! Where is the young Greek whom you have held back?"

The affrighted merchant bent his head to the earth: "Surely my lord jests with his slave—the girl is a giaour—an infidel—a haremzadeh—an ill born. Nothing, and less than nothing."

"Ouf! ouf!—peace, peace!" said the Pasha, impatiently, "or your head shall answer for your presumption. Is it for you, and such as you, to decide upon my pleasure? Tchapouk—quick—bring hither the young Greek, or the bowstring shall give your slaves a new master."

"Astaferallah—Heaven forbid!" faltered out the merchant: "will my lord hear his servant? The young giaour has already been seen by a Yuzbashi—a captain of soldiers, who is now on his way to the capital, and who has promised to talk of her to the Kislar Agha* of the Sultan, (whom may Allah prosper!) How, then, can the slave of my lord, who is but as a dog in his sight, dispose of this Greek woman until he has learnt the pleasure of the Padishah?"†

"Kelb—cur!" exclaimed the Pasha, enraged at this new difficulty; "do you dare to eat dirt; and to pour out your words as though they were the words of wisdom, when they are but the promptings of Sheitan, and the instigations of the Evil One! I spit upon the grave of your father, and blacken the face of your mother! Who am I that I should listen to you, when my foot is on your head? Bak—see! the slave is mine and the gold is ready—bring her hither with speed; or, by the beard of the Prophet, your neck shall be fitted with a bowstring!"

"Allah buyuk der—Allah is great!" murmured the merchant, as he prepared to obey. "Who can withstand his fate!"

During the brief interval that ensued, the Pasha smoked on in silence; his curiosity was aroused, and his anger excited; and yet he enjoyed the scene, for it had afforded him a new sensation, and restrung his nerves, which had latterly been terribly shattered by his anxiety for Carimfil Hanoum. Thus he was in no ungracious mood, when, with much parade, and with a most unwilling expression of countenance, the merchant slowly returned, leading in a figure ostentatiously muffled in close and heavy drapery.

"Ey vah! this pearl beyond price is at least well guarded;" said the Pasha, endeavoring to conceal his interest beneath an affectation of scorn; "but we waste time; and I have occupation of more moment than sitting to witness the unveiling of a woman."

"Sen ektiar der—you are the master;" replied the merchant, as he cast aside the mantle of the female: "be it as my lord wills."

For a moment the Pasha was silent; for it was truly a vision of surpassing beauty which had been so suddenly revealed to him. The fair Greek was scarcely sixteen years of age, slight as a willow wand, and graceful as an antelope. The bewildered Saïfula Pasha had never beheld such eyes, save in his dreams; and then only when he had dreamt of paradise. Of the deepest blue that ever caught their dye from heaven, they were fringed with lashes as black as night; and the long silky hair, which fell in a score of rich braids about her ivory shoulders, was of the same hue. Her slight figure was habited in a tight jacket of emerald-colored velvet, laced with gold; and the eymar that veiled her throat was white as the bosom upon which it rested. Her small feet were partially covered with embroidered slippers of crimson, sprinked with small pearls; and the short full petticoat of white linen revealed an ankle of exquisite symmetry.

The Pasha drew a long breath. What, indeed, was gold, when weighed against a houri like this? But he did not, in that moment, think of the beautiful Carimfil — his idolized wife! "And her price is—what?" was his first question.

"How shall I answer, my lord?" said the merchant, warily. "The slave is his."

"Chok chay—that is much;" smiled the Pasha, as he removed the chibouque from his mouth, and threw out a slender thread of smoke: "but the piastres are ready—how far shall they be counted?"

"The slave plays on the zebec, and sings the songs of her own land;" was the reply: "nay, should my lord care to listen, she can tell tales like a massaldjhe."*

"Allah kerim—Allah be praised!" ejaculated the Pasha, as for the first time since the veil of the slave had been withdrawn, his thoughts were forced back to his absent beauty; "the Prophet has heard my prayer. Once more I tell you to name your price, and that the slave is mine."

"Ne bilirim—what can I say!" replied the merchant, meekly; "I have given much for her—ajaib der—she is a wonder! She speaks Turkish like a daughter of paradise; and her voice is as the voice of the bulbul in the gardens of Nishapor."

"Mashallah! there has been enough, and too much of this;" impatiently broke in the Pasha: "For the last time, what ask you for the girl!"

The merchant cast down his eyes, and hesitated for a moment; but he had been shrewd enough to detect the effect which the extreme beauty of the maiden had produced upon the Pasha; and he consequently summoned courage to name a price which he could never hope to obtain under other circumstances.

"Y' Allah—in the name of the Prophet, that

* Chief of the Eunuchs. † Sovereign.

* Professional story-teller.

is much!" said the startled Pasha; "Fifty thousand piastres! A hundred purses! Lives there a woman between Stamboul and Paradise, who is worth a hundred purses?"

The merchant was silent.

"Give him sixty thousand, and bring hither the araba to convey the slave to my harem;" pursued the Pasha, turning to his principal chaoush; and as the officer withdrew, he shuffled off the sofa, resumed his slippers, and passing the prostrate merchant without a glance, slowly walked out of the caravanserai.

CHAPTER II.

The most difficult portion of the arrangement was yet to be accomplished; for the Pasha could not conceal from himself that it was just possible that the beautiful Carimfil might not altogether approve of the means which he had now adopted for her gratification; and he therefore resolved to take her by surprise, and to regale her with the vaunted minstrelsy of the fair slave, before she was introduced into her presence.

The morning meal had accordingly scarcely terminated on the morrow, ere the Pasha found it necessary to summon the young Greek, who had been kept carefully concealed, in order that he might explain to her the suffering state of her new mistress, and his own anxiety for her amusement. She entered slowly, and with her white arms folded meekly upon her bosom: her eyes were heavy, and the Pasha saw that she had been weeping. The langour of grief added a new charm to her beauty; and as she bent her forehead to the earth on the threshold of the chamber, the Satrap welcomed her with a gentle "Khosh geldin—you are welcome."

Her prostration performed, the slave stood with bent head, one pace within the room, and awaited the orders of the Pasha.

"Korkma—fear not;" was his next address; "your home beneath my roof shall be a happy one. How are you called?"

"Katinka," murmured out a low soft voice.

"Nay, nay," said the Satrap gaily; "yours is but an infidel name for such a houri. How say you? shall we call you Bèyaz!* 'Tis a more fitting appellation for such a lily!"

"Sen ektiar der, agam—you are the master, my lord," was the reply.

"Bèyaz be it then," pursued the Pasha: "and now, hear me. Your talents have been extolled, and I doubt not that they are worthy of all the praise which has been lavished on them. I have a fair wife, beautiful enough to have been the daughter of a peri, and born of a sunbeam, but she languishes beneath a cruel malady, and we cannot restore to her eyes the light that has fled from them. Be this task yours; it will require a gentle hand, and a bright spirit."

"My heart will be in the task;" said the fair Greek softly, "even now I am ready."

"Taib, janum—well said, my soul!" exclaimed the Pasha; "you shall be the hakeem, to whom she will owe her recovered bloom, and to whom I shall be indebted for a renewal of the happiness to which I have long been a stranger. Khosh geldin—you are welcome, fair Bèyaz, to the harem of Saïfula Pasha."

"And how wills my lord that I should enter upon my office?" demanded Katinka, somewhat hastily: "shall I take my zebec, and sing to the Hanoum Effendi one of our mountain melodies?"

"That were well done," said the Satrap; "but I would not that she should see the minstrel while she listens to her voice: that were too much!" and the Pasha looked patronizingly, and almost tenderly, towards the young Greek. But the glance fell like a sunbeam upon marble—the maiden did not raise her eyes; and, after a short silence, she asked humbly—

"What wills my lord that I should sing? Shall the strain be sad, like the heart of the beautiful listener; or joyous as the mood in which he loves to see her?"

"Be it even as you will;" said the Pasha; and clapping his hands, he gave orders to an attendant that Katinka should be conducted to an apartment contiguous to that inhabited by the Buyûk Hanoum, where she could be heard unseen.

This command uttered, the slave awaited no further bidding to withdraw; but, once more prostrating herself, she performed her salâm aleikum, and followed the attendant from the apartment.

Carimfil Hanoum sat moodily on her sofa, heedless of the efforts of her maidens to arouse her from her revery. She had cast aside her costly tusbee* of gems, and flung her feather-framed anali† from her in disgust. Costly perfumes were burning in a vase of silver on a small table near her, and at intervals she passed her hand through the scented vapor as if unconsciously. Jewels of price were scattered over her cushions, and a few flowers were strown among them; but they were alike unheeded.

Yet it seemed not like the languor of disease which weighed her down; but rather bore the character of deep and settled melancholy, fed by regretful thought.

Suddenly she raised her head, as a low strain of music broke upon her ear: it was a wild gushing melody, half hope, half sadness; and, by whatever spell it wrought, it fastened at once upon the spirit of the fair Carimfil Hanoum, who sat entranced among her cushions, and listened breathlessly even to its close.

SONG OF THE GREEK SLAVE.

Joy is a bird!
Catch it as it springs;
It will return no more
When once it spreads its wings.
Its song is gay, but brief,
The voice of sunny weather;
But ah! the bird and leaf
Vanish both together!

Joy is a flower!
Pluck it in its bloom;
'Twill close its petals up
If darker skies should gloom.
It is a lovely thing,
And formed for sunny weather;
But ah! the flower and spring
Vanish both together!

* White.

* Rosary † Hand-mirror.

Joy is a ch ld!
Seize it in its mirth;
For soon its lip will know
The withering taint of earth.
Its eye is bright as truth,
A type of sunny weather;
But ah! the smile and youth
Vanish both together!

The song ceased, but for a long interval the beautiful Circassian remained motionless. The strain had evidently awakened memories which she ought not to dispel; and, when at length a deep sigh relieved her overcharged heart, she impatiently commanded that the invisible musician should be brought before her.

At her desire the curtain of tapestry was raised, and the Greek girl stood on the threshold with her zebec in her hand.

"Ajaib—wonderful!" broke from the lips of both, as they gazed earnestly on each other; and Katinka had bounded half way across the floor, and the wife of the Pasha had sprung from her sofa, ere the slave remembered that she who had once been her friend had now become her mistress; and she stopped suddenly with the indignant blood mantling her brow, and would have turned aside, but the delighted young Hanoum caught her to her heart.

"Sister of my soul!" she murmured, as the first rush of joyful surprise was succeeded by a calmer and more assured delight; "Whence come you? Welcome are you, as the first roses that gem the gardens of the peris—dear have you ever been, as the memory of the loved and lost!"

"I come from your own fair land—from the mountains where we were wont to wander together;" was the reply; "but when you were gone the flowers of the valley hung their heads; and the wind on the hill-tops murmured only sadness. But I have found you once more, and the sorrows that have fallen upon me since we parted are forgotten."

"One of them at least is overpast;" hastily interposed the Circassian: "from this hour, beloved of my spirit, you are free." And as she spoke she led the maiden to the sofa, and seated her by her side.

The news soon reached the Pasha that, in the person of the Greek slave, his wife had found a long-lost friend; and he learnt the fact with a bewilderment of feeling which he did not seek to analyze; but when he again visited the beautiful Hanoum, and saw that the light danced in her eye, and that her lip was wreathed with smiles, he almost persuaded himself that he was satisfied with the event.

Had the worthy Satrap been more conversant with the mysteries of a woman's heart, he might perchance have suspected that even the meeting with one whom she had loved in her own land with the love of a sister, would be insufficient to produce so sudden and so great a change in the temper of his wife; but Saifula Pasha was no wizard in the lore of love; the effect delighted him; and, sensible as he himself was to the beauty of the fair Greek, he looked no deeper for the cause, but smoked the chibouque of content, and occupied the divan of justice, as well satisfied with himself and all that appertained to him, as though neither mystery nor jealousy existed in the world.

It was on a fair evening in summer that the two friends sat together, conversing in low whispers of past years and vanished happiness. The draperies of the portal were drawn back; and beyond the threshold of the apartment stretched away the garden and groves of the palace, far as the eye could reach. Fountains of delicate white marble threw their sparkling waters into the air; and, as the volume descended, touched by the colors of the setting sun, it fell back upon the lotus blossoms in the basin like a tide of gems. Birds of gorgeous plumage were suspended in golden cages from the branches of the tall trees, or wandered among the rainbow-tinted flowers; while the sweet breath of the lime-buds and the Persian jasmine came soothingly upon the wind.

It was a lovely hour; but there was a saddening influence in its luxurious calm which the fair Circassian felt in every pulse; tears stood in her deep eyes; and the unbidden sigh rose at intervals, as if to rebuke the effort which she made to smile.

The gentle Greek gazed fondly on her for a moment; and then, flinging her white arms about her neck, she said playfully—

"Ai, guzum—my eyes! when Saifula Pasha paid sixty purses for a certain slave whom he purchased not many months back, it was in the hope that she might be able to while his wayward wife from her sadness. How say you? shall we try her skill? My first tale I have told you, as the rose avows her love to the bulbul, in secret—the rest may be more openly delivered—the Prophet grant that, like the bulbul's answer to his blossom-love, they may be sweet, even although perchance somewhat sad. Speak, Effendimou—my mistress, shall it be so?"

"Janum—my soul!" answered her companion; "I live but to listen." And, having placed herself more commodiously among her cushions, and possessed herself of the fair hand which was wandering lovingly among her tresses, the Pasha's wife, surrounded by her slaves, prepared to hearken to the tale of her new-found friend.

The Greek remained silent for a moment, with her open palm pressed upon her brow in deep thought; and then, suddenly smiling upon the young beauty at her side, she struck a few notes upon her zebec, and commenced her narrative.

CHAPTER III.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT.

In the reign of Sultan Mourad the Second, there dwelt in Stamboul a young man whose name was Hassan. His father, who had been a merchant of some reputation, died while his son was yet a child; and his mother had lived through the subsequent years of her widowhood without an interest or an affection which did not centre in her boy. Well had the youth repaid the loving care of his last parent; and often did the aged Yusnu-gul bless the Prophet

who had spared such a treasure to her gray hairs.

Hassan Effendi was ardent, imaginative, and high-hearted, and was as remarkable for his moral qualities as for his personal attractions. As he is the hero of my story, I must be excused if I attempt his description; and I will give it in as few words as possible. To a stature so lofty that, had it not been tempered by extreme grace, it might have been considered almost as a defect, he united the advantages of a noble expression of countenance, and features of the most classical beauty. His dark eyes had a depth whence, in moments of excitement, the living fire flashed forth with meteoric brilliancy; and his lip had that curve of mingled scorn and softness which betrays the workings of the spirit without the aid of words. The turban never bound a nobler brow than that of Hassan Effendi; nor was the girdle of cachemire ever folded above a more generous heart.

Constituted as I have here described him, it will not be matter of surprise to any that Hassan created for himself a surpassing interest in the breast of the Defter-dar, or Treasurer to the Crown, who soon felt for the young man the affection of a father. His love was gratefully returned; and it was the more valuable to Hassan because he had never known a father's fondness. To the affection of a son he added the reverence of a protege, and thus deepened the feeling which shed a glow of happiness over his existence; while his brightest moments, despite his youth and his enthusiasm, were spent in the society of his powerful and partial friend.

Thus were things situated, when one of those diplomatic avalanches, which descend no where so suddenly nor so fatally as in the East, overwhelmed the Defter-dar, and he found himself dispossessed of all his honors at a period when they had become habitual to him. Nor was his interest at court the only loss which accompanied his dismission from office—true, his fortune, which was ample, remained intact and uninvaded by the hand of power; he was still surrounded by luxury and indulgence; but his antechamber was no longer thronged with those troops of friends who had been wont to crowd it, and whose attendance had ever been considered overpaid by his smiles; he awoke on the morrow after his dismissal, wearied by a night of fitful and uneasy dreams, only to find himself alone.

There is something strange and startling to one who has been accustomed to a bevy of adulators—to a herd of suppliants—to a throng of obsequious sycophants—in finding his altar suddenly abandoned by the incense-breathing worshippers who were wont to encircle it; and thus felt the Defter-dar. He wandered listlessly and sadly through his spacious apartments; he laid his pipe aside, and left his coffee untasted; and, after a while, he passed into the harem; but even the smiles of Nefzi-Sabah, his wife, failed to awaken him to joy. And yet she was the wife of only a few short months, and beautiful as a houri. Gentle as the "Morning Zephyr," whose name she bore, dark-eyed as the gazelle, and graceful as a fawn, Nefzi-Sabah found the spell of her loveliness for the first time powerless.

As she flung herself upon a pile of cushions beside the sofa of the Defter-dar, and looked up tenderly in his face, a coldness fell upon her heart, and she remained for a while silent; yet even that availed her nothing, for her silence passed unheeded; no fond gaze lingered upon her beauty; and a tinge of bitter and regretful surprise mingled with the sigh that heaved her bosom, as she stretched her jewelled hand towards her zebec, and swept the chords with fingers as light as the breath of evening among roses.

The spirit of the Defter-dar was softened by the strain, and he sighed in his turn; but, alas! the sigh was not for Nefzi Sabah; for as his troubled thoughts resolved themselves into calm, he remembered Hassan; and, while the beautiful Circassian was breathing out a lay of love, he was mentally expatiating on the delights of friendship.

"Of what avail," he asked himself, "have been the toils and the intrigues of years? Of what value have been the false vows of the time-serving herd who have followed in my path? The toils have withered me—the intrigues have blighted me—the flatterers have proved false—the gaud and the glitter of court favor were the sunlight in which they basked, and they have no time to shiver in the shade of disappointment. Now is the moment to revenge myself on fate, and to make the lure of ambition yield to the calm impulse of friendship. I am no longer the favorite of Mourad, but I am still the friend of Hassan; and what is the possession of power compared to that of one honest heart? When the storm rages, the surf is scattered upon the shore; but the jewel which is hidden in the depths of ocean is unmoved by the tumult of the billows."

With this consolatory reflection the Defter-dar concluded his revery; and, as the smile of recovered complacency rose to his lip, Nefzi-Sabah ceased her song, and smiled in her turn at the success of her fond experiment.

Nor was the stoical composure of the ex-courtier subject of surprise to those around him. Every Turk is aware that the same hand which beckons him to a Pashalik can also twine the bowstring about his neck; and he accepts the one with as much outward composure as he submits to the other. Even beggary, suddenly as it may come upon him, fails to wring a murmur from his lips. He looks upon worldly advancement and worldly possessions as mere transitory benefits, and the grave as the great and certain end of all; and, unlike the theoretical European, who, admitting the same belief, nevertheless acts as though they were the supreme good—the Alpha and Omega of all created beings—the Musselmann, instead of terminating his reverses with a pistol or a razor, or supporting them at best with a dogged and sullen despair which places him beyond the pale of future exertion, and atrophises the energies of all who are dependent on him, calmly resigns himself to a fate which he had not power to control, and makes the best of that which still remains. The Defter-dar was wealthy; he yet possessed the means of tranquil, and even costly enjoyment; the substance was untouched, it was the shadow

only which had passed away; and, under such circumstances, no Turk would arrogate to himself the right of complaint; or deem that he could be an object of commiseration.

It was a time of festival, the Ramazan was waning to a close—the morrow was the feast of the Bairam; and the Defter-dar ere long quitted the women's apartments, in order to prepare the presents which, at this period, it is customary to distribute among the members of the household.

As the ex-courtier turned a hasty glance on the many gifts that lay around him, each enveloped in the boksha or handkerchief in which the offering is made, he could not repress the rising scorn which grew out of the memory of past years, and the conviction that the link that now united him to those who were about to share his bounty, was one of interest, not love. But the feeling passed away, as his eye lingered on the costly gifts prepared for Hassan; and, with unwonted earnestness, he once more unfolded the boksha to assure himself that the present was worthy of his love.

A shawl from the looms of Cachemire, whose price would have ransomed a province, concealed amid its folds a Damascus dagger, and a pair of diamond-studded pistols; and, as the Defter-dar replaced the weapons, and refolded the handkerchief, he put into the hands of a trusty slave the precious offering of friendship, and turned away with a calm brow and a cheerful spirit.

But the cup of disappointment was not yet drained to the dregs, and the Defter-dar was fated to imbibe the draught even to the last drop.

Eager to expedite the work of bounty, the slave loaded himself with as many packages as he could conveniently carry, and hastened on his errand. Numerous were the greetings which awaited him as he passed on; and each chance-passenger whom he encountered on his way grasped his hand in fellowship and congratulation, as is customary at this solemn feast; cannon boomed along the Bosphorus; the distant sound of music came upon the wind; and the good Musselmaun, excited and preoccupied, hastily placed in the possession of one of the impatient expectants the sumptuous gift destined for Hassan; and then unconsciously pursued his way to the dwelling of the young Effendi.

Hassan, meanwhile, suffered far more at the misfortunes of his friend than the Defter-dar himself. The ex-courtier was no longer in the first rush of youth; he had attained the age when, despite all circumstances, a certain degree of philosophy is forced upon every man. He had sufficient experience to perceive and to appreciate the hollowness and uncertainty of worldly honors, and a mind energetic enough to turn to nobler means of consolation. But Hassan was yet in the fresh years when the dew of hope falls plentifully on the wayside of existence, and calls up a thousand bright tints from the wilding flowers which blossom there. He had not yet learnt the useful and care-taught lesson of self-examination and self-government. He could not comprehend the possibility of casting aside worldly distinctions, and replacing ...er by the more social possessions of fellowship and regard. He had ever looked upon the Defter-dar as upon one born to authority and trust; and he could not, in the first rush of feeling, disentangle those attributes which had so long been blent in his imagination. To say that he pitied the individual were an error—he only mourned the evil; for he regarded his friend with the same honoring eyes as when he moved in pride and power. "The sun," said Hassan, in reply to some observation of Yusnugul, his mother: "is still the sun, though clouds may have passed before it. Who shall dare to lift an irreverent look to the glorious orb, or to deride its want of light, because the vapors of the morning have overshadowed it?"

"The Defter-dar," retorted the aged woman, as she resumed her pipe, and deposited beside her cushions the bag of embroidered cachemire containing the scented tobacco with which she had just replenished it; "the Defter-dar has still the heart and the hand of a prince; and fear not——"

"What should I fear?" exclaimed Hassan, his dark eyes flashing scorn at the inference of his more worldly-minded mother; "Mashallah! have I loved him only for the riches with which he has loaded me? Have I been bought at a price? Do not even *you* know me better? I tell you, mother, that the world holds not the being who shall ever rend away my heart from the Defter-dar; he has been a father to me in affection, a friend in trust, a protector in munificence. *He* only can undo the work of his own kindness; and while he still loves me, nothing shall part us, though all the ills of life should accumulate around him."

The words had scarcely passed the lips of the excited young man, when a slave of Yusnu-gul's harem stood slipperless at the door of the apartment, holding in her hand an embroidered boksha, which she laid at the feet of Hassan as the gift of the Defter-dar; and then, retreating a few paces, she crossed her hands before her, and awaited in silence the orders of her lord.

With an eager hand and a throbbing heart, Hassan prepared to unfold the handkerchief; and Yusnu-gul raised herself from her recumbent position to feast her eyes on the costly present which her son was about to reveal.

It was not the expectation of acquiring a new and valuable possession which agitated Hassan as he threw back the folds of the boksha: it was the consciousness that the gift offered on the occasion of the Bairam is always in proportion to the degree of regard in which the individual to whom it is offered is held by the donor; and his dismay may consequently be conceived when the handkerchief delivered up its contents. The blood mounted to his brow, and the fire flashed from his deep eyes, as he discovered their nature—a shirt of the stuff worn by the boatmen on the Bosphorus; pantaloons of the common material used by the peasantry; a shawl whose coarse folds were meet only to bind the forehead of a ghez-metkian, or domestic slave. Such was the present which had been tendered to the hitherto favorite friend of the Defter-dar!

For a few moments the young man remained speechless; and that brief space sufficed for a thousand comments from Yusnu gul. "Shekiur

Allah—Praise be to God!" she exclaimed; "we are not yet so sunk as to need such courtesy as this! Is the Defter-dar become a divané, an idiot, or does he take you for the son of a baghdjee,* that he sends you garments fitting only for a slave! Sen chok adam, you are much of a man, if you bear this without complaint!"

But Hassan answered not. He sat with his head bowed down upon his breast, lost in thought; until, as the indignation of his mother became gradually more loud and less measured, he roused himself, and replied in a broken tone: "Enough of this. I have read the meaning of the Defter-dar—he is lord of his own will, and I have no right to condemn him for its exercise. All the world has changed to him; and he is free in his turn to change to me. It is his own fiat which separates us. May he find another heart that will cling to him as fondly and as faithfully as that of Hassan would have done had he not spurned it from him!"

A gush of tears followed the words; and hastily flinging from him the wadded covering of the tandour† beneath which he had been sitting, the young man folded his pelisse about him and rushed into the street. He had need of the keen cold air that was blowing from the Bosphorus to relieve his labored and painful breathing, for his agony suffocated him.

"All save this, I could have borne," he murmured to himself, "but to be ranked among his menial servants—to be put upon a footing with his slaves—to be tacitly taught that he holds me as lightly as any other varlet whom he has bought with his gold—this only I cannot bear. Ill-fated Hassan! to have but one friend, and to lose him thus!"

For hours did the young man wander about the city: he heard not the busy hum of the streets; he heeded not the bright eyes which flashed upon him as he passed, from beneath the jealous yashmac;‡ he returned not the greetings that were addressed to him by his acquaintance, nor the idle jests of which he was the subject. His mind was absorbed by one engrossing idea; and at intervals he mentally repeated, "Ill-fated Hassan! to have but one friend, and to lose him thus!"

In this dark mood of mind the young Effendi turned aside from the streets, just as twilight was beginning to thicken around him; and entered one of the cemeteries of the city. The night-wind was already sighing among the tall cypresses that overshadowed the graves, and the turbaned head-stones gleamed cold and ghastly through the gloom. In the distance the illuminated minarets looked like fairy palaces hung in mid-air; the world without was brightened by festivity, and loud with revel—Hassan felt as though it were a bitter mockery;—and while he lingered among the damp graves, he congratulated himself in the darkness of his spirit that he was alone; and, in the fervor of the feeling he exclaimed aloud, "Yes; they too must run the same career of cheating affection; but as yet they are happy—for them the veil is still unrent, and they deem that all men are truth—but I am undeceived. Inshallah—I trust in God! I have drained my draught of bitterness, and the cup is empty. Ill-fated Hassan! to have but one friend, and to lose him thus!"

"And what avails friendship at your bright age, Effendim?" murmured out a low voice close beside him, as a small hand was laid lightly on his arm: "Bosh der—it is nothing. Friendship is for the gray-beard and the dotard; but your beard is yet black as the midnight cloud, and your wit keen as the dagger in your girdle—friendship is but the dregs which life offers to the aged when youth has drained the draught—friendship is the cold resting-place of satiety when passion has extinguished the flames of its fiery car, and swept onward on dusky wings into irrecoverable darkness. You are not formed for friendship—the spring sun does but light up the flowers: the fruits of autumn require a fiercer beam. You are like one who hungers at a feast, because he lacks energy to stretch forth his hand."

"Who are you? and what would you with me?" asked Hassan, gloomily.

"I am called Felech-so," was the reply; "and I ask of you only to be just to yourself; the bulbul amid its sorrows has its rose—it murmurs not to the winds of heaven without one fond ear to listen; there is a charm even in grief where it awakens sympathy. But the brightest eye will grow dim with tears, and the smoothest brow become furrowed by bitter thought; and thus the young and the quick-hearted do well to trample care beneath their feet, ere it becomes too strong to be overmastered."

"Yours is joyous philosophy; affiet ollah—much good may it do you;" said Hassan with a scornful smile, as he bent down to take a closer view of his companion, interested in spite of himself in the singularity of the adventure: "but a man must be a fop or a stoic who professes it."

"And wherefore?" asked the low, soft, but somewhat mocking voice: "the stone of three-and-twenty bids fair to change his creed at fifty for one less stern. Hassan Effendi, if you could only look on me, you would believe me."

"You know me, then?" said the young man, with astonishment.

Know you?" was the laughing rejoinder "who in Stamboul knows you not? Those who may not gather the rose are, nevertheless, not forbidden to look upon it."

Hassan listened more complacently. "I have tracked you for the last hour: I would fain save you from yourself. You are cursing your felech,* when you are, in truth, your own worst enemy. Move a few paces onward, into yonder spot, where the reflection of a cluster of blazing minarets almost cheats the eye into a belief of daylight. I will detain you but a moment, and you shall then be free to act as you deem best."

Hassan involuntarily obeyed; and, as he followed closely on the footsteps of his strange guide, he was struck with the lightness of her movements, and the graceful undulations of her slight figure; but when they had at length

* A laborer.

† A wooden frame, containing a brazier of heated charcoal, and overlaid with silken coverlets.

‡ Veil worn by Turkish females in the street.

* Constellation.

reached the spot which she indicated, and that she withdrew her yashmac, and revealed to him the loveliest face on which he had ever looked, his breath came quicker, and he demanded hurriedly: — "How said you that you were called?"

"Felech-so"—murmured the low voice.

"And you are rightly named!" exclaimed the excited young man; "for your constellation must, indeed, be ever in the ascendant. Speak! What would you?"

"Effendim, I have told you all my errand. I would fain call back the smile to your lip, and the light to your eye. Our moullahs may prate to you of prayer—our Pashas of power—our merchants of gold—I promise you *all* these, if you care to mend your fortune. And now, follow me on the instant, if you will; or bid me farewell at once, for, if we part to-night, we part for ever. I am a Turkish woman; the sun has set, and I am yet abroad: none, save yourself, must look upon, or dog me. How say you? Will you confide in me? Can my smile lighten your grief? sen bilirsen—you know best—it is for you to decide, will you trust to me?"

"Instantly—eternally."

"It is well;" said Felech-so, as she re-adjusted her yash-mac, and drew her heavy cloak more closely about her:—"I shall lead you by by-paths and unfrequented streets: follow me at a distance; and when you see me enter the dwelling whither I am about to conduct you, the door will be left ajar, and you may safely pass the threshold."

"Stay yet a moment," murmured Hassan.

"And wherefore, Effendim? When once we have left the public streets, and that the same roof covers us, shall I not be free to fill your pipe, to hand your slippers, and to serve your coffee? Will not the music of my zebec be softer than the distant murmurs of the city? and the glances of your slave be more dazzling than the glare of many torches!"

Hassan insisted no farther; and in the next instant he was following the short and rapid steps of his new acquaintance through by-ways hitherto unknown to him. At times he caught glimpses of the Bosphorus, basking in the reflection of the myriad lamps of the hill-seated city: at times he left it far behind him, to follow the ascent of some steep and narrow street—but he hesitated no longer: and, after the hurried walk of an hour, during the whole of which time he never once lost sight of his mysterious guide, he saw her pause an instant at the portal of a stately building whose vast shadow lay long upon the earth, and then disappear across the threshold. In the next moment he stood on the same spot: the door, as he had been forewarned, remained ajar; he pushed it gently back, strode through the portal, and found himself in a spacious and covered court, lighted only by one dim and flickering lamp.

Hassan stood for a while in some perplexity, and not without a passing suspicion that treachery was intended towards him; when suddenly a black slave, habited in a rich costume, who had evidently been awaiting his arrival, seized him by the hand, and drew him forward. Hassan was neither of an age nor a temperament to yield slavishly to fear, yet, as he was hurried onward through dark passages, and dragged up one flight of steps and down another, where the deep silence was broken only by his own footfalls and those of his conductor, a vague apprehension of evil grew upon him; but it was by this time too late to recede, for, even could he have escaped from his companion, and had no resistance been offered to his retreat, he was conscious that he should be totally unable to retrace his path: and under these circumstances he resolved quietly to follow up the adventure, terminate as it might.

Having come to this decision, he bestowed undivided attention on the movements of the slave who conducted him; and soon became convinced that, although the building into which he had been introduced was extremely spacious, he had, nevertheless, trodden the same ground more than once: a circumstance which proved that, whatever might be the motive of its owner, the intention was evidently to mystify him as to its formation and extent. Not a glimpse of light had he encountered since he quitted the court; and, as a door immediately in front him suddenly fell back, Hassan involuntarily pressed his open palm upon his eyes to shield them from a glare which almost blinded him. Peals of ringing laughter, and the glad sounds of many zebecs, mingled with the joyous voices of women, burst upon his ear; and, as he hastily withdrew his hand, the light form of Felech-so detached itself from a group of young beauties, as fair and bright as houris, and approached him with a bounding step.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT—CONTINUED.

Hour after hour sat Yusnu-gul in her apartment, listening to the footfalls of every passing slave, and deeming that each in turn heralded the return of Hassan; but Hassan came not!

Daylight had passed away; and the illuminated minarets shot high into the air, like fiery shafts, their graceful columns of light, while the bosom of the Channel glowed like molten metal beneath the blaze. Music was soft in the distance, and, at intervals, a light laugh or a merry song rang upon the wind—and still Hassan came not!

As yet, however, Yusnu-gul rather marvelled than mourned at his delay: all the youth of Stamboul were abroad in the glad city, and Hassan, gentle as he was, ever loved to be the first in every festival. The aged woman, therefore, quietly replenished her pipe, and sipped her coffee, and lost herself in conjectures as to the motive of the extraordinary conduct of the Defter-dar, and mental repinings at the unmerited mortification of her high-hearted son.

Another hour was filtered through the lap of time, and the loud cannon boomed along the Bosphorus in rapid succession, while the flitting fires of the festival ran skimmering along the dark face of night, like mimic lightning; glancing over the tops of the tall cedars, and spread-

ing in sheets of transient flame a mantle of golden glory about the city. At length the cold grey light of morning broke pale and chilly in the east; the dusky rocks of the Asiatic coast loomed out, stern and sterile; the white buildings of Pera gleamed blank and bleak in the faint sky; and the distant minarets of Scutari looked like giant-spirits, as the first beams of day revealed their shadowy outline. It was the morrow of the Bairam—and still Hassan returned not!

Yusnu-gul, who loved her son with a devotion as untiring as it was profound, had watched throughout the night without a sensation of weariness. Hassan was young and high-spirited, and had, doubtlessly, been detained by his associates; and the heart of the mother was soothed by the belief that, amid the dissipation of the festival, he would forget his recent mortification. But with the chilly, cheerless dawn came other and more anxious thoughts. Alike to the pain-worn patient and to the weary watcher—to the sick and to the sorrowing—there are no moments so sad and so depressing as those in which day and night stand together on the threshold of time, as though each were reluctant to yield up its empire.

When the light broke around her, Yusnu-gul began to fear she knew not what! Hassan was impetuous, haughty, and uncompromising; of what rashness might he not have been guilty, in the first rush of his resentment? True, he had loved the Defter-dar as a father; but Yusnu-gul was woman enough to be aware that outraged affection is the very foundation on which may be erected the firmest superstructure of hate. His attachment to the Ex-Treasurer had been divested of every taint of worldliness and self-interest—a spontaneous outpouring of reverence and regard—but it is ever the most generous spirit which is the quickliest stung; and the mother found no consolation for her solitude in the suggestions of her awakened fancies.

The slaves of Yusnu-gul removed her morning meal untouched. Hassan was yet absent; and the tearless eyes of the gray and faded woman burnt with the fever of her throbbing brain.

It was thus that she was found by Nefzi-Sabah, the favorite wife of the Defter-dar, who, on the day succeeding that of the Bairam, entered the harem of Yusnu-gul, followed by a couple of her slaves; and, casting aside her yashmac, turned towards the mother of Hassan a brow as moody as her own.

"Hai, hai—so, so, you are tardy with your welcome, Effendim;" commenced the beautiful Circassian, for the aged woman had uttered no greeting to her visitor; "nor do I ask from you more speedy courtesy. Mashallah! the wrongs that I have suffered from the son are fitly followed by the coldness of the mother."

"If you are come to tell of Hassan, speak!" said Yusnu-gul, earnestly.

"*If* I am come to tell of Hassan!" was the retort; "think you that I can tamely suffer the rivalry of a stripling in the affections of the Defter-dar? Are my eyes dim, or my cheeks faded, that I should be overlooked because he has a smooth tongue and a ready wit? Is he not a sakil-siz—a no-beard?"

"Is Hassan indeed with the Defter-dar?" asked Yusnu-gul, while a gleam of joy lit up her faded brow.

"What avails it that he is not;" demanded Nefzi-Sabah peevishly; "when even the ingratitude and discourtesy of his absence during the festival of yesterday have not yet opened the eyes of the Defter-dar. Ne var—what is this? Am I to listen to no discourse more flattering to my self-love than repinings of the non-appearance of an ingrate?"

"Talk not of ingratitude, Effendim;" said the mother indignantly; "after the bokshalik* with which the Defter-dar honored my son, he could scarcely have expected thanks at his hands—Inshallah! Hassan Effendi is no slave."

"Were he a Pasha he could not desire one more costly!" exclaimed the Circassian; "but perchance the spoiled favorite forgot the friend, when he no longer looked upon the Defter-dar."

"A shirt suited to a caiquejhe!"† said the mother scornfully.

"Pistols for his woman-hand, of which the diamond-hilts can alone be valuable to the troubler of the peace of harems—" followed up the Circassian.

"Schalvar,‡ fitting only for a peasant—" pursued Yusnu-gul.

"A Damascus dagger whose fellow would be sought in vain, even throughout the golden city of Stamboul—" persisted Nefzi-Sabah.

"A shawl—" commenced the aged woman.

"Worthy to have covered the loins of the camel which carried the Prophet—" broke in her companion.

Yusnu-gul clapped her hands with a gesture of contemptuous indifference, and hastily commanded that the boksha of the Defter-dar should be unfolded before the visiter; when the surprise of the Circassian was extreme, on seeing the coarse and unseemly garments which had been tendered to Hassan as the gift of his protector.

Rapidly and energetically did Nefzi-Sabah enumerate and describe the contents of the handkerchief which had been prepared by the hands of the Defter-dar for his favorite; and, forgetful of her own fancied subject of complaint against Hassan, she was soon engaged as anxiously as Yusnu-gul herself in a thousand contradictory and improbable conjectures as to the cause of his unwonted absence. But, alas! in vain did they surmise, and consult, and explain—Hassan returned not!

Months wore painfully away. The heart of Yusnu-gul was a widowed heart; and, as she looked upon the sparkling waters of the Bosphorus during the sunny days of summer, she saw not their beauty, she felt not their charm: to her those waters ever seemed to be the grave of Hassan.

"Yes," would she murmur to herself in her bereavement; "there—beneath that smiling and treacherous wave, lies my manly boy—my only one—the light of my eyes, the moon of my

* Gift. † Boatman. ‡ Trowsers.

evening sky, the bulbul whose voice is hushed; the joy of my old age, Hassan the high-hearted!"

Nor did the Defter-dar mourn less deeply the disappearance of his favorite. Of his death, his violent or self-inflicted death, it was impossible to doubt, as every endeavor to discover his fate had proved abortive; and the first anguish of despair had slowly yielded to the calmer but no less heartfelt grief of resignation, when a letter was one morning placed in the hands of the Defter-dar, who started with a surprise which almost amounted to incredulity, on recognizing the well-known character of Hassan.

"Bismillah!—In the name of the most merciful Aliah; such were the contents of the paper; "I am lost to you, and to the world; I am lost even to myself: and, having told you this, I dare not add any thing in elucidation of a mystery which must have bewildered, and, I do even hope, have grieved you. I think of you often—fondly—your memory dwells with me as the remembrance of lost light lingers with the tenant of a dungeon; or as the vision of departed liberty comes back upon the spirit of the despairing captive. I love to remember that I was dear to you; I have forgotten all that wounded alike my pride and my affection. I retain jealously and fondly the gentler reminiscences which are wound about my heart too closely ever to be rent asunder! I parted from you proudly; all the kindness that you had lavished upon me; every token of affection, every proof of regard, had been the spontaneous offering of your own generous nature. Alas! I now appeal to your memory as a suppliant. If you ever loved—if you still love me—if you would save me from misery, from suffering, from death—a speedy and painful death—cherish no doubt, admit no suspicion; seek not to penetrate a mystery too dense ever to be fathomed. Do not despise nor refuse me; but remembering only the loving trust of our earlier and happier communion, bestow out of the wealth which Allah has poured into your lap sufficient to save me from destruction. Deposit, at the waning of the moon, a purse, containing twenty thousand piastres, on the tall turbaned head-stone to the right of the great avenue of the Cemetery of Scutari; one will be there to secure it; but, as you love me, linger not to assure yourself of this fact, nor to palter with the messenger. In doing either you will destroy me. I dare add no more—pity and pray for the lost Hassan."

The Defter-dar read and re-read the letter; there could be no doubt but that the handwriting was that of him whom he has loved so well—of the son of Yusnu-gul; and, although with a sick heart, and a throbbing pulse, he hesitated not to obey the bidding.

The dawn was spreading faintly in the sky, and the moon was waning into a pale and sickly white, when the Defter-dar, leaving his caïque at the pier of Scutari, slowly wound his way through the hushed and slumbering city, and thence passed alone into its stately necropolis. Long sweeps of wind were heaving the heavy cypress boughs, like spirit-sighs; but the Defter-dar quailed not in his purpose. He plunged into the deep gloom of the grave-forest, and soon stood before the tall stone which had been indicated. At its base was one of those small reservoirs, hollowed in the marble for the use of the birds and the wandering dogs, so common in Turkish burial-places; the little basin was dried up: and in this spot the generous friend deposited the sum which had been required of him, turned a long, searching look into the gloom around him, and then slowly moved away.

But it was difficult to depart without one retrospective glance; and the Defter-dar had not progressed more than a few yards, ere he paused, and looked back. A dusky figure flitted across the path, and lingered an instant beneath the tall tomb—a deep voice murmured, "It is well!" and then the ex-courtier was once more alone in the midst of the deep stillness.

CHAPTER V.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT—CONTINUED.

A YEAR went by—a long and dreary year—and the memory of Hassan became to the Defter-dar like the indistinct vision of a painful dream; but the mystery was yet to deepen, and the fact of his existence was once more to arouse all the pain-fraught sympathies of those who had loved him. A second letter, written like the first in agony of spirit, was placed in the hands of the Defter-dar at the expiration of that period by one of his slaves; and the bearer, unmoved by the peril of his mission, had cast off his slippers on the threshold of the Ex-Treasurer; and there, awaited a reply.

"Once," thus ran the missive; "once I was dear to you: you were to me as a father, and I loved you as a son. That I still hold you in my heart, be this my witness! I may be forgotten—may have been so long; yet I pray you in mercy to recall my memory. I am in danger—imminent, instant danger—and you alone can save me. You are wealthy, you are generous—a trusty slave will deliver this letter. Should you deny my prayer, or detain my messenger, I shall soon be beyond help. If, however, you would once more save me from destruction, let him be the bearer of twenty thousand piastres. I dare not doubt that you will preserve me; Inshallah! you are the last hope of the miserable Hassan!"

The Defter-dar summoned the strange slave into his presence; he bribed him with gold and soft words; he threatened him with the bastinado and the bowstring; but he could extort no intelligence of the present position or the threatened peril of Hassan.

"Destroy or even detain me, and he is lost;" was the only answer to every threat. "Dog me; and, while I am eluding your pursuit, his fate will be accomplished."

To the more gentle argument of bribe and entreaty he was equally invulnerable. "If you grant the request of which I am the bearer," he said, "Hassan is saved; and for myself, in the

case, my reward is sure. Effendim, I ask of you nothing save despatch."

Without the hesitation of a moment, the Defter-dar placed the required sum in the hands of the messenger; and accompanied it with a letter, replete with friendship and anxiety, to Hassan, and expressions of the most affectionate and sorrowing interest. He besought him to unveil his melancholy mystery to his best friend, for melancholy it must assuredly be, when it could thus sever him from the mother of his youth and the companion of his manhood; he promised, should he have placed his life in jeopardy by some act of violence or folly, to exert for him all the interest which he yet possessed at court; and concluded by drawing a miserable picture of the wretched Yusnu-gul, withering away into a solitary and unregretted grave.

But when the letter was concluded, and the money delivered into the keeping of the slave, it was not so easy to suffer him to depart unwatched; and a trusty servant was put upon his track, who followed for hours the intricate course of the stranger; but he followed in vain—the inattention of a moment sufficed to render abortive the exertions of a day; and he returned to the palace of the Defter-dar, defeated and baffled.

Once more months passed away; and, even as it had been foretold to Hassan, the disconsolate Yusnu-gul died. She had mourned her son, when she believed him to be lost to her for ever, with the calm, deep grief of resignation; but her feeble frame and excited mind could not contend with the irritation of this new mystery, this unfathomable secret; and she bent beneath the shock as the forest tree bends to the tempest breath; and as the overstrained branches, bowed beyond their power of resistance, rend the trunk from which they sprang, so did the feelings of Yusnu-gul, indulged and encouraged in the solitude of the harem, break the heart that could sustain the pressure no longer.

There were moments, when in thinking of Hassan, and in weaving strange fancies on his fate, the Defter-dar almost hoped that he should hear of him no more. That his letter had remained unanswered rather grieved than surprised him; for he felt that, had Hassan been free to act, he would long ere this have returned to his home, and to those whom he had loved from his boyhood; and he, consequently, visited his silence upon the same system of coercion which had forbidden his re-appearance among his friends. Could he have disentangled the ravelled skein of secrecy in whose meshes the poor youth was bound, the Defter-dar would have exerted every energy, and strained every nerve to restore him to the world; but to hear of him only to earn the miserable privilege of knowing him to be beyond human help, was a torment rather than a blessing to his anxious affection. His mother was no more; his former associates had almost forgotten him. He, alone, remembered him with regret; and yet he would have thanked the messenger who brought the tidings of his death. But this was not to be: a third time came a scroll from Hassan—a voice from his watery grave—a record of his jeopardy—an appeal to the friend who had cherished him:—

"For the last time," he wrote, "Hassan, the son of Said, pours forth his grief before the Defter-dar of the Sultan Mourad. I have a vague dream that a shadow had passed over your brightness, ere from me light was altogether shut out. It may have been so—I know not if it were—I heed it not, though you proclaim it to be truth. The sky is full of stars the sage alone marks the quenching of those which fade from the galaxy: to the common gaze all is unchanged—I shall trouble you no more—this is my last appeal. Save me, or I am lost—gold alone can serve me: you have gold, and your heart is large: to none else can I apply. I write to you like a madman, but it is only the madness of desperation. I care not what may be the consequence, I will write to you no more. Friend! father! protector!—save me again on this occasion—place the same sum as before at the disposal of my messenger, then pity and forget the lost Hassan."

The Defter-dar replied to the missive by silently putting a purse of gold into the hands of the expectant slave, and coldly telling him that he was free to depart when he listed. The man looked steadily in the face of the courtier, made a respectful obeisance, and withdrew. As he left the house, he glanced stealthily back to note if he were pursued, but the street was empty; and the manner of the Defter-dar had been sufficiently indifferent to convince him that the existence and well-being of Hassan were rapidly becoming unimportant to his former friend. Thus assured, the messenger made few digressions from his direct path; and, after half an hour of rapid walking, beat upon the door of a stately mansion, and was instantly admitted.

But the Defter-dar had learnt a lesson of self-reliance from the failure of the attendant whom he had on a previous occasion intrusted with the discovery of a secret which he was morbidly anxious to unravel; and suffering the messenger of Hassan to leave the house by the main portal, unpursued and unimpeded, he hastily changed his turban and pelisse, and passed out by a side door opening into his own garden, and thence into a cross path terminating in the main street, along which he shrewdly conjectured that the slave, whose person he was confident of recognizing on the instant, must ultimately pass. Nor was he deceived in his conjecture for, having by this less circuitous route arrived in the great thoroughfare before the person whom he was anxious to observe, and having, moreover, by his own change of costume, prevented all suspicion save that which might be created by his subsequent want of caution, he had ere long the satisfaction of seeing the slave turn the corner of the lane, and make his way towards the great square of the Atmeidan.

The Defter-dar was careful, as they crossed the large open space, and passed beside its stately columns, to shroud himself among the crowd; and, when they entered the street beyond it, to leave such a distance between the stranger and himself as to set suspicion at defiance. He remarked that the slave looked back at intervals, like one who cared not to trust altogether to his seeming impunity; but whenever this happen-

ed, the Defter-dar craftily paused, as though he were entering some house beside his path; or fairly swung himself round, and made a few backward steps, as though his route crossed that of his fellow-passenger: thus preventing the perfect view of his person which would have betrayed his continued identity.

And thus it was that the Defter-dar tracked the messenger of Hassan to the dwelling which he entered; and he even ventured to linger for a while in its immediate neighborhood to mark whether he would reappear; but he came not forth again; and the Defter-dar finally bent his steps homeward, with the feeling of one who is just awakening from a perplexed and painful dream.

On the morrow he caused strict but guarded inquiries to be made, and soon learnt the history of the house and its inhabitants. It was the abode, said the neighbors, of a stern and pious matron, Hemdounè Hanoum by name, whose harem was invisible as that of the Grand Seigniour himself: who gave alms largely to the poor; and who welcomed with courtesy every wandering dervish or fakeer who claimed her hospitality, and deemed her cares amply repaid by their prayers and blessings.

In vain did the Defter-dar endeavor by subtle questionings to elicit information of a more mysterious and exciting nature; the whole day was spent in useless efforts to shake, or at least to throw a doubt upon, this well-connected story; and, when evening fell, he became more than ever perplexed as to the measures which he should adopt to penetrate so closely-woven a mystery.

The hour of rest came, and the Defter-dar retired to his bed, but not to sleep. He lay revolving a thousand schemes, each less feasible than the last, until suddenly a new idea burst upon him; when, with a prayer to Allah and the Prophet, he composed himself quietly upon his cushions with a smile upon his lips and slept.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT—CONTINUED.

Early in the morning the purse-bearer of the Defter-dar bent his way to the great Tcharchi of the city, and was absent nearly an hour; and during this time, his master more than once removed the chibouque from his lips, and leaned forward in the attitude of listening. When at length he returned, he passed at once to the presence of the Effendi; and, having made his obeisance, and carefully let fall behind him the heavy screen of tapestry which veiled the door of the apartment, he drew from beneath his ample robe a handkerchief, from which he took the flowing garments of a Bektachy, or Mountain Dervish. There was the wadded cap of cloth with its binding of crimson wool: the buffalo-horn with its leathern sling; the broad belt of untanned leather clasped with a clasp of metal; the scarlet slippers, the heavy rosary, the iron lamp suspended from the girdle, and the ample robe and mantle of serge.

The metamorphosis was speedily completed; and only a few moments had passed since the return of the purse-bearer, ere the ex-courtier stood before him in the full garb of a mountain devotee. But the Defter-dar, however excellent he admitted the disguise to be, would not venture to trust it to the prying eye of day; and the garments were accordingly laid aside until the twilight came to aid, with its long shadows, the enterprise of the adventurous friend.

At length the favorable hour arrived; and when the Defter-dar passed out into the street, in the midst of his own slaves, not a prostration was made, though many an eye turned on him in wonder, as none had seen him enter. Satisfied with this unceremonious proof of his successful transformation, the heart of the Effendi beat high with hope as he pressed forward to the dwelling of the mysterious Hemdounè Hanoum; nor did he allow his hand to falter as he beat upon the well-remembered door.

A weary interval elapsed ere his summons was answered; but ultimately a sturdy slave appeared, who seemed desirous to veil the interior of the dwelling from the gaze of the intruder, as he scarcely opened the portal sufficient to enable the suppliant dervish to perceive that the hall beyond was of vast extent and magnificent proportions, although scantily lighted from the gallery which ran round its lofty walls.

The Defter-dar was not, however, to be diverted from his purpose by the surliness of a porter; and he told his tale of travel and weariness in a tone which at once insured to it the ample credence of his listener.

"The Hanoum Effendi cares not to open her doors after sunset;" said the slave coldly; "she is a widow, and deems it not seemly. But you are a holy man, and you are travel-spent; I will tell her of your arrival, and shall be speedy with my answer. Bashustun, upon my head be it! she shall know that you are at her threshold." And, without awaiting the reply of the Defter-dar, he hastily closed the door, and the sound of his rapidly retreating footsteps soon died away in the distance.

After a brief interval he returned, and with civil words welcomed the stranger to the roof of his mistress, as he stood aside to give him entrance; and the Defter-dar found himself in a stately-hall, paved with marble, around which ran a wide gallery, whence opened a range of apartments. But he had little time to acquaint himself with the locality, for he was hastily hurried forward a considerable distance down one or two dark passages; and, finally, into a second saloon of incomparable beauty, surrounded, like the outer hall, by a gallery, whose heavy balustrades were richly wrought and gilded, and to which access was afforded by a noble flight of marble steps that swept downward on either side of the stately apartment; he cast a hasty glance around as he was about to follow his conductor to a chamber on the ground floor, when a shuffling of slippers was heard, and the slave paused, and bowed reverently before a tall muffled figure which hastily approached him.

"Is this the holy man?" asked a voice which would have been harsh, had not time softened

in some degree its asperity; "Ne bilirim—what can I say? Is this the dervish who claims shelter for the night beneath my roof?" And, as the question was uttered, a lean and withered arm emerged from the mass of drapery, and a bony hand held a lamp close to the face of the pretended devotee.

The Defter-dar bent low before the speaker, and answered humbly in the affirmative.

A shrill, mocking laugh, that rung painfully in his ears, was the result of the assurance; and ere he had recovered from its effects, the mantle in which the female was enveloped was cast off; the lamp that she held transferred to the slave, who still stood silently beside her; and, as she clapped her hands, the doors along the gallery were flung back, disclosing a glare of light by which the Defter-dar was momentarily blinded, while, like a flight of summer birds forth flocked a troop of maidens as fair as the morning, whose ringing and yet musical alughter crented in an instant an atmosphere of joy about them, as they rapidly descended the marble stairs into the hall.

"Ajaib—wonderful! here is one," half-croaked, half shrieked the withered crone who appeared to be the mistress of the revels, "one who comes to us with a chaplet of beads and the robe of a dervish, and thinks to cheat us into a belief of his sanctity! Look to it, all of you, for there must be treachery here." And, as she ceased speaking, the slave put the lamp into the hand of the foremost of the young beauties, who, with a jesture half mocking, half curious, raised it to the face of the merchant, as the old woman had previously done, and then passed it, with a silent shake of the head, to her neighbor.

When each had played her part in this singular pantomime, and that all had disclaimed any knowledge of the stranger's identity, he stood in the centre of the group, utterly unable to conjecture the meaning of a scene such as assuredly he had never before witnessed; and so bewildered were his senses by the loveliness around him, that no fear for his personal safety mingled with his surprise. That the character for piety borne by Hemdonnè Hanoum in the neighborhood, was not altogether merited, he at once perceived; and, as he glanced toward the lean and withered beldame, who stood glaring at him with keen and eager eyes, as though she would read his secret on his brow, strange thoughts and fancies crowded upon him, and he almost began to regret that he had undertaken the adventure. But repentance came too late: he was now utterly in her power, and he felt that firmness alone could save him from its effects.

"Our holy guest faints with travel," once more burst forth the acrid voice of the old woman; "he has toiled all day beneath a hot sun, and there is neither soil nor dust upon his garments; he has left his slippers on the threshold, and the crimson is yet unfaded. Let him, however, blow us one blast upon his buffalo-horn, and we will crave the benefit of his prayers. How now, Effendim, is your breath spent, that you refuse me this courtesy?"

It was, however, no part of the Defter-Dar's purpose to refuse, though he hesitated for a moment ere he complied, being perfectly ignorant of his own capabilities in this new science; and when at last he raised the primitive instrument to his lips, he blew so discordant and unmeasured a blast as threw the laughing maidens into a convulsion of merriment, and perfectly satisfied Hemdonnè Hanoum that her ordinary sagacity had not forsaken her.

"Gel, gel—come, come;" she exclaimed, "we will trouble our pious guest for no more mountain music. He has, however, done his best to amuse us, and we are bound to repay his good-will in kind. Felech-so, my daughter, to your care I confide him; show him the wonders of our fairy palace, and tend him carefully until he has o'ermastered his fatigue—I will be with you anon;" and, with another fiendish laugh, she shuffled from the hall.

Felech-so gazed upon the stranger for an instant, as though some faint and far-off memory were shaping itself into tangibility in her mind; but she did not long indulge so dangerous a mood, and, in the next moment she was busily engaged in assisting her companions to replace the coarse head-gear of the Defter-dar with a turban of consummate cost and beauty, and to throw over his robe of serge a pelisse richly lined and overlaid with sables. When this was done, they led him to a sofa, and established him among the yielding cushions, whose golden embroidery showed gorgeously on its ground of pale lilac satin; and, while one filled his chiboque of jasmin wood, and another handed to him on her knees the minute cup of mocha, in its precio s setting of fillagreed gold, lipped with jewels, Felech-so established herself on a Persian carpet at his feet, and, with her graceful zebec and powerful voice, regulated the movements of a group who had ranged themselves in the centre of the floor, to dance the dance of the harem.

The Defter-dar was dazzled, but he was not blinded. He felt at once that all this was part of a system intended to bewilder and throw him off his guard; but he was no longer young enough to yield up his reason captive to the fascinations of the moment. Dark eyes were flashing round him, white arms were wreathing gracefully in air, and long jetty tresses were falling in rich masses on shoulders as white and smooth as ivory. The Defter-dar saw all, and felt its beauty: but, as he gazed about him, he remembered a tale which had once been told to him by a ginour, of one of the diversions of the far West, where crowds flock together, and seat themselves under pavilions of crimson, to listen to soft music, and to see fair women and graceful men mimic the adventures of every-day life, and live through a long and eventful existence in the course of one brief night. Even thus looked the Defter-dar on the scene around him. He felt that it was a hollow and deceiful pageant, which must ere long fade before sterner and cold realities; and when the bright shapes which had flitted past him in the dance ultimately grouped themselves about him, as if to await his pleasure, he thanked them for their courtesy in a voice as steady as its wont.

The dance had not long ceased when Hemdonnè Hanoum entered the apartment, and, as she crossed the threshold, every fair head bent

low before her. "It is well," she said, as she glanced towards her visitor; "my lord has cast off his disguise, and has now only to tell us his name and rank, ere we devise new modes of amusement to divert his leisure hours."

"Ne bilirim—what can I say? You do your slave too much grace, Effendim," said the Defterdar quietly; "that I am not that which I would fain have seemed, is true, and I will not wrong your sagacity by attempting longer to conceal the fact. But neither am I that which your courtesy would suggest. Your reception has been so much beyond my poor deserts, that I am bound in gratitude to tell you all—"

As the Defter-dar paused for a moment, he accidentally caught the bright eye of Feiech-so fixed eagerly, and, as it seemed, deprecatingly, upon him; but it might have been only fancy that there was warning in her earnest gaze, and he had no opportunity to convince himself of the fact, as her head was hastily averted when their eyes had met.

"I am a merchant, Effendim, trading from a port in the Black Sea to the fair city of Stamboul, and I have just freighted an outward-bound brig with the whole produce of ten years of industry, leaving myself so scantily provided as to be utterly unable to meet the daily outlay necessary to my existence, until the arrival of a brother-merchant, for whom I am anxiously watching from hour to hour; and who has promised me a share in a venture of so profitable a character, that, should he hold to his word, my fortune is made. In this strait, being unwilling to lodge myself in a khan without the present means of paying fairly for the accommodation, I exchanged my usual dress with a dealer in the Tcharchi for the costume of a mountain dervish, well knowing that in that guise I should be certain to profit by the alms of the pious. The fame of the holy and charitable Hemdounè Hanoum reached me as I stood in one of the great thoroughfares of the city, uncertain towards which quarter I should first bend my steps, and decided me at once. I have now confessed myself to be an impostor, Effendim, and should you put me forth, I shall submit to the justice of your fiat without a murmur."

As he ceased speaking, the Defter-dar glanced towards Feiech-so, and this time there could be no mistake. An expression of unutterable relief had passed over her features, but she sat with her face turned slightly aside, and her hands folded upon her bosom, as though she felt no interest in the narration of the stranger.

"And you are then really too poor to lodge yourself in a public caravanserai?" said Hemdounè Hanoum, interrogatively.

"You have said it," was the concise reply.

"Do you not rather mock us with a new fable?" asked the old woman, angrily, "when you amuse us with the tale of your poverty, while you wear upon your finger a diamond which would well nigh ransom a province! Ey vah! we are not to be cheated twice."

For a moment the Defter-dar did not reply—for a second his ready wit deserted him—and the blood rushed in a volume to his brow, as he stood self-convicted of a carelessness which, for aught he knew, might perhaps cost him his life.

That the aged fiend who sat with her keen eyes fixed upon him, evidently gloating over his discomposure, would suffer him to depart after having laid bare before him, for some hidden purpose of her own, the secrets of her household, he was not weak enough to believe even for an instant; and that she would not scruple to rid herself, by the most effectual means, of so profitless a guest, he was equally assured; and, in this dilemma, he resolved to make one more attempt, ere he resigned himself tamely to a fate at which it was not difficult to guess.

"What blossom shall be hidden from the sun? and what sand-rift shall resist the billow?" exclaimed he, as if in admiration of the shrewdness of his hostess. "Is it not in vain that I would conceal even a portion of my secret from Hemdounè Hanoum, to whom it is given to know all things. This ring, Effendim;" and, as in obedience to a gesture of the old woman, he withdrew it from his finger, and placed it in her hand, he remembered with a pang that the precious jewel had been the gift of the Sultan in his days of court favor, and that it was now, in all probability, lost to him for ever!—"this ring is a portion of the mystery. Look on it well, and then tell me if it be not a diamond of surpassing beauty."

The aged woman readily obeyed: she passed the glorious jewel on her own bony finger, and, having examined it near the light, and ascertained that it was without spot or blemish; and that, as she slowly moved her hand to and fro, it gave out a thousand rainbow tints, she withdrew with it into a far corner of the saloon, and there, shading it from the glare of the tapers, she admired the sparks which, with every movement that she made, it flung out into the darkness.

"It is a rare stone!" she said, more blandly than she had yet spoken, as she returned to the side of the Defter-dar; "the Sultan himself hath not a finer. I would fain hear its history ere I restore it to you."

"That shall you not do, Effendim," replied her crafty guest, "if its possession give you pleasure—nay, offer me no acknowledgments, I pray you;" he added, hastily, as his hostess was about to speak: "keep the bauble, and I will tell you all. I have already stated that I am awaiting in Stamboul a merchant of my acquaintance; but I played you false when I pleaded poverty as an extenuation of my disguise. I am about to confide to you a secret upon which hangs my life, but you will not betray me: and brief shall be the period which intervenes ere I repay you a hundred fold for all the courtesies that you have lavished on me. Effendim, the trinket on your finger is a mere toy—the jewel is counterfeit—I came to the city with many such for sale, and I have parted from them all at a heavy sum, save this, which I retained in a weak fit of sentiment, because it had been given to me by my friend ere he admitted me to a share in his adventurous traffic. Many of the stones with which I came laden to Stamboul have found their way into the treasury of the Padishah,* others are in the harems of our

* Sovereign.

wealthiest Pashas, while a few of the meanest are at this moment the boast and wonder of the bezenstein. Were my secret discovered, the bowstring would be my portion; but, meanwhile, so long as I continue unbetrayed, I coin disastres faster than the Taraf-banê* himself."

A deep thoughtfulness settled like a cloud on the stern brow of Hemdounè Hanoum, and she did not immediately reply to the communication of her guest: but, after a while she looked up, and said anxiously: "Do I understand that you have no other jewel of the same sort in your possession?"

"At this moment, none;" answered the guest, readily; "but my friend and principal, Mechmed Cadirè Ishmnël, who himself manufactures them, should arrive in the city to-morrow evening at the latest; and if it be permitted to him to share in the smiles which have lit up my own existence since sunset, I will answer for the readiness with which he will repay the debt of hospitality, by permitting the Hanoum Effendi to select a dozen of the stones, ere he offers them for public sale in the bezenstein, as a memorial of her own charity and our gratitude."

"But he will not know where to find you;" suggested the Hanoum.

"Doubtlessly, should I not myself seek and conduct him hither, he will pursue me in vain;" replied the Defter-dar; "for he will scarcely look to find his comrade Ibrahim in the palace of a Pasha's wife."

"You shall describe the good merchant to my trusty slave Emin;" said the old woman: "and you can write a few words of greeting and invitation, which will be his warrant with your friend."

"You say well, Effendim," was the ready answer; "but I know not the color of his vest, nor the tint of his turban. Mechmed is from the desert, and only leaves the caravan to pass over to the Golden City. There are many of his name in the bezenstein, and your slave may miss him until his fairest merchandise is bartered to the dealers in diamonds, and he has no longer any stones to offer to the Hanoum Effendi, or her ladies."

"It is true," said the crone, after another pause of thought; "I would have kept you here as a surety for his coming, but the jewel which you leave with me convinces me of your good faith. You shall depart then to-morrow at break of day, and at sunset I shall expect you back, accompanied by your friend. It will please me to see his merchandise, and to hear from him the tale of his desert-pilgrimage." She then clapped her hands, and a slave, habited in a flowing robe of crimson and gold, hastily obeyed the signal, and prostrated himself to the earth before her.

"Saduk," she said with peculiar emphasis; "conduct Ibrahim Effendi, my honored guest, to a chamber near the hall of entrance. At daybreak he will depart—hinder him not—I have told you my pleasure."

"To hear is to obey"—was the brief reply; but, as the slave glanced towards the Defter-dar, he could not wholly conceal the astonishment which the words of his mistress had elicited.

* Inspector of the mint.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT—CONTINUED.

In a short time all was silence in that house of mystery. The Defter-dar, greatly to his satisfaction, found himself lodged in a mean apartment opening beside the door of entrance: and having narrowly searched his chamber to ascertain that he could not be intruded upon from any other outlet, threw himself upon his bed to think over the occurrences of the evening. That he was still in considerable danger he was fully aware: for he comprehended at once that he was indebted to the cupidity of his hostess for even the questionable chance of escape which now offered itself. He had marked the sparkle of her eye when she first detected the jewel: he had observed her inward struggle, ere, in the hope of greater gain, she had compelled herself to permit his departure; even yet she might repent! And, as this last fearful reflection crossed his mind, the Defter-dar became uneasy and restless—fearing he knew not what; and at intervals imagining that he detected through the deep stillness the stealthy tread of feet and the rustling of drapery. Hours passed over him thus—hours which appeared to his excited imagination as interminable: when suddenly he become aware that his fancy no longer cheated him, but that some one was beside him, whose deep and hurried breathing came hot and troubled to his brow.

The Defter-dar sprang instantly into a sitting posture, and would have spoken: but a small soft hand was pressed heavily upon his mouth, as the voice of Feleeh-so murmured in his ear: "Khosh-buldûk!—well found! Be calm!—be silent—or you are lost—Hassan is lost—and I shall myself become the sacrifice of your indiscretion. We have no time to lose—listen to me then attentively. Hassan is here, bowed by chains in a loathsome dungeon, where he will be suffered to exist until his friend the Defter-dar, to whom he has been compelled to apply for vast sums, refuses farther to assist him. When the slave who bears his letter first returns empty-handed, Saduk and his comrades will at once end his sorrows with the bow-string: and I need not tell you, Effendim, that the grave betrays no secret. He is one of many who are wasting away their bright youth not a hundred feet beneath the spot where I now stand. Thrice have I saved the life of Hassan, when his hours were numbered by his refusal to write those letters to his friend. The accursed love of gold is the impulse of the vile mistress of this impious house. We, her slaves, the creatures whom she has bought at a price, and tutored in her wickedness, are taught to make our miserable beauty the means of wiling to her roof the young and the wealthy; and here they are compelled to drag on a despairing existence, so long as their prayers for gold are answered by their friends. But Hassan! Hassan! can you not save him from this living death? I have watched over his existence as though my own hung upon its duration, for I have learnt to love him in his misery. I it was who wiled him hither; but now, now," she continued, as her

voice became stifled with agony: "now I would gladly lay down my blighted and unhappy life, to know that he was once more free."

"Tenapouk, tchapouk,—Haste! haste! let me know all," urged the Defter-dar.

"I trembled for you a few hours back," pursued Felech-so, struggling to control her anguish; "I know not why, but, from the moment of your entrance here, a strange wild hope grew in my heart that you were fated to save Hassan —and I trembled lest your own tale should destroy you. But you acted wisely, and for the moment you are saved. Think not, however, that I am duped by your fiction of the false diamond—trust not that Hemdounè Hanoum when in the solitude of her chamber her fiendish avarice yields to her fear of detection and exposure, will not also awaken to a conviction of its falsehood; and suspicious of your motive, place you at once beyond all power of treachery. Wait not for the dawn, or you will never see the rise of another sun. I have drugged the sherbet of Saduk with opium; he should keep the door, but even now he sleeps a sleep as deep as that of the grave. Take the key from his girdle, and fly—return speedily, but be it with help and arms—away. I dare not linger another moment—farewell, and remember Felech-so."

As the last words passed her lips, the Defter-dar was conscious that she had left his side; and an instant afterwards a cold stream of air, entering through a concealed opening in the wall of his apartment, assured him of her departure.

Not a moment was to be lost, and, hastily seizing the turban and pelisse which lay beside his bed, the excited courtier strode silently into the hall. An expiring lamp still flung a dim and uncertain light on the surrounding objects, and by its assistance he at once distinguished the form of Saduk, stretched on a mat in a heavy sleep. For one instant, and but one, the Defter-dar hesitated. Should this nocturnal visit be only a part of the plot, to induce him to exhibit suspicion, and thus afford a plausible pretext for violence? but immediately came the reflection that, if violence were indeed intended, no action of his own would be required as an apology for its exercise—and had not Felech-so told him that Hassan yet lived—in misery, and suffering, and chains? The Defter-dar despised himself that he had yielded even momentarily to the promptings of his cowardice; and, bending over Saduk for an instant to assure himself that his slumber was not feigned, he possessed himself of the huge key that was hidden amid the folds of the shawl which bound his waist, and ere long found himself beneath the broad moonlight in the open street.

The Defter-dar stopped not to admire the beautiful effects of light and shade which presented themselves as he hurried on, but hastily pursued his way to his own habitation; feeling as though he had been absent from his home for months; so much had he been impressed by the rapid and extraordinary events of the evening.

Morning was just beginning to break over the Asian hills when he reached his own door, and beat loudly for admittance: and he had traversed his accustomed chamber more than on and examined minutely the rich pelisse, and t costly cachemire that composed his turban, e he could quite convince himself that he had r just awakened from a troublous dream. As l thoughts unravelled themselves slowly from t chaos of memories in which they were involve the Defter-dar was glad that he had retain these vouchers for his story, for the more mused upon the night's adventure, the more felt its apparent improbability and romanc and, conscious of the imperative necessity speedy and powerful measures, in order to p serve the life of Hassan, he knew that he h but one line of conduct to pursue; and th painful and humiliating as it was, he could r hope for success through any other means.

Never since his dismission from office had t ex-courtier sought the presence of the Sulta he felt that he had been wronged for a n favorite, and he had too much self-respect expostulate, where he was conscious that exp tulation would avail him nothing. And no when years had gone by, and it might be, tl his very name was forgotten by Mourad, he w about to present himself at the foot of the thro as a suppliant—as an actor in a wild and qu tionable drama—as a mad and fool-hardy adv turer.

The resolution of the Defter-dar did not fal for an instant but his pride revolted, and sickened under his task, as he bent his way the Sublime Porte to supplicate an audience the Sultan. Well was it for him that he ca in a fortunate hour; for the court astrolo had predicted that every undertaking of Imperial master during this auspicious mo should prosper to his heart's content; and, a chanced that it had hitherto offered little sa satiety to the high-hearted monarch, he at o consented to receive his discarded courtier, a to lend a favorable ear to his petition, be what it might.

But Sultan Mourad, when he so gracious signified his pleasure, looked not to be rep by a tale so wild and strange as that of the Treasurer: and he had scarcely heard it to end ere he exclaimed earnestly:—Bè hèy what's this? Why, it surpasses our most s guine hopes! There is still adventure to found in our good city! Why have you b so long absent from our presence, my lord Treasurer? We have always respected the m though we dismissed the minister. And y are to return to the haunts of these you Houri, said you not so? and your friend is to admitted on your responsibility!"

"Light of the World!" replied the Defter-d as he still remained prostrate before the Sult "I was compelled to the promise in order save my life; for myself, I have resolved keep my word; and it is to crave your subli appro-al and assistance that I am now a s pliant in the dust before you—but the fabl at an end: the rest of the adventure must achieved by force; for none would venture share with me the risk of further deception."

"Bakalum—we shall see. You forget whom you speak," said the excited Moura "you shall yet play your part, even to the e

—you shall still be Ibrahim Effendi, and I will personate Mechmed Cadrè Ishmael, the manufacturer of diamonds! Mashallah, it is a good trade, and one that were well worth the learning! We shall pave our palaces with gold-dust when we have mastered the mystery! And now, withdraw, Effendim: we have of late had some defalcations in our public treasury, and you bring us a secret so unlooked-for and so welcome, that we owe you an instant demonstration of our gratitude: retire then, Defterdar, and at sunset return hither, for we shall look for you, and be prepared to start upon our expedition."

The Minister, reinstated at once in favor of the Sultan and in his long-forfeited dignities, kissed the hem of the sacred garment, and withdrew from the presence to muse over his unexpected good fortune. It was to Nefzi-Sabah that he first confided it; but gradually the happy intelligence spread through the household, and thence to the world beyond; and long ere the setting sun warned the restored favorite that the hour had arrived when he was once more to set forth in pursuance of an adventure which had already so deeply benefited his fortunes, his ante-room was filled with long-oblivious friends, who were suddenly seized with eager and earnest anxiety for his social and bodily welfare!

On arriving at the palace, the Defter-dar was immediately ushered with much ceremony to a private apartment, which he had scarcely entered when he perceived an individual, plainly clad in the common garb of a merchant, advancing towards him; and he had barely time to bend his forehead to the earth, when the Sultan exclaimed gaily:—"Rise, Ibrahim, my brother; with this coarse and somewhat inconvenient garb I have for a time doffed the Padishah. We should now be on our way; and I can acquaint you as we traverse the city with the plans which I have formed to ensure success of our undertaking. To our task, then, Ibrahim! The sun will set ere long; and you were pledged to return to the hospitable halls of Hemdounè Hanoum ere nightfall."

The word of Mourad was law; and the god of day had scarcely dipped his golden hair in the blue waters of the Bosphorus, when the two disguised merchants beat upon the door of Hassar's prison-house.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DIAMOND MERCHANT—CONTINUED.

They were evidently not expected; for, as on the occasion of the Defter-dar's former visit, they were detained for a considerable time ere the door was cautiously opened; but, at sight of the well-remembered face of the merchant Ibrahim the slave hastily bade them enter, and as hastily closed the door behind them. The words of his greeting were courteous, but its manner struck both the Sultan and his companion, as dark and threatening; and it was without regret that they obeyed his bidding, and remained alone together in the hall, while he hastened to apprise his mistress of their arrival.

If they had been detained in the street, they had no cause to complain of delay on the part of the old woman. Only a few seconds had elapsed, ere the rapid shuffling of her slippers was heard in the distance, and the two merchants bent low before her, as she emerged from the long gallery, and stood beside them.

"Khosh geldin—you are welcome;" she exclaimed hastily.

"Khosh bûlûk—well found," was the ready reply of her visiters, as they repeated the salâm aleikum.

"Why, this is well, Ibrahim, my son;" she said, with a smile whose fierceness she could not wholly conceal; "after having played the truant in such unseemly style, as to give us room to doubt at once your truth and your honesty, you reappear, according to your promise, when we had abandoned all hope of again receiving you as a guest. And this, then, is the honorable merchant your friend, Mechmed Cadrè Ishmael! He is welcome to my house; and the more so that you are his companion. But come, come;" she added, somewhat impatiently; "the hall is chilly, and we waste time." Then, as she moved slowly on before, them, attended by the slave bearing a lamp, she muttered in a low voice, which distinctly reached the ear of the Sultan, who was immediately behind her: "And I am to select a score of stones—a score! poor fools, poor fools—are they not all mine—*all?*" and a fiendish chuckle and a clenching of the thin bony hands filled up the measure of her meaning.

"But tell me, Effendim, tell me," she said, a moment afterwards; "you, Ibrahim, my friend, it is to you I speak, and the excellent merchant, your associate, will pardon me that I neglect him for a while—tell me, I pray you, wherefore you fled from my dwelling last night, like one who apprehended evil? Did any offer you insult or annoyance? Did any wild suspicion, or weak alarm, prompt your flight? Tell me honestly, for I hate mystery."

"Surely the Hanoum Effendi jests with her slave;" was the reply of the Defter-dar; "the cause was too simple to need long seeking. I had an ill dream, which somewhat ruffled me, and, to rid myself of its effects, I passed from my chamber into the hall, that I might breathe more freely, when I was attracted by the sight of the slothful Sadûk. I knew at once that he should keep the door, and I remembered that the safety of Hemdounè Hanoum and her whole household depended on the vigilance of this snoring slave. I did not awaken him, for the thought struck me that I could teach him a lesson more likely to produce amendment than any reproaches, and accordingly, I resolved, even at some inconvenience to myself, to depart without his assistance, in order to prove to him that his sluggishness, might, under some circumstances, have been the cause of mischief. If I did wrong, the Hanoum Effendi will pardon me—as to the slaves who slumber when they should watch, what are they? haïvan der—they are animals!"

"Twas shrewdly done," said the old crone; "a deed after my own heart. I have myself

finished the work which you began so bravely; and there is now no fear that the slave Saduk will ever sleep upon his post again."

As she uttered the words, the party emerged from the dark passage along which they had been slowly advancing, and found themselves in a superb saloon, brilliantly lighted, and occupied by half a score of young beauties, among whom the Defter-dar instantly recognized Felech-so. But ere he made his salutation to the bright band, he gave one hurried glance at the old woman, and remarked with satisfaction that every shade of suspicion had vanished from her haggard countenance.

The guests were soon seated on the sumptuous divan, beside their hostess, and supplied with chibouques and coffee by the fair hands of her attendant maidens; and then the impatience of Hemdounè Hanoum became uncontrollable, and she abruptly desired the merchant Mechmed Cadîrè Ishmaël to display his diamonds.

The Sultan bowed low, and thrust his hand amid the folds of his girdle, but suddenly withdrew it, and pressed it upon his brow with an expression of acute pain. "Air! air!" he exclaimed convulsively, "Ibrahim, air, or I faint!"

"Quick! quick!" shouted the hostess in her turn; "look that the lattices be firm, and throw up the casement; see ye not that the Effendi labors for breath."

Felech-so was the first to obey the bidding; she sprang upon the divan with the rapidity of lightning, and flung the wide casement back to its fullest extent; and, as the sweet breath of evening came softly into the apartment, the merchant slowly revived. A goblet of water, tendered to him by one of the ladies, completed his recovery, and he lost no time in gratifying the curiosity of his hostess.

The joy of Hemdounè Hanoum amounted almost to insanity, as her guest spread before her some of the costliest jewels of the Imperial Treasury. Her wasted fingers opened and shut, as though she were already clutching them in spirit; and her eager eyes fastened on them as if she feared their instant disappearance, and would thrall them with a look.

"Gulu*—Zembrut†—Maitap‡—Felech-so—" she exclaimed, addressing the individuals on whom her glance chanced to fall; "we have made a precious harvest to-night! The ransom of an Emperor! And now we will waste no more time upon these simple idiots, who have brought their own necks to the bow-string;" and she was about to clap her hands, to summon some one without, when the Defter-dar seized her forcibly by the arm, as she shouted, "Fools! maniacs! close the casement, if you would not have the kavashlir§ upon us, and call hither Mèmish and Ferhat; are we to be frightened by the impotent violence of two hair-brained madmen?"

One of the maidens sprang to the window, but she was held back by Felech-so, who had already stationed herself beside it; and the progress of the others towards the door was arrested by the Sultan, who, as he flung himself across their path, drew a pistol from his girdle, and fired it through the open casement. The repo of the shot was answered by a shrill cry fro the minaret of a neighboring mosque; and th Sultan had scarcely wrenched from the hand o the fiendish old woman a dagger which she ha aimed at him, ere the room was full of arme men. Thick and fast they poured in throug the shivered casements on all sides of the dwe ling; and the clatter of their arms, and thei shrill cries, as they pursued each other throug the intricate passages of the house sounded fea fully through the silence of the night.

The saloon in which the Sultan stood in thi dwelling of darkness presented a singular spec tacle as the Janissaries prostrated themselve before him. Strown over the rich Persian car pet were the costly jewels which had been scatter ed during the struggle of the Defter-dar with th old woman; in the centre of the floor stood th Sultan, his brow dark, and his eye bright witl a terrible meaning. In one corner of the apart ment were clustered together a group of lovely girls, splendidly attired, and wan with fear while on the rich sofa of gold and azure, lay th graceful form of Felech-so, one round white arm falling over the edge of the divan, and a slender stream of blood flowing from her bosom to the floor.

The signal shot of the Sultan had been fired in haste, and the ball had terminated the life of the fair and gentle Felech-so.

My tale is almost told. The wretched Hemdounè Hanoum was bow-strung by two of her own slaves, who had been made captive by the Janissaries. Coldly and sternly, Mourad, as they were brought trembling before him, inquired of each his name; and then, selecting from their number, Mèmish and Ferhat, who had been destined to the honor of terminating his own existence, he stood by to see his will accomplished. The victim uttered no cry—made no supplication—but submitted to her fate with a recklessness worthy of her impious life; and, as her quivering body was flung down by her executioners, the Sultan bade them conduct him to the prison of Hassan.

The report of Felech-so to the Defter-dar was true in every particular. The vaults beneath the house had been converted into dungeons; where, surrounded by squalor, filth, and wretchedness, loaded with chains, and attenuated by hunger, the Sultan found not only Hassan, but a score of other victims, all young men of wealth or rank, many of whom had been lost to their families for years.

The joy of the miserable prisoners may be imagined, when they recognized their deliverers. Hassan fell on the neck of the Defter-dar and wept, and, as his chains were struck off, he mingled with his gratitude an inquiry for Felech-so; and his tears only flowed the faster when he learnt that she had perished in the service of her affection.

Of the fate of her companions there is no record; but, as they were Eastern women who had come under the ban of the law, it is not difficult to imagine it; while it is certain that, in many of the state documents subsequent to this adventure, mention is made of a certain Hassan Pasha, who held a high office of State

* Rose. † Emerald. ‡ Moonlight. § City police.

during the latter part of the reign of Sultan Mourad the Second.*

PART II.

CHAPTER IX.

"Taib! taib!—well done, well done!" exclaimed Carimfil Hanoum, as the fair Massaldjhe ceased speaking; "Y'Allah! 'tis a wondrous tale, and my ears have drunk it in like soft music; but, truly, as you forewarned me, it is somewhat of the saddest. The calam† which traced it must have grown beside a swift river, and been fanned by the breeze of evening; and, ne bilirim—what can I say? methinks that I better love a tale of happier issue."

The young Greek only replied by lifting her instrument from the cushion on which she had laid it when she commenced her narrative, and smilling archly at her friend, as, with rapid utterance, she poured forth the following ballad.

THE LOST ONE.

"The winds of our mountains, how gladsome they are;
But the voice of my loved one is sweeter by far,
As on his swift Arab, as bright as the day,
He comes from my bondage to bear me away.

"They have wreathed my dark tresses with blossom and gem,
But my heart has no fondness to lavish on them;
I was sought by a stranger—they made me his bride,
And my free spirit pines in its passionate pride.

"Speed! speed! to the rider who comes like the wind!
Whom no peril can daunt, and no fetter can bind;"
So sang the sweet voice which we welcome no more,
For the bride of the stranger has fled with the giaour!

"Enough, khatoun—darling;" said the fair Circassian in a low whisper, as a deep blush mantled her brow and bosom; "I like your ballad even less than your history, for it tells a tale to which it is a sin to listen."

"I have done," smiled her companion, "and now we will hearken to the fall of the fountains, the murmuring of the winds in the mimosa trees, and the song of the caged birds; for, truly, they make sweet music."

Not long, however, had the fair friends resigned themselves in silence to the calm beauty of the hour, and the train of thought which it engendered, when a slave approached with intimation that the Pasha purposed paying a visit to the harem after the evening meal; and, his wife having signified her readiness to receive him, the ladies shortly afterwards removed to another apartment, in which the supper had been spread by their attendants.

Cushions of delicate pink satin, sprinkled with golden stars, were placed beside the silver tray on which the meal was to be served; napkins of muslin, as white and fine as gossamer, exquisitely embroidered and fringed with colored silks and silver, were laid carefully across their knees and over their arms; tepid rose-water, poured from a richly gilded vase into a basin of the same material, was showered upon their white and taper fingers, and the repast commenced.

A line of slaves, extending from the low tray to the door of the apartment, passed the dishes, which were served singly, from hand to hand; the one nearest to her mistress setting it down before her upon her knees.

Not a word was spoken as the meal proceeded, which was accompanied by the voices of half-a-dozen slave girls grouped together at the extreme end of the room. There were the delicate keftas, balls of highly seasoned force-meat; tehalva, a dish made of flour, honey, and oil; kaimack, an exquisite preparation of thickened cream; monlibé, a species of inferior blanc mange, much prized by the Orientals, and eaten with powdered sugar and rose-water; kiabubs of lamb, served up on skewers of jasmine wood; kubeh, spiced meat, minced, and rolled in vine-leaves, baked crisp; dolmas, a similar preparation stewed in cream; tchorba, or soup of several descriptions; dried beef, prepared with garlic, the Turkish substitute for ham; and all the various provocatives to appetite which fill up the measure of an Oriental repast; and, lastly, the national pillauf, richly colored with tomato juice, and flavored with quails. Sherbets and coffee succeeded; and, having once more bathed their fair hands in perfumed water, Carimfil Haroum and her Greek friend returned to the garden saloon to await the coming of the Pasha.

The sun was just setting, and the tall sycamores which bounded the view were gleaming in gold and orange; while, as the rays fell upon the noble sheet of water immediately below the casement, they shed a soft pink tint upon the marble basin, and over the pale blossoms of the lotos flowers.

"How fair must this sweet evening close upon the mountains of my beloved land!" sighed out the beautiful Circassian; "can you not picture to yourself, Katinka mou, the glory of this rich light flung over the blessed valley, where—"

But the kadeun* had no time to localize her picture; for, as she was speaking, the tapestry curtain of the inner door was lifted by a couple of negro slaves, and the Pasha entered the apartment.

"Salâm aleikum," said the Satrap, as the ladies rose to receive him.

"Aleikum Salâm," replied his wife, as he advanced towards the sofa; while the Greek, retiring a few paces, stood silent in an attitude of deep respect.

"Keifiniz ayi me—is your humor good?" asked the Pasha, as his young wife bent her knee and pressed his hand to her lips and brow.

"Guzel—good:" was the answer; "my lord has brought joy to the heart of his slave, for he has restored to her the sister of her soul."

* Wild, romantic, and improbable, as this tale will appear to European readers, it is nevertheless strictly true; having been drawn from the archives of the Turkish Empire, and related by Peronsse Hanoum, the lady Secretary of the Sultana Azmé, for the purpose of being communicated to me, during my residence at Constantinople, in the year 1836. Mourad, or as he is styled in England, Amurath II., was a prince devoted to adventure, and of great personal courage.

† Pen made from a reed.

* Lady.

The Satrap glanced for the first time towards Katinka: "Approach, kizem—my daughter;" he said kindly; "I have much to thank you for, when I see the bloom and the light restored to this jewel of my existence; you have been a skilful physicinn; every hakeem whom I have hitherto consulted has been an ass and the father of asses; but you have brought back joy to my harem, as the dawn brings back light. Who has taught you a skill valuable as the precepts of the Korān, and sure as the Paradise of the Prophet? How is it that, while the wise men of the land have heaped upon my head the dirt of disappointment, you have spread for my feet the carpet of content?"

"Allah buyūk der—the Kadeun Hanoum has rejoiced in my minstrelsy, and we have broken together the spiced bread of memory," was the reply. "The heart, when it is sad, ever loves to fall back upon the past; the river may flow through many valleys, but its waters have all been fed from the same source, and they cannot change their nature."

"And yet, what is the past?" said the Satrap philosophically, as he took from the hand of an attendant his richly ornamented chibouque, of which the boudaka, or bowl, was curiously gilt, and painted; "is it not bosh—nothing! The song that has been sung, the tale that has been told, the sherbet that has been drunk, what avail they? Bashustun—On my head be it! They are even less than nought—I have said it."

"Otour, janum—Sit, my soul;" was his next exclamation, as he withdrew for an instant the chibouque from his lips, and turned towards his wife: and when, profiting by this gracious permission, she had placed herself on the extreme edge of the sofa on which he was comfortably established, a motion of the hand implied a similar command to the young Greek, who obeyed it by taking her place on a pile of cushions at the feet of her friend.

"Bèyaz;" said the Satrap a moment after as he looked up; "I have been searching for the cause of your vaunted cleverness, and I find not in the chambers of my brain one with which I can feel satisfied. Hai—true, you are a Greek, and the women of your nation are content to turn over the leaves of knowledge, and to trace the characters of communication themselves, while the fair inmates of our harems—Alhemdullilah—praise be to Allah!—sit quietly upon their sofas, and for a few piastres, purchase the labors of others; but you do more than this—you are as a daughter of Frangistan—as a sister of the Unbelievers, who walk the streets with their faces naked, and pour dust upon the heads of the karabashes, the wise men of our country, who double up their feet upon the sofa of science, and pour the sherbet of study into the goblet of learning. Mashallah! Frangi domous—the Franks are hogs—and their women are the sisters of Sheitan, and the hand-maidens of Eblis!" and the Pasha spat upon the carpet, overcome at once by indignation and fatigue.

"The women of the Franks, what are they, that we should talk of them?" asked the Circassian. "Do not their own husbands hold them so lightly that they may come and go as they list, and receive strange men in their harems, and sit at meat with them unrebuked Are they not giaours and unbelievers?"

"Taib—well said; why should we talk of them, guzum, my eyes!" replied the Pasha; "are they not as almè,* wandering from house to house unveiled, and smiling upon every beyzadeh† who smokes from the chibouque of their husband? Ajaib!—wonderful!"

"Have you ever looked upon one of these unhappy ones?" asked the Hanoum anxiously.

"But once, janum, and that was at Stamboul, before I took possession of my pashalik; and, ouf!"—and again he assumed an expression of intense disgust. "She had neither turban upon her head, nor henna upon her hands! When I peered at her from behind a curtain, for I would not enter her apartment, she had a Frankish calam in her hand, and she was tracing upon the leaf of an open volume a knot of flowers that was lying open before her; and I swear by the Korān that I could scarcely tell the precise blossom to which the prophet had given life. Who could breathe the breath of peace in a harem where his women could laugh at him to his beard!"

"Mashallah! who indeed?" murmured the young wife; and for a time there was silence.

Katinka, whose zebec lay beside her, wearied of the dull common-places to which she had been so long compelled to listen, swept her hand across the strings of her instrument, and at once changed the current of the Pasha's thoughts.

"Pekahi—very well," he said smilingly, "be it so—we will have music." And, without further bidding, the maiden poured forth one of the wild melodies of her country.

"I have been thinking of you as you sang;" said the Satrap, as the strain ceased, and the young Greek remained with her head bent over the zebec, to conceal the large tears that were standing in her eyes; "and as I have no more important occupation than to listen, I would fain hear your history, and terminate a perplexity of which it fatigues me to attempt a solution. Do I say well, Carimfil, janum, shall she tell us the tale of her life?"

"As my lord wills;" said the Circassian in a low melancholy accent; "she lives but to obey you."

The young Greek passed her hand before her eyes, flung back the clustering braids which had fallen over her face, and after having continued silent for a moment, turned a long speaking look upon her friend, and commenced her story.

CHAPTER X.

"I am a native of Scio, of that delicious island which, mirrored in the clear waters of the Egean, and rich in all the prodigal gifts of nature, appeared to have sprung from the blue depths of ocean to give to man a renewed glimpse of the forfeited but unforgotten Eden. I dare not detail to my lord, as my Greek heart

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* Dancing girls. † Son of a lord

would dictate, all the horrors to which my birth-place became a prey. Again the serpent stole upon the calm happiness of innocence; and again man was driven out into the wilderness of the world; but this time it was with blood and tears—"

"Mashallah!" broke in the Pasha; "if you put so many words to the firing of a town and the murder of a few thousand revolted Greeks, your narrative is likely to last to the next Ramazan! But go on; it may perchance mend as you proceed—Bakalum—we shall see."

"The cry of blood rose to heaven;" pursued Katinka, heedless of the interruption, and rather speaking to herself than addressing the Pasha; "and in heaven's good time it will be answered! How many happy ones did a brief day make orphans! Shrieks and groans rang through the groves which had so lately resounded with laughter and music; and the graceful limbs that had led the romaika under the shade of the tall sycamore and the drooping safsaf,* lay maimed and bleeding by the wayside. All was terror and dismay; and my affrighted mother, seizing with frantic haste my brother and myself by the hand, hurried us along by-paths little frequented, and quite unknown to our enemies, to a cavern in the rock, which had already afforded refuge to a score of other fugitives. Meanwhile the flames of the burning villages rose into the air in volumes, and the occasional discharge of musketry continued throughout the night. My mother sat upon the ground, with her head buried on her knees, my brother was beside her, and I lay at her feet, and slept, overcome by fatigue and terror.

"Through the agency of a relative, who lost his wife and children during the massacre, after four tedious and miserable days spent in the cavern, during which we subsisted on shell-fish and wild berries, collected by the boldest of the wretched company during the night; we escaped in the frail bark of a fisherman, whom the hope of gain had induced to hover about the island, and who landed us ere the day was spent on a bleak rock, where we continued until we could safely transport ourselves to Athens; our faithful fisherman supplying us with food, and ultimately informing the friends to whom we were anxious to be conveyed, of our destitute and miserable condition.

"Landed in Greece, we were in comparative security; and the uncle of my mother, a wealthy merchant, without any nearer relatives than ourselves, lavished upon us every luxury which his affection could procure or devise; but my poor mother's heart was broken: and, while I was yet a child, she was laid beneath an acacia tree to rest.

"We were now wholly dependent on Age Aneste, our uncle, and we became to him as children; all the advantages that gold could secure he poured forth upon us; but even that effort would not satisfy his love. We were about to be transported to Frangistan, to a sea-port of the Gauls, touching on the gulf of Genoa, and there—"

"Y' Allah?—in the name of the Prophet, how say you? Have you been in the land of the infidel?" exclaimed the Pasha, suddenly aroused from his indifference; "know you not that the country of the Unbelievers is but a menzi khaneh, a post-house, on the road to Jehannum?"

"Shukiur Allah!—heaven be praised, the sole of my foot has never been polluted by treading the soil of the ginour;" replied the young Greek, with a quiet smile. "I was about to inform your highness that the feluccn was at anchor before the city, when a Frank stranger arrived with his only child at the house of one whom Age Aneste loved, and in whose company he passed a great portion of his time. When they landed in Greece, it was evident to all who looked upon the stranger that he had come there only to die. His eye burnt with a fierce light which was almost dazzling, and there was a bloom upon his cheek better suited to a stripling than to one whose head was white with the snows of age. The Frank was devoured by the disease which is the plague of his country; and the hakeems of his own land had sent him forth in despair from the fogs and snows of his unhappy clime to our more genial East; he had passed rapidly from one fair island to another, with the restlessness of his disease and of his people; until, feeling that the angel Azrael was rapidly folding his wings about him, he resolved to visit Greece, though well he knew that it must be his burial-place.

"I have spoken of his child—it was a daughter, with eyes like the blue heaven that floods the world with beauty, and hair as golden as the last rays of the setting sun. Alas! she hoped on to the last; and when Allah at length recalled the breath that he had given, and she was left alone, she prayed in her anguish that the same stone might cover them. She lived on, however, for the prayer of the bursting heart was set aside in mercy; and she became an inmate of my uncle's house. From her I learnt the lore of the Franks, and when she at length followed her father to the grave—for the poisoned shaft which had struck down the strong man lurked also in the veins of the golden-haired child of his love—we mourned for her as though she had been of our own blood.

"Affairs of commerce calling Age Aneste to Circassia, he determined, in order to remove the melancholy which had fastened vampire-like upon my heart, to carry my brother and myself with him upon his interesting expedition. Then and there it was, your highness, that, for a few brief and happy months I enjoyed the friendship of the beautiful Curimfil Hanoum, whom may Allah long preserve in loveliness! When his affairs were settled, my uncle pined for his own land, and the familiar comforts of his own roof, but my brother's bolder spirit had become enamoured of the mountain life, and the generous hospitality of Circassia, and he resolved to follow out his fortunes in the war which the brave mountaineers were waging with the Muscovites. Heaven was merciful, for on our return to Athens, our feluccn was taken by a Turkish vessel; my unhappy uncle died like a brave Greek, with his weapon in his hand; and, for myself," —and the voice of the maiden faltered, and the bitter tears of anguish fell upon her bosom—"I am pursuing my destiny—nursed in blood, and

* Egyptian willow.

reared in exile, I am now wearing away my youth in slavery—"

"Nay, not so, Khatoun;" exclaimed the Circassian, throwing her white arms about her friend, heedless of the presence of the Pasha; "your sorrows now are ended, your life shall be one of sunshine, and they who oppress or injure you shall be the enemies of the Satrap."

"Taïb—well said;" echoed Saïfula Pasha; "I will pluck out their beards, and fill the r nostrils with ashes. But we have had enough of grief—let your slaves be summoned, Effendi mou, that the dance may dry up your tears, which are pouring out like the fountains of the desert. Inshallah! I would rather see the flowers when the sunshine rests upon them, than when the shower falls heavy on their heads, and bends them earthward."

Carimfil Hanoum clapped her hands, and the dancing girls of her harem speedily entered, greatly to the satisfaction of the Satrap; who, when he commanded the narration of Katinka, had by no means anticipated so gloomy a history; and who was far better amused by the monotonous twanging of the wiry Turkish mandolins, and the meaningless movements of the slaves, than he would have been by all the fables of the wily Scheherazade herself.

To the dance succeeded a shrill chorus of voices, sufficient to have cracked the drums of any ears save those of an Osmanli; and, when the musicians had performed their prostrations, and quitted the apartments, Carimfil Hanoum, anxious to reinstate her friend in the good graces of her husband, whose favor had evidently been much lessened by the saddening nature of her story, by which he had nearly been put to sleep, and, at the same time to diminish its effect upon her own spirits, roused herself by a violent effort, and said laughingly—

"The moon is as bright to-night as the sword of the Padishah—'tis an hour for a love-tale; aye, and one of happy issue. Have you none such, guzum? Bak—see! you have but to look at those threads of silver flung over the leaves like a net-work, in order to weave a thousand gladsome fancies, and to dispel at once the gloom of the Satrap, who has done nought but sigh since the singing women left the apartment."

"Guzel!—good, good:" smiled the Pasha, "'tis a good thought, janum—my soul; but we will have no more revolts, nor pirates, nor Frank women wandering into far lands to die, instead of waiting quietly upon their sofas the coming of Azraël; as they would have done had they covered their faces, and not eaten dirt from their childhood. But first"—and he clapped his hands, and said gravely to the negro who answered his summons, "Chibouque, cahveh getir—bring pipes and coffee;" ere he turned gaily towards the young Greek, and added, with a self-gratulatory chuckle at his own wit. "First pass the sponge of oblivion over the parchment of memory, and fold your feet upon the cushion of delight; for if you fail to make me laugh ere I leave the harem, I will condemn you to prepare your pillauf with green rice; so let your words be your slaves, that they may make smiles as plentiful in my harem as roses in the gardens of Nishapor."

The fair Greek bowed her head, and laid her hand upon her heart and lips; and, when the cafejhis had retired, prepared to obey the Pasha by relating the story of—

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEVEN DOORS.

Not above a hundred years ago, there lived in the city of Stamboul, near the mosque of Sultan Bajazet, a shawl merchant named Suleiman, to whom the prophet had been auspicious, and who had consequently accumulated immense wealth. For sixty-five years he had been content to see his harem occupied only by his very aged mother and her slaves: but at the termination of that period, as he was one day sitting in the Shawl Bazär, his attention was attracted by the stately form and graceful carriage of a female, who paused for a moment beside his carpet to examine a magnificent eachemire of Lahore, which he was in the act of displaying to a Frank customer, and then hastily passed on attended by a slave.

The Frank purchased the shawl, and the bright eyes of the fair pedestrian had so far favored him, that he did not pay above a thousand piastres more than its value; Suleiman having, in his temporary bewilderment of spirit, named to the Giaour the very sum which he would have demanded of a True Believer; and, when the merchant had carefully deposited the gold in his tobacco purse instead of the more legitimate receepticle destined for his gains, and had inhaled in silence the aroma of a newly-replenished chibouque, he was aroused from his fit of musing by the voice of his neighbor Najib, an Adrianopolitan by birth, and, like himself, a shawl merchant by profession, who had witnessed the bargain with some surprise; but with that quiet philosophy of non-interference common in the East.

"Allah moutèyemmin èilèyè—Allah grant that it may be of good omen to you:" he said calmly. "The dog of an infidel was ready with his gold, and paid it fairly; but you, methinks, were somewhat over-hasty on your side, or you might have counted it up to a heavier sum. Even the light-footed daughter of old Abdullah, the silversmith, stopped for a moment as she passed, in wonder at your fair dealing with a Giaour."

"Mashallah—Allah be praised—the eye must be keen that pierces the folds of a yashmae,"* retorted the other, thoroughly aroused by the subject; "How know you, Effendim, that Abdullah has a daughter? or that the girl who just walked through the bazär was his child?"

"To your first question, I answer that my wife asked her for our son Hafiz, but it was not his kismet—his fate—to be pleasing in the eyes of the old man; and to the second, that the negress who followed her was reared up in my own harem, and bade 'God guard me,' as she stepped beside my carpet."

* Veil worn by Turkish women.

Suleiman smoked on after this short dialogue in silence: a new idea had sprung into existence in his mind; and he remained quietly resolving the subject until an hour before sunset, at which period the teharchi* closes; when, having exhausted his last pipe, he rolled up his carpet, secured his costly merchandise, and walked slowly homeward.

"It is my felech—my constellation"—he murmured to himself, as he cast off his slippers at the door of the harem, and proceeded to pay a visit to his mother; "What is to be, will be!" And having indulged in this consolatory and soothing reflection, Suleiman, the shawl merchant philosophically resigned himself to his fate! "Allah kerim—Allah is merciful!"—he said quietly, as he took possession of a cushion near the sofa on which his aged and widowed parent sat supported by pillows: "Allah kerim—my home has hitherto been one of solitude, and the hair of my mother has grown gray with years; and as yet she has had no daughter to pour water into her goblet, nor coffee into her cup—but this must not be for ever—I have said it."

"Allah kerim!" echoed the old woman in her turn: "the Prophet has heard my prayer. I will see Hamet the slave-merchant, before the set of to-morrow's sun."

"Nay, not so;" was the reply; "I have heard that Abdullah the silversmith, he who wrought the mangal† for the Sultan's new palace, hath a daughter; men speak well of him, and his beard is white. I will marry the girl."

"Pekahi—very well," answered the aged crone: "then will I see the Hanoum, her mother; the Imaum shall be warned; and next week her foot shall be on your threshold."

"Abdullah hath refused her to Hafiz, the son of Najib;" observed the suitor with a sudden misgiving.

"And what of that?" asked his mother sharply; "is it not bosh—nothing? Hafiz is a mere boy, and the camel is not yet foaled which will carry him to Mecca."

Even on the morrow did Gunduz Hanoum (for thus was the mother of Suleiman called—Gunduz signifying Daylight, though the sun of her mortal sky had long been set, and her existence dwindled away into a mere gloaming; and Hanoum being translated, reading as lady or mistress:) even on the morrow did she set forward upon her interesting errand. Nor had the aged ambassadress the most remote doubt as to the success of her mission: true, the silversmith had refused to give the maiden to Hafiz, the first-born of Najib, the Adrianopolitan; but Najib was not a man of substance, and the son fed only upon his father's fortunes; while Suleiman——

It was at this point of her musing that the araba, or latticed carriage, of Gunduz Hanoum stopped before the harem of the mother of Hafiz; and when the arabajhe had beaten upon the door, and it had been opened by some invisible means from within, her slaves slowly lifted her from her cushions, and bore her into the hall of Abdullah's house, whence she was supported up stairs; and, having traversed a wide corridor surrounded by the women's apartments, she was ushered into the principal room of the harem, and the presence of its mistress.

"Bouroum—you are welcome;" said the lady, rising courteously from her sofa, as the guest entered; and she motioned the decrepid old woman to the place of honor; "You are welcome, though I know not whence you are, nor on what errand you come." And while the visiter, having put off her slippers, settled herself comfortably at the upper end of the divan she clapped her hands, and a slave entered with coffee.

Long sat the two women side by side in silence; and, when the coffee had disappeared, the wife of Abdullah prepared a chibouque for her guest, and, having duly placed on the summit of the tobacco a small piece of lighted charcoal, she offered the pipe to her visiter with her own hands, who received it with a courteous salâm aleikum.*

"You are the wife of Abdullah the silversmith"—commenced the old woman at length, after she had imbibed the aroma of the tobacco, and that the raised circle of light white ashes had formed round the bowl of the chibouque, which betrays that the virtue of the "scented weed" is well nigh evaporated; "you are the wife of Abdullah the silversmith, and I am the mother of Suleiman the shawl merchant, who lives within the shadow of the mosque of Sultan Bajazet—you have a fair daughter; and my son is one who can well afford to flavor his pillauf with spices—do I speak clearly?"

"You speak clearly;" responded her auditor without the slightest gesture of surprise, and drawing as she spoke a longer stream of vapor through the slender pipe of jasmin wood which she was herself smoking.

"I would see the girl;" followed up the old woman.

"And why not?" readily rejoined her new acquaintance; "Alhemdullilah—Praise be to Allah—she has eyes like oysters, and lips as ruddy as the dye of Khorasan—why should I bid her hide herself when a mussafir—a guest—desires to look upon her?"

And again she clapped her hands, and, on the entrance of an attendant, bade her summon Helmas Hanoum to her presence.

The maiden obeyed without delay; and even as she made her graceful obeisance at the threshold, ere she advanced deeper into the apartment, the keen eye of the old woman had detected in her intended daughter-in-law all the charms which she had silently settled in her own mind to be imperative and indispensable in the wife of her son. She was indeed, as her name implied, a "diamond" among women: she had the height and grace of her Georgian mother, but her eye and brow were those of her Turkish father. It may seem somewhat apocryphal to dilate on eyes which her own parent had just likened to so utterly unsentimental an object in natural history as an oyster; but the simile will nevertheless bear analysis as

* Great Exchange.

† A brazier for holding heated charcoal.

* Eastern salutation.

well as most—her eyes were full, and round, and clear, and, moreover, deeply fringed with lashes as black as night—she was pale, very pale; but ere the visit of Suleiman's mother ended, her cheek had flushed into a dye that would have shamed the roses of Gurgistan; her long dark hair fell in masses upon shoulders as white and polished as ivory; and she moved with a grace that lent a new charm to her beauty.

"Inshallâh—I trust in Allah—she is no Kurd;" said the wife of Abdullah, as the lovely Helmas Hanoum raised the withered hand of the visiter to her lips: "she is worthy to be the wife of a True Believer."

She is worthy"—echoed the other high contracting party, without removing her sharp gray eyes from the countenance of the fair girl; "she shall be the wife of Suleiman, even of my own son."

The maiden started painfully, and raised her downeast eyes with an expression of acute suffering; her lip trembled, but she did not venture to give voice to the words that quivered there; and she almost bounded from the room as her mother bade her retire.

The declaration of Gunduz Hanoum was fulfilled to the letter; one short week beheld the young and lovely daughter of Abdullah the wife of Suleiman the shawl merchant. She wept bitterly as she was borne into the harem; and she closed her eyes as the dancing girls moved along before her, and turned aside her head as the singing women pealed forth her bridal song. In short, it avails not to make a secret of that which her husband was not slow to discover; the peerless Helmas Hanoum had given away her heart ere the aged mother of Suleiman went on her matrimonial mission to the harem of Abdullah the silversmith.

But who was the favored lover? Who should say? In taking a wife, the worthy shawl merchant had secured at once a misery and a mystery. He sought to win the secret by tenderness; but the sentiment of sixty-five long years, written in wrinkles on the brow of a new-made husband, is no key to open the heart of a young, and pretty, and preoccupied wife. The Hanoum, his mother, endeavored to gain her point by taunts and menaces, but she was only answered by tears, from which nothing could be learned save that there *was* a secret; and this only made the matter worse.

How many sleepless nights did the unhappy Suleiman pass in vain endeavors to remedy an evil whose exact cause he could not even fathom! And how often did he swear to himself by the beard of the Prophet that he would outmatch in cunning every lover in Stamboul, though they should be leagued with Sheitan to do him wrong.

For one whole weary month he sat in the bazâr, apparently gazing on the passers-by, but in reality with his eyes turned inward, and his thoughts plotting treason against his liege lady and wife. At length the electric spark was struck, and the luminous atom grew into breadth and form—it is true that for a time the breath of the loving husband came thick and hard as he revolved the different bearings of his scheme, but the more he reflected, the more he became reconciled to the idea: and when, in a private conference with his mother, it had received her sanction and approval, he hesitated no longer to prepare an effectual remedy against all lover-like stratagems on the part of his unknown rival.

Beneath the house of Suleiman was exeavated a vault of some extent, which, with considerable labor, was fashioned by the jealous merchant into a spacious and comfortable apartment, save that the light of heaven could not penetrate its gloom; and this subterranean was approached by a long vaulted passage, along which, for better security, he placed, at regular distances, seven doors strongly plated with iron and fastened with locks, each different from the other, and to be opened only by the key that appertained to it.

The surprise of the young wife may be imagined when she was introduced into this living grave, and told that it was to be thenceforward her abiding place. She wept, she knelt, she even shrieked in her anguish, but the heart of Suleiman was steeled by jealousy, and tardily-awakened love. Nor, as he took some trouble to explain, would she be so much to be pitied as she seemed to apprehend; for, with the exception of light, liberty, and fresh air, nothing in reason would be denied to her. But the young beauty was deaf to all his rhetoric; she saw only in the subterranean, in which she was to be immured with the faithful negress who had followed her from her father's house, at once a prison and a tomb; nor did the passionate protestations of her husband reconcile her in the slightest degree to his very original arrangement. Never were the inconveniences of excessive attachment more strongly developed; and after an hour uselessly expended in sententious consolation, the merchant was fain to ascend to the level of the earth, leaving his lovely victim bathed in tears of most sincere distress.

Now it so chanced, that the house adjoining that of Suleiman the shawl merchant had long been uninhabited, and was likely to continue so, for the window panes were shivered, the roof had fallen in, in many places, and the suns of summer and the rains of winter had combined to render it as forlorn and uninviting as any tenement could well be; and the merchant congratulated himself that it was so, for the grief and terror of his young wife had been more vociferous and demonstrative than he had anticipated; and he felt all the inconvenience which might have accrued to himself from a possible interference on the part of a neighbor.

Were this the time or place for moralizing, or were the habit of so doing more popular than it is, I might be tempted at this period of my story to pause a little, and to remark on the proneness of purblind human nature to exult over the very circumstances which are frequently the most inimical to the success of its projects; but as it is, I will not indulge myself with digression; and this resolution brings me back at once to the prison-chamber of the fair and ill-fated Helmas Hanoum.

"What care I for my beauty!" she exclaimed peevishly, cutting short the anxious exhortations of her attendant, who sat on a cushion at her

ge ; "I detest the very atmosphere he breathes. Tehiffût—wretch! Shall I braid my hair for him, and stain my hands with henna to give him pleasure? If I am mad, let him send me to the Timernazè;* there at least I shall feel the breath of Heaven, and look on the blue sky—and soon, soon;" she added, with a fresh burst of passionate grief; "I shall be fitted only for such a home."

Time wore on heavily enough in the subterranean, though Suleiman rarely failed to visit each day the lady of his heart, who met his affection either in sullen silence, or with vehement reproach; but a Turkish husband cares little for a storm of words—it is only a woman—she must be suffered to say all that she lists—her anger is bosh, nothing—she is better when she has poured forth her dissatisfaction; and upon this principle listened the husband of the incarcerated fair one, without swerving one iota from his purpose; and upon this principle he bore the tempest meekly; and consoled himself by double locking each of the seven doors, as he re-ascended to the light, and never suffering the precious keys to be deposited elsewhere than amid the folds of the shawl that he wore about his waist.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SEVEN DOORS—CONTINUED.

Six weary weeks had passed since Helmas Hanoum first became the tenant of the vault, when, as she sat one day listlessly passing the beads of her chaplet through her slender fingers, she detected a strange noise in a corner of the subterranean; and so much was she perplexed to define its cause, that she awoke her companion, who lay sleeping peacefully upon a mat thrown on the floor, not half a dozen paces from her sofa: "Wake, Zeïnip! wake, I say!" she cried impatiently; "Ne var—what is that? some one is in the apartment."

"Affiet ollah—much pleasure attend you—we shall then see a new face;" said the negress quietly, as she passed her hand over her eyes, and rose to a sitting posture; "But where, Effendim, is the mussafir?† Bir chey yok—there is nothing; we are still alone as when I lay down to sleep."

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly;" whispered the imprisoned beauty, pressing her finger on her lip; "hear you nothing?"

"Nothing, save a rat which has lost his way in the dark, and would take a short cut through our under-ground harem. Hahi! the Prophet pardon you, Effendim, for you have spoiled the sweetest dream that has gladdened my sleeping hours since—"

"Hist! I tell you, 'tis no rat; now Allah shield us! what can it mean?"

The slave, seeing the terror of her mistress, and being by this time wide awake, listened in her turn. In five seconds she decided that her first guess had been a correct one, but in five minutes she confessed that such could not be the case. And in truth, it was not wonderful that the two incarcerated women should instinctively draw closer together, and throw their whole souls—for the Turks have always allowed that their women *have* souls, whatever it may have pleased Europeans to declare to the contrary—and throw their whole souls into their ears, as the mysterious noise continued with scarcely any intermission. It was not precisely a knocking, nor quite a scratching, nor altogether a grinding; it was a strange irregular compound of each and all of these; and the only decision to which Helmas Hanoum and her ebony-colored attendant could come on the subject, was, that some person or thing was striving to make a way into the vault.

Having arrived at this conclusion, their terror began after a time to grow into curiosity. What could it be? What could it mean? The young beauty looked towards her slave, and murmured out "If it should be my father!"—and the slave in her turn looked towards her mistress, and in a tone as low as the last whispering of the wind on the ocean ripple, replied to the suggestion by slowly saying, "If it should be your lover!"

The sentence was no sedative, for the cheek of the young wife crimsoned, and her heart began to beat painfully; and meanwhile the knocking, scratching, and grinding went on with an indefatigability which did infinite credit to the perseverance of the operator. The upper end of the vault, where it touched the subterranean of the adjoining dwelling, was secured by some of those huge blocks of stone which are frequently to be seen in the most ancient quarters of Stamboul, and seem to have been hewn by the Titans; they were moreover united by that mysterious, and almost indestructible cement, of which the secret is now supposed to be lost; and, altogether, no jealous husband could possibly have devised a more solid or satisfactory species of partition between his own house and that of his neighbor. But what avail even blocks of stone, or Roman cement, against the resolute determination of headstrong passion? The complicated noise went on day after day, until the two prisoners became so thoroughly accustomed to it, that it was no longer a cause of fear, though, amid the monotony of their existence, it still remained a subject of curiosity and conversation.

It was somewhat remarkable that the invisible workman, as though gifted with the power of seeing through the stone that he found it so difficult to penetrate, never continued his labors during the daily visits of the merchant; the instant that the key of Suleiman turned in the lock of the seventh door, all was as still as the grave; and perhaps it was equally strange, that neither of the women ever volunteered to the merchant the slightest mention of the circumstance. It might be that in the excitement of his reception it escaped their memory: or it might be that they considered the incident to be altogether insignificant, and therefore unworthy of attention. I can not take upon myself to explain their motive, but, be it what it would, it shrouded itself in silence.

It will readily be believed by those who have the advantage of Suleiman, and who are in pos

* Lunatic Asylum. † Guest.

session of the secret, that the noise became gradually louder as the work advanced; and that, when once a huge stone was displaced from its legitimate position, the two trembling women —for they *did* tremble more violently than ever when they saw the loosened mass actually yield to some external force—were "all eyes," as they had long been "all ears," to discover the cause of the mystery. Helmas Hanoum was the first to recover from her panic, as a very handsome head appeared in the chasm, which was quickly succeeded by a tall, slight, graceful figure, that, having passed the narrow space with some difficulty, started suddenly into a standing posture; and then, quick as thought, was prostrate once more at the feet of the young beauty.

"Hafiz!" murmured the low voice of the merchant's wife.

"My fair, my loved, my long-lost houri!" answered the youth, as he covered her small hand with kisses: "Sultana of my soul! Was it for this that they refused you to me—to bury you beneath the earth ere the Prophet had beckoned back your spirit? Was it for this?" and tears of mingled joy and bitterness swelled in his large dark eyes.

"It is my fate!" said Helmas Hanoum mournfully: "it is my fate: and you have done ill, Hafiz, to seek me out. Was I not sad enough in my loneliness that you bring me a deeper grief? Ne bilirim—what can I say? You are a madman!"

"The nightingale sings to the rose when the sun has set;" was the meek reply: "I have learnt a lesson of a silly bird; and shall I be chidden by the flower which has won my worship?"

"If I chid you not in brighter days;" said the weeping beauty; "how could I chide you now? And yet, Hafiz—"

"Ai guzum! janum!—oh, my eyes! my soul!" commenced the lover—

"Enough, enough of this;" interposed the slave abruptly: "we lose time—you love each other—a way of escape is open; let us fly to the mountains."

"Peace, Zeïnip!" said her mistress sternly: "am I not the wife of Suleiman?"

"You are a child," retorted the negress unceremoniously; "see you not that the young Effendi is your felech—your constellation? Will you put out the light of your own star? Will you blacken your face because your father sold you to a greybeard's gold? and eat dirt with him when you may share the pillauf of one who loves you?"

And as the energetic Zeïnip paused for breath, Hafiz looked up at the trembling girl, and whispered "She says well—will you indeed do this?"

"Listen to me!" said Helmas Hanoum, who at once perceived that she should have to contend with the pleadings of her own heart, as well as those of both her companions; and who was anxious to gain time, lest, in this first moment of happy emotion, she might be induced to take a step, against which reason and propriety alike revolted; and, with the ready tact of her sex in all countries, and under all circumstances, she adopted at once the tone and manner best fitted to win her lover to a compliance with her conditions. Like the evil enchanters of the East, and the spoiled beauties of every land, she insisted on the performance of feats which she affected to believe impossible, but on whose accomplishment she bound herself to unite her fate with that of Hafiz, and to fly with him from Stamboul for ever.

In vain did the young man argue, expostulate, and plead; he wasted alike his time and his eloquence, for Helmas Hanoum was firm. "I have said it, Hafiz, and thus only may you hope to win me; remember, too, for how many weary weeks I have been buried here, and shall I not be revenged upon my tormentor? Between the entrance of the vault and this apartment there are seven doors, and so many times must you deceive Suleiman in some wise, so thoroughly that he may believe himself the sport of a foul fiend without having power to free himself from the thrall; and you must, moreover, so conduct your machinations as to make me a party in every plot. You need not doubt but I shall play my part well, and my faithful Zeïnip also—"

"Have I not grown up with him from a child?" interposed the negress; "and will not my heart be with him while he walks the earth? Inshallah—I shall not mar his plotting."

After a time Hafiz became more reconciled to the whim of his mistress: for, with the sanguine and joyous spirit of youth, he anticipated only a successful issue to each adventure, be it as wild as it might; and the two thoughtless and happy lovers—happy in spite of all the dangers and difficulties by which they were surrounded—laughed heartily, ere they parted, at the mere anticipation of the discomfort they were preparing for the merchant.

Prudence, however pointed at length to the displaced fragment of wall, which must, to insure the success of their schemes, be carefully readjusted ere the next visit of Suleiman; and as Hafiz prepared to depart, Helmas Hanoum unclasped from her slender wrist a costly bracelet well known to her husband, whose bridal gift it had been, and tendered it to her lover: "I need not tell you how to use it;" she said smilingly "Zeïnip and I will not fail in our parts—the stone shall be sufficiently loosened, as soon as the Effendi departs, to enable you to remove it by a slight effort, and to restore the jewel ere he can turn the keys in his seven locks; and now, farewell."

Hafiz obeyed, and left the vault; the stone was rolled back into its place; the rubbish that he had flung into the apartment carefully swept away; and then the wary slave stretched across that portion of the wall the silken cord on which hang the embroidered napkins used by Turkish females in their ablutions after each meal.

They had scarcely terminated their task, when the echoes of the subterranean vault betrayed the approach of the shawl merchant, who came to pay his daily visit ere he departed for the Teharehi. He found his young wife languidly reclining on her cushions, and complaining of indisposition, which she attributed to the unwholesome atmosphere of her prison-chamber. Suleiman endeavored to soothe her, but she only became more silent and sullen; and he left her with a promise that she should not be much

longer an occupant of this gloomy abode, since neither the luxuriousness of its arrangements, nor his own arguments, had power to win her to an approval of her position.

"Mashallah! what have I done?" she faltered, when she was once more left alone with her attendant; "should he indeed now yield to the prayer to which he has so long continued deaf, I shall have ruined my own cause, and broken the heart of Hafiz."

"Dry your tears, Effendim, and assist me to remove the stone;" answered Zemip calmly; "bir chey yok—there is nothing to fear—the Effendi only seeks to amuse you with words; and, even were it otherwise, the son of Najib must use your jewel with less wit than I take him to possess, if he does not make your jealous jailer look closer than ever to the locks of his seven doors."

Satisfied of the truth of the remark, the pretty prisoner rose from her sofa to aid the efforts of her more far-seeing companion, and they readily rolled back the friendly stone sufficiently for their purpose; and then, with beating hearts and attentive ears, awaited impatiently the termination of the first adventure of Hafiz with the merchant.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEVEN DOORS—CONTINUED.

Suleiman was squatted on his carpet, gravely knocking the ashes of an exhausted chibouque from the bowl of moulded red clay in which they had burnt away, and was preparing to renew the luxury, when the young and handsome son of Najib, the Adrianopolitan, who occupied the adjoining counter to that of the worthy husband of Helmas Hanoum, lounged slowly up to the station of his father, and conversed with him for a while on the merits of some merchandise which he had been displaying without success to a departed customer; or, rather, to one who he had hoped would have become such.

"I have done nothing to-day, nothing;" said Najib, in reply to the inquiry of his son; "save fold and unfold to no purpose. I must surely have been smitten by the Evil Eye, for the Kislar Agha, who purchased cachemires of me last year to the amount of two hundred and sixty thousand piastres, passed through the bazār this morning, without turning a glance towards me as I sat among my merchandise; and when his pipe-bearer, who had good reason to remember the bargain, approached him with 'Effendim, this is Najib of Adrianople,'—he answered, hastily, 'What of that? do I owe him gold that I am not free to pass on as I list!' and in half an hour I saw him depart, followed by the nephew of Namik the one-eyed, almost staggering under the weight of his burthen. The Chibouquejhe gave me a look as he passed, which I translated easily into an avowal that Namik had not acted by him as generously as I had done, and that he was by no means satisfied with the change. But what do I say? Am I a woman that I vent my disappointment in words? Is not my beard white!"

"Wish me better fortune;" said Hafiz; "I have a jewel to sell." And he drew from beneath the folds of the shawl that girdled his waist a bag of gold-embroidered cachemire, whence he took a small parcel containing a bracelet. The ornament was a peculiar one; it was a chain of fine gold, curiously worked, its links being wrought to resemble the minute scales of a serpent, and each at its point being tipped with a ruby; while the head of the reptile was formed of one large emerald, into which two brilliant drops had been introduced to represent the eyes.

"Mashallah!" murmured Najib, fixing his gaze intently on the costly stone that clasped the jewel, with all the discriminating admiration bestowed in the East on gems of price; "Mashallah! 'tis a drop of light on a spring leaf! 'tis a gaud for a Sultana!" And without a moment's delay he stretched the hand which held it towards his neighbor, saying earnestly; "How think you, Effendim? Is it not a noble gem?"

Suleiman received the jewel calmly, but he did not long look on it with a placid brow; the blood rushed in a volume to his cheeks and forehead, and the fire flashed from his eyes; he thrust back his turban, and gasped for breath; "You would sell this bauble, young man;" he said, in a cold deep accent of concentrated passion; "And I, perchance, would become a purchaser; but honest men do not pay away their gold for things like these without first learning somewhat of their history—I would fain know—"

"What would you have me tell you?" asked Hafiz, with a smile which roused, as he believed that it must do, every suspicious pang of the jealous husband, who had at once recognized the jewel; "Should I say that it was given to me by a woman, were it not bosh—nothing! You must see that it is a woman's toy, and, as such, useless to me; and you would hold me as a vain boaster—a sakal-siz, a no-beard."

Again Suleiman gasped for breath. "I will buy the jewel;" he said hoarsely; "yes, I will buy it; leave it with me for to-night, that I may ascertain its value, and to-morrow I will pay you the gold."

"That may not be, Effendim;" calmly replied Hafiz; "I will trust no one with the trinket until it ceases to be my property. Shall I heap dirt on my own head?"

"But I have not wherewithal to purchase it until I return to my own house"—urged the merchant.

"To-morrow, then, I will treat with you, should no one ease me of it meanwhile;" and Hafiz stretched forth his hand to resume possession of the bracelet. For a moment, however, Suleiman did not relax his hold, his fingers had instinctively closed over the treasure as he marked the action of the youth; but suddenly a thought appeared to strike him, and he surrendered it up with a mien of as much indifference as he could assume.

"Pek ahi, pek ahi—well, well, to-morrow be it then—to-morrow, or the next day, or at the opening of the coming week, as may best suit your leisure. Nay, how know I," and he forced a grim and a ghastly smile, "how know I that

I may not have outworn my fancy when we next meet?"

"Even as you will;" replied the youth, taking his place beside his father, and affecting to occupy himself with a mercantile calculation, while he was in fact narrowly watching every motion of his excited neighbor; "I shall fold my feet upon the carpet of patience—what is written will come to pass!"

Suleiman filled a fresh pipe, and strove to be composed, but the effort was beyond his strength; there was a nervous quivering of the eyelids and twitching of the upper lip, which betrayed the workings of his spirit. Turk though he was, there is a boundary beyond which even a Turk's apathy cannot hold out, and at length he reached it; a cold dew stood on his forehead, a chill came over his heart, a thousand frightful phantasms danced across his brain, and he fairly gave up the struggle. After uttering a few hurried and almost inaudible directions to the lad who attended his commands, he rose slowly from his carpet, and, carefully putting aside his chibouque, he resumed his slippers, and offered his farewell greeting to Najib and his son. "I have business with the Algerine Hussein," he said, as he slowly moved away; "the bazâr is dull to-day, and I will profit by the opportunity."

Hafiz returned his parting salutation with an air of pre-occupation admirably acted; and when Suleiman suddenly stopped at the distance of a hundred paces, and looked back, there still sat the son of Najib, the pen in his hand, the paper resting upon his knee, and his head bent down over his occupation. But there were eagle eyes under that ample turban which were otherwise employed than in deciphering the intricate characters of the scroll before them; and no sooner had Suleiman turned into another branch of the Tcharchi, than Hafiz, springing from his seat, and oversetting in his haste a pile of bright-patterned shawls, that in their fall made a rainbow-like confusion on the narrow path, rushed hastily round a neighboring corner, and flew, as rapidly as his slippered feet would carry him, to the empty house adjoining that of the jealous husband. He had not been deluded by the subterfuge of his victim, and he knew that he had not a moment to lose. Accordingly he turned the key which he carried in his girdle, without the delay of an instant, in the half-rusted lock, and drew the door after him, threw off his encumbering slippers in the passage, and, bounding down the steps that led to the vault, three or four at once, had just time to fling the bracelet through the aperture in the wall, and to force back the stone, ere the approach of the merchant became audible.

The young wife, on her side, was not idle; she hastily clasped the jewel on her arm, and, folding herself closely in a shawl that enveloped her head and shoulders, laid herself along the sofa, like one suffering from indisposition; while Zeïnip, as expert in deception as her mistress, squatted on the floor, busied in the manufacture of lemon sherbet.

As the merchant entered the vault, he raised the lamp that he carried above his head, and glared suspiciously around; but all was calm, and still, and undisturbed; so calm and so stil indeed, that it smote upon the heart of Sulei man from its contrast to the heat and hurry of his own emotions; "Khosh geldin—you are welcome;" whispered the negress, affecting to deprecate the sound of the husband's approach ing step; "but tread softly, Effendim, for she has just fallen asleep."

"Sister of Sheitan!" said the merchant in reply; "what treason are you hatching here to fit your neck for the bowstring? Do you take me for a divanè—an idiot?"

The imperturbable Zeïnip only answered by raising her ebony hands in wonder, and rolling her eyes until nothing save the whites were visible.

"Tell me—" persisted Suleiman, in the same subdued voice in which he had before spoken "tell me, mother of a dog, who has been here?

"Here?" echoed the slave stupidly.

"Ay, here in the boudroum—the subterranean! a man—a young man—a devil!"

"Holy Prophet! has a devil been here?" exclaimed the negress in her turn, with a look and accent of horror; "and a young man too Did they come together?"

This was too much—the patience of the merchant could hold out no longer—it was too palpable—his suspicions were but too well founded—he had been duped—he—Suleiman!—he, who had even buried his wife in the bowels of the earth from the eyes of the whole world—*he* had been played upon—cheated by a couple of false plotting women, one of them a mere child! He required only the evidence of his eyes to be fully, fatally, convinced of his misfortune—the sleeping beauty, whom his entrance had failed to rouse from her slumber, no longer wore the jewel which he had clasped upon her arm when he had welcomed her to his house—she would not venture to tell him that she had lost it; for was not that subterranean her world?—and thus she would be the instrument of her own destruction. For a moment the heart of the merchant quailed—she was so young, so fair, so sad; but he remembered the half exulting, half supercilious smile of the son of Najib when he spoke of the jewel, and he hastily approached the sofa, and flung back the shawl in which she was enveloped.

Still the young Hanoum slept, or appeared to sleep; nor could the excited merchant satisfy himself of her treachery without awakening her, for her head was pillowed upon the very arm that should have worn the bracelet. For another moment he paused; and it was no surprising that he should do so, for a prettier picture than that beneath his eye it had never been his lot to look upon. Her arms, from which the long open sleeves had fallen back, were as white and smoothly-moulded as marble, and the long dark hair that was scattered over her shoulders formed a strong contrast from the pure pale beauty of her complexion. A bright crimson spot was upon her cheek, deeper than mere sleep would have called up; but she had already stifled the beating of her heart, and she breathed gently and calmly like one to whom slumber was indeed repose. The various tints of her gaudy costume showed gaily in the light

of the lamp; and the little naked foot that peeped from beneath the ample tchalva—or pantaloon, of party-colored chintz, gleamed out like a snow-flake.

"Guzel—pek guzel—pretty, very pretty!" murmured the merchant involuntarily; but at the instant the image of Hafiz, and his insulting triumph once more rose up before him, and steeled his heart. "Wake, Helmas!" he cried sternly; "wake, 'tis your husband calls you."

"Mashâllah!" exclaimed the young wife, opening her deep eyes, but without altering her position; "are you returned? you had been here already to-day, and now you come only to awaken me from a dream in which I had quite forgotten you and your tyranny."

"And is this the fashion of your reception?" demanded the enraged merchant; "but I will endure your woman-whims no longer. With your childish follies, your idle tears, I could have borne with patience—I have borne them—but you have become a dog, and the mother of dogs—you have eaten dirt—you have blackened your face, and defiled the grave of your father!"

"Ne bilirim?—what can I say? What have I done?" asked the young Hanoum, who, secure as she knew herself to be in the possession of her bracelet, yet quailed beneath the deep stern passion of the merchant; "How can I answer upbraidings that I am unable to comprehend? Tell me at least——"

"Rather tell me"—burst forth Suleiman, goaded to madness by the placidity of the culprit; "rather tell me, sister of the Evil One, to whom have you given the jewel that I placed upon your arm when I was fool enough to take you to my home?"

"Given it!" said his wife in well-counterfeited astonishment, as she calmly withdrew her arm from beneath her head, and extended it, encircled by the bracelet, towards her husband, while the negress raising her spread palms in the air, groaned audibly as though she were mourning over the departed intellect of her master; "Again—wonderful! Given it?" she repeated, as if doubting that she had really comprehended the question. "To whom could I give it, even were I disposed to part with the pretty bauble, save to my faithful Zemip, who has as little occasion as myself to wear gems where no one can see them?"

The merchant could not believe his eyes; but yes—there was the jewel—and that which Hafiz had offered for sale, clearly, therefore, could not have been his wife's; he took it from her arm; he examined it narrowly—ha, not the thing been impossible, he could have sworn—and yet, he should palpably have been a perjured man, for he had never parted from his seven keys—the locks had assuredly not been tampered with, and there was no other outlet from the vault. It was with a deep and almost hysterical respiration that Suleiman one more fastened on the ornament, fully persuaded that he must have been acting under some delusion of witchcraft, and keenly conscious of the full ridicule of his position. At that moment he would almost have rejoiced had his suspicions been confirmed, for then, at least, he would have been justified in his own eyes for the violence with which he had acted towards his young and innocent wife; as it was, he felt that he must make a very sorry figure, and he could not immediately decide upon his best mode of action. Nor did the Hanoum and her handmaid afford him much space for reflection; they were conscious of their advantage, and resolved to avail themselves of it to the utmost, and the poor shawl-merchant was consequently assailed with such a tempest of reproach, vituperation, and tears, as had well nigh driven him mad, ere he was allowed once more to hear the sound of his own voice, and permitted to pour forth his regrets for an intemperance into which he had been betrayed by circumstances that he was alike unable to fathom or to explain.

Peace was, however, ultimately proclaimed, for the females, conscious that they were not altogether so blameless in the affair as they were now believed to be, and remembering that the purgatorial sufferings of the ill-fated merchant were only commencing, were graciously pleased to be pacified by slow degrees, and to accept the promises of their victim that he would never again offend by hinting that his wife was a family connexion of the Evil One, or polluting the grave of her unoffending parent. Enough of doubt, nevertheless, remained upon the mind of Suleiman, though he could not have shaped it into a tangible form, amid all this mystification, to induce him, ere he departed, to steal another long wary look round the vault; and, after looking each of the seven doors, to hold his lamp close to the key-hole, and to examine most narrowly the mechanism of the fastening, about which it must, however, be admitted that he knew nothing whatever; but it is a satisfaction to investigate closely and carefully, and to form our own judgment, even of things on which we are profoundly ignorant; and so the merchant found it, as, after closing the last door, he retired to his own apartment, perfectly satisfied of the utter impossibility of any entrance into the prison-chamber, save by means of his own precious keys.

But one undertaking had been successfully accomplished, and Hafiz had now only to contend against six of the seven doors!

It needs not to be told that, on his next meeting with the merchant, he replied to his inquiries by asserting that he had disposed of his jewel to another purchaser, nor that the answer added to the bewilderment of Suleiman. He knew not why, but he had assuredly never expected to see it again in the hands of the young man, nor to be urged a second time to make it his own property; on the contrary, he had felt a most unpleasant presentiment that such would not be the case; and yet, when his expectations were realized, fresh doubts, and pangs, and wonderings assailed him. But be it as it might, what could he do more than he had already done? What locality could be more secure than that in which he had incarcerated his wife. Ergo, he must forget the mysterious resemblance of the two bracelets, for it could of course be nothing more: and dismiss the subject from his mind altogether.

Now this was perhaps the wisest conclusion

to which the worthy merchant had ever come in his life, and it is probable that in time, had nothing occurred to renew the impression of the incident, his practice might have rivalled his theory; but his kismet—his fate—had ordained it otherwise.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SEVEN DOORS—CONTINUED.

SULEIMAN had a friend who was perfume-merchant to the Sultan. A man of mark was Saïdomer Nourren Atem, and well skilled in the composition of sweet and subtle scents. Every flower of the East had in turn given up its delicious breath in his crucibles and pipkins; but there were certain secrets whose results were reserved for the exclusive use of the imperial harem. No slave in the tcharchi wore a gayer vest or a more elaborate turban than the Abyssinian confidant of Saïdomer Nourren Atem, or filled with a better grace the minute essence-boxes of ivory into which the more costly perfumes were compressed. No Musselmaun smoked a more princely chibouque, or cinctured his brows with a more magnificent cachemire than Saïdomer Nourren Atem himself; he looked around him calmly on the rival establishments of the tcharchi, and defied competition.

Now it so chanced, that, about a week after the adventure with the bracelet, the skilful scent-merchant made a discovery which, Turk though he was, well nigh turned him mad with delight. Never was so exquisite a perfume as that which after a score or two of costly experiments, he succeeded in producing. The Attargul itself was fetid beside it! The Abyssinian slave who had assisted in the work flung himself along the floor in a paroxysm of ecstacy, and rolled his huge eyes, and clasped his ebony hands like a lunatic; while even the stately, and ordinarily imperturbable Saïdomer Nourren Atem himself apostrophised Allah and the Prophet, as though he had succeeded in converting all the Christian raïahs of the empire to Mohammedanism.

It was at this moment that Suleiman, a privileged person at all times, entered the spicy laboratory of the excited scent-dealer; and in the first moment of exultation, nothing could be more simple than that Saïdomer Nourren Atem should introduce to his friend the delicate composition which he was at that moment ready to believe would go far to immortalize him. The Orientals love perfumes beyond all other luxuries; and it is therefore not surprising that, as the exquisite aroma entered his nostrils, Suleiman the shawl merchant should stroke down his beard, draw a long breath, and stagger to the sofa, as though overwhelmed by its sweetness.

"Y'allah!—in the name of the Prophet, whence comes it?" he murmured, when he could again command his voice; "He who distilled it must have been born of a rose, and nursed in the flower-garden of Paradise! I would give a cachemire of Lahore for a gilded flaçon of that surpassing essence."

"What shall I say?" was the reply of the flattered Saïdomer Nourren Atem; "I it was who caught the breath of the Hour, and imprisoned it in this liquid for the gratification of our imperial master; and until the Sultan hath quaffed it in his sherbet, how may I dispose of even the lightest drop to one of his slaves."

"And when he shall have inhaled its matchless sweetness;" followed up Suleiman; "if he does justice to its wise inventor, he will forbid that it should be purchased at will in the tcharchi, and thus—"

"You are right, my friend;" said the scent-merchant, and you, at least, shall forestall the prohibition. Your felech hath guided you here in a happy moment—I will give you some of these drops of my soul—Bacarac;" and the attentive slave bent forward to receive his instructions; "give to the Effendi of this precious perfume as much as will fill the smallest box in the fourth drawer on the right hand. Have a care that the wool on which it is poured be of the finest and softest quality, and that the cover of the box fit to a nicety, for the essence is subtle, and I would not that he should perfume the tcharchi as he passes along."

The slave bent low, and prepared reverently to obey. The box indicated was most minute, curiously turned, and could be hermetically closed; the wool was with some difficulty introduced, and the precious liquid poured slowly, drop by drop, as though it had been blood wrung from the heart. Suleiman received it as it beseemed him to accept so costly a gift; and while the delighted Saïdomer Nourren Atem listened to his profuse and hyperbolical expressions of admiration, and gave directions for the security of the wondrous production of his genius, the shawl-merchant was inwardly indulging a feeling of self-gratulation at the fortunate chance which would enable him to offer to his yet sullen wife a gift that must at once insure his favor.

It was consequently with a lighter step than usual that Suleiman bent his way homeward on the closing of the tcharchi, and, when his evening meal was ended, descended to the subterranean. Helmas Hanoum laid aside her zebec as he entered. It was no part of her system to allow him to think that she passed a single moment of the twenty-four hours in seeking to divert her thoughts from his tyranny and her own misfortune; and she was only more cold, and sullen, and ungracious, than her wont when he approached her. But what Eastern woman would not have been melted by such an offering as that of Suleiman? A new and delicious perfume—to be forbidden, moreover, to all save the imperial family! How doubly charmed was the young wife of the shawl-merchant when she had learnt the history of her treasure! Was ever husband so assiduous to torment himself? This was indeed a two-edged scimitar! Nay, so glad and gay was her spirit, as she deposited the essence-box carefully amid the folds of the shawl that girdled her waist, that she yielded at once to a desire which he had often expressed, and she had as constantly refused to gratify, by resuming her instrument, and playing and sing-

ing until Suleiman fancied himself in the seventh heaven!

In a few hours the essence-box was in the possession of Hafiz.

It must surely have been through the agency of some imp of darkness that Najib the Adrianopolitan and the husband of the pretty Helmas Hanoum chanced to be neighbors in the tcharchi, for it gave to the plots of Hafiz all the effect of chance. Nothing could be more simple than that he should afford to his father the opportunity of sharing his enjoyments; and accordingly there was no appearance of design in his hurried address, as he seated himself beside Najib, and drew forth his new treasure.

"Mahomet be praised!" he said, smilingly; "new stars and new flowers spring to life about us each day of our existence."

"Would that they were new customers! it would be more profitable to the merchants of the city;" replied Najib drily; "stars and flowers are pretty things enough, but they will neither turn to pillauf nor piastres."

"Of the stars it is true that nothing can be made;" pursued the young man in the same joyous tone in which he had commenced the conversation; "but flowers boast not only brightness and beauty ——"

"Pshaw! are you going to talk in verse, like your Persian namesake!" asked his father, whose temper had been somewhat ruffled by a morning of idleness.

"Would that I might, do I exclaim in my turn;" said his son; "but I am simply going to prove to you, better than by words, that flowers are not to be considered as mere toys. I will not talk of the sighs of roses, caught and changed into attar-gul, nor the sweet scents of jasmine, and a score of other blossoms, prisoned in minute flacons, and making summer wherever their breath is suffered to escape. I will rather confound you at once by an argument into which is crushed the combined perfume of a world of flowers—and here it is—" and he placed in the hand of his father the small ivory box that had been confided to him by the wife of the shawl-merchant.

"There is but one Allah, and Mahomet is his prophet!" murmured Najib, slowly swinging himself backward, as he inhaled the odor of the new essence. "Ne bilirim—what can I say? This it is to live in the country of the True Believers. They talk to us of Frangistan—is my face blackened, that I should believe that the dogs of Giaours have joys like these in their own lands, where they never see the sun? H—a—a"—and again he stroked down his beard as he drew in the sweet savour of the essence; "what are the gums of Araby or the roses of Gurgistan beside this?"

So well indeed did the worthy Adrianopolitan appreciate the enjoyment, that he did not appear likely to offer a portion of his pleasure to Suleiman, who sat enveloped in the scented fumes of his Salonica tobacco, apparently quite unmoved by the raptures of his neighbor. Suddenly, however, Najib remembered that a gratification, of whatever description, is greatly enhanced by participation and sympathy; and upon this principle he bent towards the rival shawl-merchant, and proffered to him the little box.

"Tchabouk, tchabouk—quick, quick! close it carefully as you restore it;" cautioned Hafiz, with an air of extreme anxiety: "I would not, for all the riches on the shelves of Suidomer Nourrem Atem, the sultan's scent-dealer, that a breath of this precious compound should escape."

But the petrified shawl-merchant heeded him not; he sat gazing from Hafiz to the ivory box, and from the ivory box back again to Hafiz, like one who is not quite certain that he does not dream. He unscrewed the lid, he bent down his head, and hurriedly inhaled the precious perfume, and again he fixed his large, dark, flashing eyes on the son of Najib.

"Is it not a breathing of Paradise?" asked the young man, with a self-gratulatory smile.

"And you obtained it, where?" gasped out Suleiman.

"Yok, yok—no, no—I am not bound to name the houri who paid me so richly for a light flattery;" was the reply; "but this much I may confess, that where I won the bracelet, there also I gained the essence."

Suleiman ground his teeth, but he did not articulate a syllable.

"Beware, Hafiz;" said his father, deprecatingly; "where the rose grows, there does the thorn flourish; and the jewelled hilt ever betokens the keen weapon."

"But what if I secure the gems, and defy the blade?" asked the young man.

"It is ill making your horse's bridle out of a bowstring;" followed up the anxious parent; "let this gift be the last."

Hafiz only smiled again, and, as he did so, his eyes met those of the agitated Suleiman; "What shall I give you for this toy?" he demanded hurriedly.

"Ne bilirim—what can I say? Not all the silks in the tcharchi of Broussa should buy it of me; shall I fill my own mouth with ashes?" and, as he spoke, the youth extended his hand to regain possession of the treasure.

"Only let me show it to Suidomer Nourren Atem;" urged Suleiman; "I know not its name, and I would fain become the possessor—"

"Hay, hay!—so, so! Think you that I will suffer it to be hawked through the bazar like some villain merchandise?" asked Hafiz angrily; "Mashallah, I am not so base."

The discomfited Suleiman only sighed, and relinquished the fairy box to its owner; this time there could be no mistake—there was not its fellow in Stamboul—he had been too slow in detecting the first artifice of his plotting helpmate; but now—now—he should confront her on the instant, ere she had time or opportunity to dupe him twice—he was bewildered, mystified—there must be witchcraft in it; but, strong in his sense of wrong, he would defy the Evil One himself to-day to cheat him with a lie! And with this laudable conviction he shuffled off his carpet, thrust his feet into his slippers, and, without the courtesy of a parting word to his companions, hurriedly proceeded towards his dwelling.

But, alas for the worthy merchant! the very precaution which should have secured his safety,

proved his bane, for he was so long engaged in unlocking his seven doors, that the ivory box arrived in the prison-chamber before him; and, as he turned the last key to the accompaniment of the high clear voice of his wife, who was warbling out a love-ballad, he had the gratification of finding her engaged at a game of ball with the box itself, which she was dropping from one hand to the other in regular time with the strain; her delicate little fingers closing and unclosing over it, and her fair round arms gleaming out in the lamp-light like water-lilies.

Suleiman was petrified! He rubbed his eyes, and pinched himself to ascertain whether he really was awake—he darted forward, and seized the toy from the hands of his pretty captive, for which he was rewarded with a frown and a pout—he examined it narrowly, and there it was—the very same—a small rose in the centre of the lid, three rings round the outside, and a flaw in the ivory about the size of a pin's head! He had seen all this in the tcharchi—he had almost walked himself into a fever to prove that he had been played upon and cheated, and—here was the box!

In the agony of his amazement he seated himself beside the young Hanoum, and, as soon as he had recovered his breath, he told her all. When the tale was ended, the happy husband was glad that he had done so, for never were two women more overwhelmed with wonder. His wife cast up her bright eyes, and crept closer to him as she murmured something about demons and magic; and Zeïnip whispered that the victim of this dark sorcery would do well to summon a dervish of the sect of the Melavics, and be exorcised. Suleiman listened to the counselling of his trembling prisoners, and promised to think seriously of their advice. Never since their incarceration in the vault had they been so gentle and so courteous; and, although a pang and a doubt would now and then cross the mind of the merchant as he lent a willing ear to their surmises, and suffered himself to be soothed by their suggestions, he soon banished all mistrust, for was it not worse than folly to believe that a jewelled bracelet and a box of essence could escape through stone walls? and, more absurd still, be in two places at once?

And yet—but what availed it to dwell upon the subject? There were the locks, the walls, and the doors; and, consequently, however strange, and unaccountable, and bewildering such coincidences undoubtedly were, they could be only coincidences after all. Suleiman was a wise man in his own way, a man of forethought and precaution, with an energy of self-confidence which always made him wind up his reflections with the comfortable and self-gratulatory mental apostrophe of—"It cannot be otherwise; I am not the person to be taken in—I have lived too long to be duped by fools:" and this was the murmured accompaniment to the echo of his footsteps as he slowly ascended from the vault on the present occasion; and scarcely could he have extinguished his lamp on arriving at the head of the stair, ere the stone was rolled away that gave ingress to the prison-chamber of the pretty Hanoum, and a chorus of laughter, where a deep bass blended with an harmonious tenor, ran through the subterranean.

The joy of Hafiz was great—he had opened a second lock—he had flung back two of the seven doors!

CHAPTER XV.

THE SEVEN DOORS—CONTINUED.

Suleiman denied no enjoyment save that of light and liberty to his young wife. Those well-beloved luxuries of Turkish women, shawls and diamonds, he lavished on her with as much profusion as though she possessed the opportunity of exhibiting them to the admiration and envy of her acquaintance: and it was but a few days after the adventure of the essence-box that he carried with him, on his visit to the vault, a cachemire of a new and rare description, the first which had been seen in the tcharchi of Constantinople.

All shawls of price in the East being woven in pairs, Suleiman, as he made the purchase of a stranger with whom he had never before traded, inquired eagerly for its fellow, when he was informed that, the pecuniary means of the merchant having become impaired by a long and unsuccessful speculation, he had been permitted, through the courtesy of a friend, to possess himself of one of these costly pieces of merchandise, although he was unable to pay down the sum necessary to make him the owner of both; and that, in consequence of this arrangement, none could be found in the city of the same pattern and texture.

Groups of minute and finely-wrought flowers were scattered over a ground of faint yellow, and a few threads of green were woven into a border of crimson, of so rich a dye that it looked as though the wool had been stained with the juice of the pomegranate blossom. The merchant added his private mark to those which were already impressed on the paper ticket, regarded in the East as an additional ornament, and alway conspicuously displayed in token of the freshness of the shawl, ere he unfolded it before the admiring eyes of his wife and her attendant.

The pretty Hanoum smiled her thanks for the costly gift, and in five minutes it was gracefully folded about her waist; the rich crimson border in strong relief on the sky-blue tchalva, and the pale yellow centre rendered still more delicate in tint as it contrasted with the deep purple vest.

The interior of the vault would have been at that moment a study for the orientalized pencil of Pickersgill; the languid beauty of the young wife, who sat upon her cushions on the ground, beside the sofa honored by the occupation of the merchant, in his flowing robes of ruby-colored cloth, ample turban, and amber-lipped chibouque, was softened into deeper loveliness by the faint light of the distant tapers, grouped together on a small stand at the extremity of the apartment; while, immediately in their broadest

glare, squatted the negress in an antery* of white cotton, with her long hair falling over her shoulders in a score of minute braids, and her large eyes fixed earnestly upon her mistress. The sofa glittered with gold fringe, and the cushions were gay with embroidered flowers; all the showy toys of a Turkish harem were lavishly strown in every direction; and as the large deep eyes of the Hanoum wandered over the chamber, a smile rose to her lip, which, by whatever feeling it might have been summoned there, added to the brightness of her pure and pallid beauty. No wonder that the merchant, as he gazed upon her childlike loveliness, congratulated himself upon his sagacity and caution; no wonder that as he looked upon her languid grace, and the dove-like dreaminess that dwelt in her dark eyes, he felt at once the folly of his passing doubts. She had not energy to plot against his peace!

It was with a somewhat cxcombical swing in his gait that Hafiz, a day or two subsequently to that of which I have just spoken, approached the husband of Helmas Hanoum as he sat in his usual place in the tcharchi; and, after saluting him with infinite politeness, begged him to take the trouble of examining the cachemire that formed his turban, as he had been desired to purchase a similar one for a friend who was about to depart for Smyrna, and who was ready to pay down the price which might be agreed upon between them.

"I would have sought it among the bales of my father;" pursued the young man, as he unfolded it from his brow before the fascinated eyes of the astonished Merchant; "but I should only have wasted time, for well know I that he hath not such a cachemire, though it might be paid for by all the piastres in the imperial treasury. 'No,' said I, as I passed the threshold of my home; 'I will away at once to Suleiman Effendi, he only can be the owner of such a shawl as mine, for has he not the newest and the richest goods in the tcharchi?' Have I said well, Effendim? Can you pair me my cachemire?"

But the merchant answered not; his gaze was riveted—not by the fine and delicate texture of the costly shawl—not by the deep rich tints of its gorgeous border—but on the little ticket where he recognized his own private mark!

Suleiman was right when he resolved this time, whatever might be the consequence, not to restore the shawl to Hafiz until he had assured himself beyond all possibility of deception, that it was not his own property. Yes—let the consequence be what it might! he armed himself resolutely against reproaches, threats, and violence, for he was prepared for all these; and, gradually recovering his self-possession as he formed this doughty resolution, he affected for a time to be carefully examining the quality of the cachemire, in order to collect his ideas, and to determine on his mode of action. A few moments sufficed for this; and keeping, without apparent design, his hold of the prize, he raised his eyes to those of the young man, and, slowly removing the chibouque from his lips, said quietly.

"Is the Effendi, your friend, prepared to pay down a heavy sum for the goods?"

Harcit—yes;" answered the youth calmly.

"Then to-morrow I may perchance be ready to deliver it up;" and again Suleiman examined the ticket; "Ey vah! 'tis not often that I have seen so costly a shawl. Did you purchase it in the tcharchi?"

"Purchase it!" echoed Hafiz, with another of those mocking smiles which had already maddened the merchant on a former occasion; "where was the son of Najib to find piastres enough to buy such a cachemire as that? Mashallah! I should be long in counting them."

"But it is your property, since you have just untwisted it from your brow?"

"Alhemdullilah! praise be to Allah! You have said well, Effendim; it is mine—but that is not my errand; to-morrow then you will pair it, and tell me your price?" And, as he spoke, he took hold of the shawl, and would have drawn it from under the hand of the merchant, but Suleiman's fingers closed over it with a firm grasp, as he prepared himself to contend with the indignation and anger of its declared owner.

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly, Effendim;" he said, in a grave and stately tone; "this is not a question of matching a porcelain cup, nor a clay chibouque-bowl; many things are to be considered and ascertained. Learned as I am in the lore, I cannot carry away with me the exact texture of the cachemire, the quality of the wool, nor even the intricacies of the pattern, and the shades of the dyes—you must leave the shawl with me, in order that I may compare it with that to which I have already likened it in my mind; and to-morrow I will bring you the two together."

Hafiz laughed a light laugh. "You jest with me, Effendim;" he said tauntingly; "I know you to be a rich man, and I believe you to be an honest one, but I will not therefore part from my property as though I cared not—"

"I will deposit its value with you in gold," interposed Suleiman; "and when I return the shawl, you can restore the piastres—otourusit."

"Be it so;" said the young man calmly; and, throwing off his slippers, he seated himself beside the merchant; and, having lighted his chibouque, smoked on in silence, while the more than ever bewildered Suleiman counted out the deposit money on the carpet between them.

"Pek ahi—it is well—" were the next words he uttered, as the golden and glittering pile of coin was transferred to his purse; "Fail not, I pray you, at this hour to-morrow with the fellow-shawl, and I have no fear that we shall cavil for the price." Then, shaking the ashes from his pipe, he put up the money, resumed his slippers, and walked away, leaving Suleiman in possession of the cachmere.

Long sat the merchant gazing at the rainbow-like subject of his new mystification. He was more perplexed than ever. He could vow upon the Korân that this was his own shawl—the present that he had made to his wife—the costly piece of merchandise to which he had proudly affixed his private mark—and there *was* the mark—there was no mistaking his misfortune—

* Outer dress.

the father of evil was assuredly mixed up with the transaction, for the shawl must have been conveyed to Hafiz, either through the bowels of the earth, or on the bosom of the air: be that as it might, and he could not attempt the solution of the problem, he now held the shawl; and he resolved not to relax his grasp for a moment, until he confronted his wife with her perfidy, and forced from her a confession of the truth.

Acting upon this determination, Suleiman carefully folded the cachemire, and lodged it safely beneath his ample robe: and, having seen his merchandise duly secured by his attendant, bent his steps homeward, with visions of bowstrings, sacks, and overwhelming waters, chasing each other, like the spectre-hounds of the Arabian fiction, across his over-heated brain. It is a singular fact, and one which it would be difficult to explain, but it is nevertheless true, that, as he moved slowly through the crowded streets, and exchanged salutations with his acquaintance, he could not decide whether he wished to prove his wife unworthy of the extraordinary indulgence with which he had treated her, or not. It was vexatious, certainly, to lose the idea of being, if not quite loved, at least reverenced and feared, and, above all, obeyed—while, on the other hand, it was provoking to be duped, and mystified, and pursued by constantly-recurring doubts. This day must, however decide all; and he magnanimously resolved to proportion the punishment of his wife to her apparent contrition, and to his own conviction of her repentance and probable amendment.

Kindly thoughts and relenting feelings were creeping over him as he descended the stair to the vault. Helmas Hanoum was so young, so pretty, and so graceful, it would be ten thousand pities to drown or to exile her; and he had arrived at a firm determination to push his forbearance to the extremest limit, when, on arriving at the fifth door, his ear caught the distant echo of a female voice, and he became conscious that his intriguing and false-hearted helpmate was actually at that very moment—that awful moment, freighted as it was with the chances of life or death—when he held in his hand the scales of severe and rigid justice, which his single breath would suffice to turn against her—actually singing to her zebec, as though neither doubt nor danger existed in the world!

This was too much even for a Turk's philosophy, and he accordingly flung back the two remaining doors with a more rapid hand; and his brow was crimson as he stood before the pretty culprit, prepared to overwhelm her with cutting reproaches, and indisputable proofs of her unequalled guilt. But, ere the first sentence had passed his lips, his words were arrested in the utterance; for, as the young Hanoum according to custom, laid aside her instrument on his entrance, he at once discovered that her waist was girdled with *the* shawl—the shawl that was even yet hidden beneath the folds of his robe—the shawl whose counterpart had never been seen in Stamboul!

The merchant gasped for breath, and the lamp fell from his hand upon the snowy Indian matting that covered the floor, amid the laughter of his wife, and the reproachful ejaculations of her more thrifty attendant; but he heeded neither the one nor the other as he rushed forward, and, seizing a corner of the cachemire, looked eagerly for his own private mark upon the ticket. His search proved successful: there it was—and his next action was to tear the shawl which he bore about him from its hiding-place; a second sufficed to draw it forth; and who shall describe the astonishment of Suleiman when he found himself unable to distinguish between the two—they were alike to a thread—to a shade—and to crown all—his mark—his own private and peculiar mark—was upon each.

"What means this?" asked the young beauty, as she possessed herself of the newly-arrived cachemire. "Did you not tell me that Stamboul held not the fellow-shawl to mine? And are not these two as like as twin roses? Chak chay—that is much—do I speak clearly?"

"You say truly—you say truly;" gasped the merchant: "they are alike, quite alike; woven in the same loom—dyed in the same copper—marked by the same—but no, no; if I really live, and do not dream, they cannot have been marked by the same hand. It is an invention of Satan—a plot hatched by the Evil One."

"Sen ektiar der—you are the master; but what new mystification is this?" demanded Helmas Hanoum pettishly. "Is it not enough that you should vaunt your own generosity in giving me a shawl of which even the Sultan himself (may his shadow never be less!) might be proud, and which he could not purchase in Stamboul—but you must come to place another precisely similar under my very eyes, to prove that you have made me an easy dupe? Unhappy woman that I am, to be first buried alive, and then treated like a wayward child by my own husband!"

"Peace—peace,"—exclaimed the merchant, impatiently: "Woman! you do not know—you cannot guess"—

"I do not wish to know, and I will not guess!" broke in his wife in a higher key: "Affiet ollah—much good may it do you—you are a divanè—an idiot—you do not speak Turkish—your words are dark, and your face is blackened—Who am I that you should have made me your wife?"

Suleiman only sighed; he was too wise to answer the revilings of a woman; and he folded up the mysterious shawl with a steady eye, though his heart beat more tumultuously than usual. He stayed not to apologize for his abruptness, nor to explain his perplexity; but, taking his lamp from the hand of Zeïnip, who had busied herself in retrimming it after its fall, he walked silently out of the subterranean.

Long and loud was the laughter that followed closely on his departure, and the last key was not turned in its lock ere Hafiz was seated at the feet of his mistress, detailing to her the scene of the morning.

"I would have given a thousand piastres to have seen him when you so readily consented to leave the cachemire in his hands," said the Hanoum gaily: "and to watch him as he counted

out his darling gold, and placed it before you! But, now tell me, Hafiz, how your friend became possessed of this rare shawl,' and left you only the task of counterfeiting Suleiman's mark upon the ticket."

"'Tis a simple tale, my Sultana;" replied the youth, as he looked into her laughing eyes; "and requires no khoja—no scribe, to record it. My friend Noureddin fell from his camel as he was journeying to Stamboul, and was grievously bruised: when a certain merchant, who travelled in his company, tended him like a brother, and bore with him through all his hours of suffering. Noureddin was not one to forget such kindness: he reads the Korân daily, and gives freely to the poor; how much more readily then did he open his hand to the friend of his sickness! He only hesitated as to the means of serving him, when, as if guided by the Prophet, the merchant himself suggested the method, by thus addressing him as they rode side by side together through the gate of Scutari:—'Effendim, said the merchant, 'you are a wealthy man, and a pious one: you are ever ready to help the needy, and to uphold the weak—I pray you do me a grace—I know that your bales are precious; and I have heard that among your merchandise are shawls of so fine a fabric, that they seem to have been woven by the Houri. Sell me, I pray you, one of these at an easy price, that I may on my arrival in Stamboul dispose of it in the tcharchi, at a rate that may help to defray the cost of my voyage; for my affairs have not prospered, and I am loth to return to the house of my father, and render up so poor an account of my venture.'—'Be it so,' answered Noureddin cheerfully; and, when they reached the khan where he had resolved to house his goods, he opened a bale of shawls, containing among others that which you now wear, and the one that I borrowed and carried to your husband.

"The merchant was struck with the splendor of the cachemires, but even although Noureddin offered them to him at the price that they had cost in the loom, he yet wanted gold to make up the sum; and it was at last arranged that he should become the possessor of one of these only, taking with the remainder of his piastres another of inferior value. On arriving in Stamboul he disposed of it, doubtlessly with great advantage, to Suleiman; while I chanced to remark its fellow when examining the merchandise with which Noureddin proposed to trade at Sevastopol, whither he was bound when he had arranged his affairs in this country. The rest of the tale is not worth telling; and you are bound from this instant to confess that I have opened three of the seven doors!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SEVEN DOORS—CONTINUED.

About a week elapsed after the adventure of the shawls, when, as Suleiman was one morning sitting in the salemlick,* or man's wing of the house, smoking his last pipe previously to repairing to the tcharchi, a slave informed him that a negress, who refused to tell her errand, craved to see him for a few moments. The merchant "pished," and "pshawed," and contracted his brows with impatient annoyance, for he had quite enough to do to arrange his own affairs, without interfering in those of others; but he nevertheless consented, after a moment's delay, to receive the applicant, be she whom she might; and accordingly, leaving her slippers at the extremity of the passage, the stranger approached with a succession of lowly prostrations, as far as the door of Suleiman's apartment.

Every one knows that the yashmac worn by the Turkish women in the streets conceals the whole of the face save the eyes, and that the ample feridjhe of cloth envelopes the form so closely as to disguise the whole of its outline; but those who have resided in the East for any length of time are quite aware that it is possible, despite all these precautions, to give something more than a guess at the identity of the wearer: and thus, as the negress stood before him, the merchant started, for he thought he traced a singular likeness in the stranger to the slave who shared the prison-harem of his wife.

"There is but one Allah!" commenced the intruder, as soon as she found herself alone with the merchant: "Do I stand before Suleiman, the son of Gunduz Hanoum?"

"You stand before him;" answered the host.

"I have a message for Suleiman Effendi;" pursued the slave; "and ekhi kateti—there is something in it; a message from a young and anxious beauty who craves of him a grace, which, if he be the beyzadeh that men deem him, he will not refuse."

"What you say is idle;" interposed the merchant; "bosh der—it is nothing; I am a grave man, and my beard is white."

"May it never be plucked out!" said the negress solemnly. "What shall I reply to my mistress? Shall I—"

"Who is the Hanoum Effendi, and who are you yourself?" demanded the irritated Suleiman, whose suspicions were strengthened by the voice of his strange visitor, even mutiled as it was beneath her yashmac. "I shall give no pledge until I know with whom I have affair. Mashallah! I am too old to be cheated by a woman."

"May my face be blackened;" urged the slave earnestly, using in her energy an ejaculatory sentence which savoured strongly of supererogation: "may my face be blackened if I seek to deceive so pious and worthy a Musselmaun—Kiefiniz ayi me—is your humor good? Effendim, I was told not to betray to you the name of the young beauty, nor even to mention my own; but who shall disobey your bidding? Inshallah! I am not so bold, when my foot is on your floor, and my slippers are at your threshold."

"Speak then;" said the merchant, "I listen."

"Hassan is a man of substance;" commenced the negress; "he has goods in the tcharchi, and gold in the salemlick; a caique on the Bosphorus, and an araba in the city streets. If affection could have been bought like unwrought silk, and fashioned into form like beaten silver, the

* Literally, "where the man is honored."

wife of Hassan might have loved him; but love, Effendim, is like the wind: it comes and goes as it lists, and no man can buy it with treasure, nor fetter it with bonds—nay, had Hassan buried his young wife in the bowels of the earth, and robbed her of the glorious daylight which Allah gave alike to all, *he* must know little of the sex who is not quite aware that she would have cheated him at last. But why do I say this to you, Effendim? to you, who need no words of mine to convince you of the fact? Am I a divanè—an idiot—that I talk thus to Suleiman, the son of Gunduz Hanoum, who knows all things? Ne apalum—what can I do?"

Something between a sigh and a groan escaped from the merchant but he did not utter a syllable.

"Let not the Effendi imagine, however," resumed the negress, "that Hassan *did* so bury his fair young wife—Shekiur Allah! he was too good a Musselmaun thus to provoke the wrath of the Prophet; no, no, he knew better. Are there not laws in Stamboul? Is there not a strong cord and a swift current, if a man really wishes to sell himself to Sheitan, and to defile his own grave? Why then should he act like a madman, and be laughed at to his beard?"

"All this is then bosh—nothing:" said the merchant angrily; "why do you tire my ears, and devour my time with empty tales; say your errand, and leave me to my thoughts"

"You are a wise man, Effendim; and I am but a woman," was the reply; "Allah bilir—God alone knows; as for me, I was only endeavoring to explain—"

"A wise head spareth its tongue;" said the host sententiously; "few words make wisdom—you waste time."

The slave folded her arms before her, and bowed her head meekly on her bosom as she continued; "Hassan brought a wife into his harem, but she never gave him her heart. How could she? Hassan suspected that she loved another. He was a wise man in this at least, for she did. Why did the Prophet plant roses in the gardens of Paradise, save that they should be gathered!"

"And who is this Hassan of whom you speak!" again demanded the merchant, as he suffered the smoke from his chibouque to escape, and roll away in dense curls over his mustache: "who is this Hassan who mated himself so ill?"

"He sits on the fourth carpet in the Bezenstein:" said the slave, "and he is kinsman to the Cadi."

"And his wife?—"

"Was the daughter of Hakif the sekeljhe,* near the Atmeidan; Gul-shy† Hanoum, the prettiest girl in that quarter of the city."

"And what would she ask of me?" inquired the merchant, somewhat mollified by the elaborate candor of his companion.

"The churl her husband has refused to give her a new cachemire for the feast of the Bairam, because, forsooth, he suspects her of—"

"Yok, yok—no, no! I will assist no plotting wife to deceive her husband!" broke forth Suleiman in a transport of virtuous indignation.

"Get you gone—there are easy dupes in the tcharchi who, having been fooled themselves, will be glad to aid in the good work of hoodwinking others: but I am not of these—I am not of these. Return to your light mistress, and tell her—"

"Yavash, yavash—not so fast, Effendim, not so fast;" interposed the pertinacious slave; "I have as yet told but half my tale. In the shawl-bazär sits a worthy merchant named Najib, an Adrianopolitan by birth, who has a son called—"

"Hafiz,"—exclaimed her listener, aroused at once into attention.

"You have said well, Effendim: he is indeed named Hafiz, and it would seem that you know him. If it be the same of whom I speak, he is a tall youth, with large dark eyes, and a smile like daybreak—"

The merchant made a gesture of impatience, and knocked the ashes from a pipe which was but newly replenished—"And what of this young man?" he asked peevishly.

"He has seen the Hanoum Effendi, and loves her:" was the reply; "He has learnt that she desires a new cachemire, and he has offered to procure for her the richest shawl in the city if she will buy it with a smile."

"Kiupek—dog! and the son of dogs! his beard is not yet grown;" muttered Suleiman beneath his breath; but the quick ear of the negress caught the words, and she answered readily, "Even so said my mistress;—'Semsi,'‡ whispered she as she spoke; 'am I a child to be won by a stripling—shall I sell myself to a boy, when I have only to ask the love of a man, and win it.'"

"She said well," murmured Suleiman, sententiously; "the wife of Hassan is a wise woman, and deserves to eat her pillauf in peace. Bashustun! on my head be it!"

"She has set her heart on a new cachemire," pursued the slave, heedless of the interruption; "but she has no gold, and Hafiz has resolved to tempt her to-morrow with the choicest in the tcharchi: she must have a shawl, or she will fall sick, and should she fall sick she will lose her beauty, and then the brightest carnation in Stamboul will be withered for lack of a few hundred piastres; unless, indeed, the Effendi before whom I stand will consent to receive in exchange some jewels, for which her fancy is outworn, and which will sell well in the bezenstein."

"And why not?" asked Suleiman, who had forgotten his suspicions in the joy that he felt from the hope of outwitting Hafiz. "Show me the diamonds, and I will tell you at once if I can venture on the traffic."

"Astaferallah—Heaven forbid! Does the Effendi imagine that the young Hanoum would intrust me with the jewels before she learnt his determination! Or that she will not desire to select her own cachemire? No, no,—if the Effendi consents to effect the exchange, he will have an opportunity of making his own bargain with the fair wife of Hassan, who has already looked upon him from behind her lattices, and selected him from among all the merchants in the tcharchi, because she saw him with pleasure. Shall it be so, Effendim?"

* Confectioner. † Rosewater. ‡ Parasol.

The flattered and flattered Suleiman did not immediately reply—a thousand suspicions of foul play rose up before him; and, as his long gaze fastened on the negress, and his ear drank in her accents, he could not divest himself of the belief that it was really Zeïnip who stood before him, or Sheitan himself in her likeness; but then again all was uncertainty, and Hafiz—what would he not give to circumvent the plottings of his arch-enemy! for as such he could not forbear considering him—"Do you take me for a fool?—a madman?" he asked quietly; "that I should set my foot in the harem of Hassan the jeweller, and bring my neck to the bowstring? Am I a boy, like the son of Najib, that I should do this thing!"

"And is the daughter of Hakif an idiot, that she should share her pillauf with dogs, and blacken her own face?" asked the negress in her turn. "Are there no harems in Stamboul save that of Hassan her husband? Allah buyük der—Allah is great—the Effendi is as a man who dreams."

The merchant started. He had never committed the folly of compromising his personal safety, even in his youth; and that he should now voluntarily encounter an almost certain peril for the mere gratification of thwarting a vain and froward boy, was an excess of rashness and indiscretion from which he shrank with very natural repugnance. "I will answer you to-morrow on this point," he said, at last; "let me see you before the noon-tide prayer in the bazár, and I will tell you my decision."

"Ere that hour the shawl of Hafiz will be in the harem of Hassan's wife; but be it as you will—" and, as the slave spoke, she pressed her fingers to her lips and brow, and moved to depart.

"Listen to me"—exclaimed the merchant sternly, as he rose suddenly from the sofa, and laid his hand upon her arm; "I am no longer to be cheated like a child—you are Zeïnip, the slave of Helmas Hanoum my wife—how you came here I know not, but it must have been by the agency of some devilish magic—I have watched you narrowly—deny it not—you are the plotting sister of Sheitan to whom I owe the miseries of months, and hence you depart not until I have visited the vault. Should my suspicions be correct, make your peace with Allah while you may, for you have not long to live—" and, as he spoke, he pointed with his outstretched finger to the window, through which might be seen in the distance, the bright ripple of the Bosphorus dancing in the sunlight; "but if I have deluded myself, I shall not detain you long; and I swear to you, by the beard of the Prophet, to follow you withersoever you list."

"And why should I wish it otherwise?" asked the negress, shaking off his grasp; "Am I not your slave? and are there not still many hours to sunset? I have told you that my name is Semsi, and that I serve Gul-suy Hanoum, the wife of Hassan the jeweller."

"And I have told you, in my turn," retorted the Merchant; "that I am no longer to be fooled. What I have said is said."

"It is said;" echoed the visiter, as she calmly squatted down upon a cushion which chanced to be near her, with an unmoved gesture of athomeness, that more than ever convinced the angry Suleiman of her identity. "But the Effendi will do well to return quickly, as my mistress may require my services; meanwhile, I will tell my tusbee, and wish good speed to his errand."

The merchant did not vouchsafe a reply, but contented himself with desiring two of his servants, who were lounging in the lower hall of the house, not to suffer the negress to escape; and, after this very natural precaution, he lighted a lamp, and proceeded as fast as his agitation would permit to the prison of his wife.

As the last door flew back, the irritated husband became instantly aware, even through the unusual gloom of the subterranean, that it was tenanted as usual by two individuals. On the sofa sat Helmas Hanoum with a circular mirror in her hand, staining her eyebrows with the juices of a nut which she had been burning on the candle that stood on a small table beside her; and immediately beneath the lamp, at the other extremity of the vault, expiring at the very moment of his entrance, as it appeared from lack of oil, was spread the prayer-carpet of the slave, who, with the long white cloth twined about her head and face, without which the Musselmaun women never repeat their orisons, was devoutly engaged in her namaz.* The merchant actually trembled with rage and mystification—there she was!—at intervals pressing her ebony-colored hands upon her knees; and her naked feet showing like two lumps of charcoal on the crimson ground of the carpet; piously indifferent to his entrance; and wholly unconscious of the absurd error into which she had been the innocent means of betraying him. So earnest was her devotion, moreover, that, as she bent down in the pauses of the prayer, sundry low groans escaped her, which, had she been otherwise engaged, would have appeared rather to be hysterical efforts to subdue a movement of mirth, than conscience-stricken demonstrations of holy suffering; as it was, however, the worthy merchant saw at once that he had committed a new folly: and, even while he sustained a disjointed and unsatisfactory conversation with his wife, his thoughts were with the captive negress in the salemlick: who, on her return to the harem of the daughter of Hakif, would not fail to make merry at the expense of the jealous husband. He was also conscious of having betrayed a secret not altogether calculated to decrease the ridicule; and thus he deemed it expedient to make a hasty retreat from the prison-chamber, in order to liberate his new captive, whom each added moment of restraint could not fail to exasperate into a resolution of more determined revenge. He accordingly informed Helmas Hanoum, whose eyebrows had by this time been taught to form a curved line all across her forehead, that he had pressing business at the teharehi; and, after bidding her console herself in her captivity with her zebec, and leaving beside her a small basket containing a pillauf made of quails, he resumed his lamp, turned another last, unloving look on

* Devotions.

the devout negress, and was soon on his way through the vaulted passage to the salemliek.

The key had turned in the third door which parted him from his prisoners, when the kneeling figure sprang lightly into an upright attitude; and, flinging aside the prayer-cloth that had bound its head, stood before the laughing Helmas Hanoum, at least a foot too tall for the negress Zeïnip. The shaven skull, with its one long lock of silky black hair, was soon concealed beneath an ample turban; the dye washed from the face, hands, and feet of the impostor: the trailing antery exchanged for a tight vest and girdle of shawl; and the pretty Helmas Hanoum and the adventurous Hafiz busied, amid their merriment, in preparing, over the glowing charcoal of the brazier, the savory pillauf of the mystified Suleiman; who, on his arrival at the apartment in which he had left the negress, found her still squatted quietly on the cushion, and with more haste than courtesy bade her summon him on the morrow to fulfil his pledge.

The slave rose, bowed humbly before him, and, without uttering a syllable, passed into the street. But she was conscious that she was dogged by one of the household of the merchant; and it was, moreover, so long since she had enjoyed a sight of the sun and the bustle of the city streets, that she arrived at the empty house beside that of her master by as many turnings and windings as a Greek pirate in the Archipelago; and the pillauf had been heated, and the fair fingers of the pretty Hanoum had dipped with those of her lover in the dish so often, that, ere the entrance of Zeïnip had been effected through the agency of Hafiz, the feast was at an end; and the fatigued and hungry negress was fain to content herself with the relics of the yesterday's meal. But this was no misfortune to one who had so merry a tale to tell; and heartily did the three plotters laugh ere the lover departed, at the bold device by which they had unlocked the fourth door of the prison-chamber.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEVEN DOORS—CONTINUED.

On the morrow, Suleiman was seated among his merchandise in the tcharchi one hour before his usual time; but his brow was dark, and his mood more than ordinarily taciturn. He remembered, and, remembering, he deeply regretted, the pledge that he had given to the negress. He had, moreover, passed a wretched night; he had dreamed of bright eyes and ruby lips, it is true, but he had unfortunately dreamed of them in conjunction with dark-browed negroes, and darker browed husbands. He had enjoyed a vision of a more than earthly beauty, who had welcomed him to her presence with the assurance that he stood before the favourite wife of the Sultan; but, while he gazed in wondering admiration, mingled with a very powerful degree of respectful terror, he had been surrounded by armed slaves, thrown on the ground, bowstrung with the rapidity of lightning, and finally had awoke just as the rapid current of the Bosphorus was consigning him to the tender mercies of the Black Sea.

Now Suleiman was not a man of prowess, but a man of peace—he despised the Jews, and hated the Janissaries: he had neither taste for adventures, nor affection for danger; and, when he raised his head from the pillow, he thanked Allah and the Prophet, from the very depths of his spirit, that it was all a dream; and a moment afterwards he shuddered at the recollection of the perils to which he had actually subjected himself through his own headstrong and causeless jealousy. It was, consequently, to escape from his unquiet thoughts and self-reproach, that he hurried to the tcharchi with such unwonted diligence, in the hope of finding amusement in the passing scene; but ever and anon, as he saw the gleam of a yashmac in the distance, a cold chill crept over him, and made his shaven head feel for an instant, as though it were covered with bristles.

Hour after hour wore on, however, and he began to nurse a vague and timidly indulged belief that the wayward beauty had repented her bold enterprise, and even to hope that she had suffered herself to relent in favor of Hafiz, and had accepted his offering; when, as he was carefully readjusting the folds of a shawl which had been hastily put aside on the previous day, he saw the son of Najib approaching him with a rapid step.

"Khosh geldin—you are welcome:" said the merchant, as the young man stopped beside his carpet, wishing him, at the moment in which he uttered the greeting, safely deposited in the great cemetry of the city: "affiet ollah—much pleasure attend you; can I serve you in aught? or are you only whiling away the time until the mid-day prayer?"

"Nay, not so;" replied Hafiz, as he returned the salutation. "I am hurried even more than my wont on this occasion; and, therefore, pray you to show me, with what speed you may, all the cachemires of Thibet on which you can lay your hand. My father's stock is exhausted, and I am commissioned to make a purchase for the wife of a rich Bey."

"Of a Bey, said you?" demanded the merchant, as unconcernedly as he could, while he was in the act of taking down some merchandise from one of the shelves. "Are you sure that her husband is a Bey?"

"Haveit—yes; she is the wife of Hassan Bey, who served for several years in Tripoli, and who now inhabits a house near the fortress of the Seven Towers. She desires a new shawl for the feast of the Baïram."

"And she has commissioned you to select it for her—is it so?" asked Suleiman, as he looked steadily towards the youth.

"Mashallah! that were a tale for a massaldjhe"*—laughed Hafiz; "'tis the good Bey himself who has charged me to make the bargain—and I must make a successful one, or it will fare ill with me, for Hassan is not a man to trifle with. He has been so many years accustomed to have every thing his own way, that he is not

* Professional story-teller.

particular about the propriety of the manner in which he manifests his displeasure. I never look at him without fancying that I see a bow-string peeping from amid the folds of his girdle."

Suleiman actually shivered with terror as he sat.

"Just now," whispered Hafiz confidentially, as he bent towards the merchant; "all gives way before the beautiful young Gul-süy Hanoum, his new wife; but her favor is precarious, for it has been insinuated to the Bey that she is not so devoted to him as it behoves her to be. But who shall say?" and he looked up archly into the face of his listener.

"Wallah billah—by the Prophet! are we Musselmauns that we thus talk together of a woman!" murmured Suleiman deprecatingly; "what is it to you or to me, Effendim, if it be so or not?"

Again Hafiz laughed. "You say well; to us it is indeed bosh—nothing. So now we will examine the shawls."

But the husband of Helmas Hanoum had heard too little or too much—too little as regarded the unknown beauty herself, and too much as it regarded her husband, for a man who was bound hand and foot to risk his life in the furtherance of a woman's caprice. Yet how to lead back the discourse to the point at which he wished to arrive, he knew not; for the Turks, even among themselves, do not make their women the subject of conversation or comment; and thus, with all the terrors of the uncompromising Bey before his eyes, coupled with the consciousness that he was about to beard him in his very den, he was compelled to turn over shawl after shawl, and to expatiate on the beauties and qualities of each, while visions of fear, and peril, and jeopardy, were crowding across his brain.

"What have I to do," he asked himself almost aloud, "with the light-headed and wilful wife of another man, and that man, moreover, a Bey and a soldier? avret der—it is a woman. Have I not counted nearly seventy years since the prophet first blew the breath of life into my nostrils? Is not my beard gray, and my hand weakened? Is it for me to measure myself with boys?" But all these reflections availed nothing; and, just as Hafiz, after quarrelling with the quality of one shawl and the cost of another, had flung aside the last with a dissentient gesture, declaring that he should not dare to meet the Bey if he made no better bargain than those offered to him by his father's friend, a negress, whose yashmac almost covered her eyes, walked quietly up to the merchant, and, without noticing the vicinity of Hafiz, said in a calm tone, "The Effendi awaits you hard by—I am to conduct you to him." And the paralyzed Suleiman, without a word, cast all his costly goods upon the floor of the little store-room behind him, locked the door, and, shuffling on his slippers, prepared to follow his ebony-colored guide, like one under a spell.

One glance, and but one, passed between the slave and Hafiz, and that was unnoticed by the merchant, who was absorbed in the trembling discomfort of his own terrors; and in the next instant the heavily-draped negress was threading her way along the narrow streets of the tcharchi, followed at some distance by her victim.

They moved onwards very slowly, for the pathways were thronged with passengers; but at length they emerged into the open streets of the city, and Suleiman remarked, with something like a sensation of joy, that their road did not lie in the direction of the Seven Towers, whence it was evident that the troublesome beauty could not purpose to receive him beneath the roof of her husband!

On turning an abrupt corner, the merchant found himself suddenly in a street little frequented, and, as it chanced, at that moment saw no human being near him except his mysterious conductress, who was standing a few paces from the opening, evidently awaiting his approach. He did not accelerate his pace, however, but rather walked more slowly, for he dreaded all communication with the dusky piece of mysticism who had beguiled him into his present predicament; while the slave, on her side, appeared perfectly indifferent to everything save the object that she sought to attain, and contented herself by exclaiming, when he at length reached her side; "So far, so well—lightly falls the foot of him who is summoned by a pasha's wife: aferin—well done, Effendim; the Hanoum will rejoice to find that her bidding has been so joyously obeyed."

A cold dew rose to the brow of the worthy Suleiman, but he did not dare to ask a question, as the slave, having uttered her extraordinary address, again moved forward. The wife of Hassan the jeweller had grown into the favorite of Hassan Bey, and again into the consort of a pasha, within the twenty-four hours since he had first heard of her. There was but another step to take—he had now only to learn that she was an inmate of the sultan's harem, and his doom would be sealed! He remembered his dream, and trembled; and, as the negress from time to time looked back to assure herself that he followed, he each moment expected to have the dreaded intelligence poured into his quailing ears. But no such misfortune as this befel him; for his companion never addressed him again until they reached the narrow and squalid street which terminates in the Tcherunberlè Tasch, or Burnt Pillar. This celebrated column was at that period nearly perfect; the figure of Apollo, one of the masterpieces of Phidias, which had originally crowned it, was indeed gone; but the delicate garlands of oak-leaves, that encircled it at regular distances from its base to its summit, were yet perfect; and the marble was but slightly stained with fire-marks.

About midway of the street the negress paused before the gate of a dreary-looking house, and having fixed one long, significant gaze on the merchant, beat upon the door, and was instantly admitted. Suleiman took several turns along the rude and rugged paving, and delayed as long as he safely could, ere he reluctantly followed her example, and then, with a trembling hand, he raised the ponderous knocker, and heard its harsh sound slowly die away in the void beyond.

He was not kept long in suspense. The door flew back, and, as he passed the threshold, closed slowly behind him; his old acquaintance Semsi was in waiting, and he obeyed her silent gesture, and followed her through a long and dusty passage, which looked as though the daylight had never penetrated its gloom. There was no matting upon the floor; and, even stealthily as he moved along, the unfortunate merchant could hear the echo of his own footsteps, and almost the beatings of his heart. Every tale of terror to which he had ever listened came fresh to his memory; and he submitted to his fate unquestioning, like one who felt that he had gone too far to recede, and that escape was now hopeless.

The passage terminated at a door, before which hung a tapestried curtain, and the negress, having flung it aside, bade him enter without ceremony. For the first moment he could not distinguish any thing, though he was conscious that the slave was still beside him; but in the next, a strong glare burst forth from the upper end of the chamber, as a hand flung upon the brazier by which the apartment was heated a quantity of aromatic wood. When the smoke cleared away, Suleiman could just discover that a female, whose dress glittered with gold embroidery, lay reclined upon a pile of cushions spread upon the floor; and, while he was yet employed in endeavoring to obtain a view of her features, she clapped her hands, and half a dozen slaves entered with lights.

Suleiman rubbed his eyes, and fancied that he must be the sport of a dream. The whole apartment was the very embodiment of splendor and luxury. It was like awakening in the Prophet's paradise after the sleep of the grave. The floor was covered with Persian carpets; the sofas were sprinkled with embroidered flowers, and looked like a petrified parterre—draperies of gorgeously-tinted silk veiled the latticed windows—and, in the midst of this scene of costly comfort reclined its unveiled mistress, in a vestment so resplendent with gold and jewels, that the dazzled merchant cast down his eyes, like one who has inadvertently looked upon the sun.

But he was not long suffered to remain in this attitude of silent wonder. A voice which sounded strangely familiar to his ear bade him welcome, and invited him to approach; and, as he advanced further into the apartment, his eye fell on a group of splendidly-dressed slaves, who were standing near the couch of their mistress. Coffee was served to him in silence; and then a chibouque of cherry-wood, with a mouth-piece of the finest and palest amber, was put into his hand by an attendant, young, beautiful, and graceful, who bore so strong a resemblance to his imprisoned wife, that he started as he took the pipe, and almost suffered it to escape his clasp.

"You have done me much grace, Effendim;" said the lady of the revel, as soon as the proper ceremonies had been observed towards her guest: "khosh geldin—you are welcome; and I am grateful to you for running so great a risk to indulge one of my idle caprices. The pasha, my husband, is jealous and lynx-eyed, and we shall be fortunate if we contrive your departure without exciting suspicion. But we will not talk of him. My slave Semsi, by whom you were summoned, has doubtless told you that a new whim, on whose gratification I am, as usual determinedly bent, has compelled me to apply to your generosity. Bana bak—look at me—I am one to be thwarted? I need not explain more; I will merely put before you the toys which I desire to give in exchange for one of your most costly cachemires. I know all the risk that I incur in order to work out my pleasure, and I am grateful to you for having so willingly shared it. Joy and fear are not more opposite in their effects than in the feeling which they excite towards those who are our partners in the emotion; in joy, we find the pleasure doubled by participation; while, in fear—oh Effendim, you know not, you cannot guess the sensation with which a young, and pretty, and idolized wife looks upon the individual, who, at the moment when he pays homage to her beauty, is conscious that, should his devotion be discovered, he can save her by offering himself up a willing sacrifice to her offended husband! Could I not at this instant, were the pasha to intrude into the harem, vow that I knew not your errand, and had never sanctioned your entrance? Nothing could be more simple; and as the result of such a declaration, it were vain to expatiate on it—Mashallah! Hassan Pasha is too methodical to leave any one in doubt on such a subject. 'Gul-süy Hanoum,' he will say to me, 'you are the light of my eyes, and the sun of my sky, and rather would I put out the beam of the one, and miss the warmth of the other, than know that they had been shared by the Sovereign of the world—the Padishah of the most glorious empire of the earth—'"

The merchant wiped the gathering damps from his brow, and only groaned a reply.

"Korkma—fear not; what care I for all these love-sentences?" pursued the lady; "will they buy me a cachemire, or give me a pleasant dream? Are they not mere words? Perhaps you have a fair wife in your harem, Effendim; nay, I am sure you have, for your beard is white, and your days are numbered, and you would be a divanè—an idiot—not to seek some solace for your age in bright smiles and gentle words; and if you *have* a wife, young, and pretty, and ready-witted, as women will be, though all good Musselmauns would fain see them otherwise, you must know that she would rather have one purse* than a score of compliments—from you at least. Yet wherefore waste your time with idle talk, when every instant may be fraught with danger? Diliram"—and, as she spoke, the slave who looked and moved like the merchant's imprisoned wife, advanced, and bent meekly before her; "show to Suleiman Effendi the toys which I desire to barter with him."

She was obeyed on the instant; the attendant silently withdrew, and in a moment returned, bearing a tray, which she deposited at the feet of the visiter. It was covered with a gold-em-

* Generally containing 500 piastres (or £5); all imperial presents in specie are made in "purses."

broidered napkin, which was hastily thrown aside, and the first object that met the eye of Suleiman was a jewelled bracelet, whose form and setting were as familiar to him as the precepts of the Koran. Beside it lay an essence-box of ivory, small, and quaintly-fashioned; and both were pillowed on a costly cachemire of pale yellow, with a border of green and crimson!

Let those who have writhed under the visitation of the nightmare, picture to themselves the sensations of Suleiman! He looked long and earnestly on the objects of barter as they were spread out before him—he handled them each in their turn, and they were all real and palpable—they were offered to him for sale, and he could swear that they were his own! In his bewilderment he turned towards the pasha's wife, and gazed keenly and inquiringly upon her. The haughty beauty bore his steady look unshrinkingly: not a blush, not a word escaped her; and it was strange how the expression of those large dark eyes added to the mystification of the merchant; there was a mocking light in them that withered his very soul! He had seen them before, he knew not where or when; his memory played the traitor, and his senses reeled: and meanwhile there lay the bracelet, the essence-box, and the shawl—the ferocious pasha in perspective—the imprudent beauty in presence—and a crowd of phantoms, shapeless, indefinite, and mystical, writhing and winding through all the intricate angles of his imagination. There too stood the slave, the young and mystical slave, who looked and moved so like his own wife! The merchant instinctively buried his hand in his girdle—this at least must be a delusion, for there were the keys: and hence it was only fair to infer that he was under a spell—that the Evil Eye was on him—and that the bracelet, the essence-box, and the yellow cachemire, were all phantoms, engendered by the fever of his own over-heated brain.

While he was yet abandoned to his bewilderment, the slaves, as if to increase it, struck up a wild, shrill concert of voices and zebecs, which rang through the saloon, and whistled in the ears of Suleiman like an east wind. Well nigh maddened by the noise, the mystification, and the terror, which grew deeper each moment from the necessity of its concealment, the unhappy merchant began hurriedly to offer he scarce knew what, for the hated objects of barter; and anxious to escape from the scene of torment, swore to the dark-eyed lady of the revel that she should turn over every bale in his store, and select the shawl which pleased her, be its value what it might. The offer was accepted on the instant; nor was an effort made to detain the liberal Suleiman when he had pledged himself to observe, and faithfully to fulfil the compact; while, on his part, he as willingly consented to leave behind him the valuable pledges that were to be given in exchange. He lost not a moment in descending from the sofa, and shuffling on his slippers; and having made his obeisance to the hostess, who was sunning herself in the light of her own eyes, as they were reflected from a circular mirror set into a frame of ostrich feathers, he lifted the tapestry hanging that veiled the door of the gorgeous apartment, and passed into the void and echoing gallery beyond.

But no officious Sensi followed to guide him through the dark labyrinth—no companionship save that of a loud and mocking peal of laughter from the party whom he had just quitted, beguiled the difficulty of his progress; and even that died away as suddenly as it had burst forth. Not a single lamp shed its protecting light to save him from yawning staircases and gloomy passages; and he wandered on slowly and painfully, with fear and trembling, bewildering himself more and more in the intricacies of the building, in silence and in darkness, until after the lapse of an hour, when he distinguished in the distance the glimmering of a sickly light, towards which he cautiously advanced, in the hope that it might afford him a means of escape from his malicious enemies. Not a sound was to be heard as he neared the beacon, save the dull echo of his own footsteps; and he consequently became sufficiently reassured to quicken his pace, and to pass without hesitation the threshold of the vast and apparently empty apartment in which the lamp was burning. But he had no sooner done so than the door closed with violence behind him, cutting off all hope of escape by the gallery along which he had passed, and the sickly lamp gave out one strong burst of light, and instantly expired. In that brief interval, however, momentary as it was, the trembling merchant discovered the whole extent of his misfortune; nor was any time permitted him for preparation; in an instant he was seized—flung on the ground—held down by powerful hands, amid low and mocking laughter—and in five minutes he had fainted beneath the bastinado.

The sun was bright upon the domes and minarets of the city, when Suleiman the shawl-merchant painfully stretching his limbs, and opening his haggard eyes, found himself extended on a marble slab in the Armenian cemetery of Pera, beneath the light shade of a blossoming acacia. He might well have believed that all the scene through which he had lately passed was but a hag-ridden dream, had not the swollen and smarting soles of his dishonored feet assured him to the contrary. He could not doubt the extent of his wrong; and if he did not instantly lay his complaint before the cadi, it was simply because he was unable to make his way to the Bosphorus, and to pass over to Stamboul unassisted.

Several hours were consequently wasted, to the great disgust of the merchant, among the Christian graves, ere he was gladdened by the approach of an Armenian jeweller, who came, as his wont was towards sunset, to smoke his chibouque beside the grave of one of his relatives. Suleiman knew him well, as he had often traded with him in the bezenstein; and to him, therefore, he confided, without hesitation, the history of his discomfiture, taking care, however, as he subsequently did in his complaint before the cadi, to conceal the fact of feminine agency; and contenting himself with the declaration that he had been decoyed to this house of mystery for the purposes of commerce.

By the agency of Takour-Oglou, the Armenian jeweller, a carriage was soon procured, in which the suffering Suleiman was safely deposited on the wooden pier at Topp-hannè, and there embarked in a caïque for Stamboul, where, on his arrival at home, he lost no time in laying his case before the cadi and demanding justice.

His description of the house was so circumstantial, and he was so positive as to its accuracy, that the officers of justice found it at once, and thundered for admittance without a moment's hesitation; but the sturdy strokes which they beat upon the door only produced a long-sustained echo as they died slowly away in the distance; and when at length their importunity excited the attention of the neighbors, an old crone, closely muffled in a scarf of blue and white checked linen, tottered forth from one of the most squalid-looking tenements of the wretched street, and delivered up the key of the empty house, with an assurance that it had been long uninhabited; and that her son, who was pursuing his trade in one of the Archipelagan islands, and whose patrimony it was, desired with all his heart to dispose of it, even at a loss.

The followers of the cadi left the withered woman to pour forth her information to the half dozen individuals whom the outcry in the street had attracted, and rushed through the entrance-court into the desolate gallery beyond. But they discovered no object in any one of the empty and mouldering apartments which bore testimony to the truth of the merchant's story.

Weather-stained walls—faded frescoes, peeling from the neglected ceilings—doors hanging loosely upon broken hinges—and casements from which the perished lattices were dropping in fragments—were about them in every direction, but not a trace of recent inhabitation was perceptible; and, after having traversed the whole building, and searched every room and gallery, they were compelled to vacate the premises with a firm conviction that the merchant had misled them, and had altogether mistaken the locality of his disgrace.

But it was not so: and during the interval which succeeded ere the enraged and baffled Suleiman had regained the use of his feet, and was once more enabled to visit the subterranean, many a jest and jibe of which he was the subject, had lightened the tedium of the prison-harem; and more than once had Hafiz twined about his head the costly calemkier,* in which he had enacted the Pasha's wife; and practised before the anali (or hand-mirror) of the treacherous Helmas Hanoum the same languishing grimaces with which he had favored her unhappy husband.

Well might the youthful lover exult over the success of his treacherous artifices—for five of the seven locks were now unloosed, and more than half his adventurous task was accomplished!

* Painted handkerchief.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SEVEN DOORS—CONTINUED.

Suleiman was one morning descending to the vault, when, as he was turning the key of the last door which separated him from the prison-chamber, he was startled by the sounds of violent contention; and he paused for a few seconds ere he entered, in order to acquaint himself with the cause of the outcry. High and shrill rose the voice of his young wife, but higher and shriller still were the tones of Zeïnip; and the amazement of the merchant was extreme when he discovered that that the gentle Helmas Hanoum was actually in anger against her long favored attendant; and that the pampered negress, forgetful of all the indulgence and kindness of her mistress, was casting back every reproach, and retorting every injurious epithet. Had Suleiman seen a purse of gold upon his path, he could not have been more rejoiced! A quiet smile played about his lip, and he stroked down his beard with a gesture of complacency and self-gratulation truly enviable. *Now* every mystery would be unravelled; if, indeed, as he was still sometimes inclined to suspect, the tenants of his pretty prison were privy to all his annoyances. A quarrel between the conspirators would necessarily involve discovery; for what angry woman ever kept the secret of her adversary? Thus the merchant listened with all his ears; and the contention continued long enough to convince him that the belligerents would show each other no quarter when his appearance afforded to them the opportunity of revenging their imaginary wrongs.

But with all his powers of hearing on the stretch, Suleiman could not gather amid the violence of the quarrel a single sentence tending to throw any light upon the subject on which he was anxious to be better informed; and, accordingly, making a great rattling with the stupendous bunch of keys that he carried in his hand, he ultimately threw back the door, and stood before the flushed and furious women, who seemed well nigh exhausted by the violence of their contest.

I shall not stop to detail the torrent of words by which the merchant was assailed: suffice it, that one plucked him by the sleeve, and that the other twitched him by the robe—that one pulled him one way, and the other dragged him the other—that one screamed into his right ear, and the other into his left—that they teazed, tormented, and almost terrified him, ere he could produce the slightest appearance of peace, and make himself master of the very obscure and mystified cause of contention.

Strange and startling inferences had escaped both from the lady and her attendant, as the war of words went on; and ever and anon the merchant imagined that he had glimpses of a mystery which he would fain have fathomed; but even as he seemed about to grasp it, it eluded him, and he remained fully as bewildered as ever.

In vain did he attempt to pacify his fair and furious wife—she was resolved—she might be a prisoner—he might deprive her of the light of

heaven, and the free air which was the heritage of the happy—but he should not compel her to share her dungeon with one who had become hateful to her. Nay more—if Suleiman persisted in retaining the obnoxious negress in his service, the determined little beauty threatened him with her enduring and unmeasured wrath. She should be sold—absolutely sold in the slave-market—disposed of to the best bidder—banished for ever from all chance of offending the eyes of her irate mistress; and, despite his better reason—for, amid all the declamation and violence of his wife, Suleiman was quite unable to ascertain of what crime Zeinip had actually been guilty—he was compelled to acquiesce in all that was required of him, and to promise that he would without delay, purchase a younger and more submissive attendant for his angry helpmate.

With some difficulty he, however, prevailed on the young Hanoum to retain the negress until he had decided on her successor; and, having carried this point as an especial favor to himself, he quitted the vault, leaving both the women silent and sulky.

On the morrow the merchant sauntered to the slave-market; his brow was clouded, and his humor dark; for he was too fully convinced of the powers of elocution possessed by Zeinip, not to feel painfully certain that his prison-harem would afford a fruitful topic for verbal display in the next family of which she became an inmate. Suleiman dreaded ridicule with a most holy dread; and he actually shivered as he remembered how legitimate a subject his jealousy had supplied to the discarded negress. But for this evil there was no remedy, save retaining the delinquent in his own service; and ere he reached the enclosure appropriated to the sale of Kurd and Abyssinian slaves, he accordingly determined to effect a purchase if possible, in order to pacify his wife; and then to propose to her the luxurious alternative of retaining both the slaves in her service. The more the merchant pondered on his scheme, the more feasible it appeared; for he deemed it only probable that a storm which had arisen so suddenly, might as suddenly be calmed; and that the morrow might see the disgraced favorite reinstated in the good graces of her mistress. The thought was a pleasant one; and as Suleiman moved on into the centre of the market-court, he passed his hand caressingly down his beard; for this transient tempest had at least proved to him beyond all further doubt, that the extraordinary and mysterious annoyances which had lately ruffled him, had not originated in the vault.

Slowly, therefore, and complacently, the merchant stepped into the midst of the groups who were squatted on their rugs and mats under the broad sun, and laughing out their thoughtlessness as they waited to be purchased. Once or twice he paused, attracted by a merry face, or a bright eye; but he resolved to make the tour of the court ere he committed himself by word or sign; and accordingly he pursued his way until he stood beside a solitary negress; who, veiled and clad more decently than the generality of those by whom she was surrounded, appeared to be wholly absorbed by her own thoughts.

Suleiman started as his eye fell upon her—he paused upon his path, and fastened his gaze on the apparently unconscious negress like one fascinated—and then he silently beckoned to an aged, coarse-looking Turk, who was quietly smoking his chibouque on a faded Persian carpet, a few paces from the slave.

"She is yours?" said the merchant inquiringly, as the hoary dealer in human beings deliberately obeyed his summons.

"She is mine," was the brief reply.

"I would see her," pursued the merchant.

"Allaha es marladek—Allah preserve you! the Effendi is lord, and I am his slave;" said the owner of the negress, as he pointed to the yashmac which she wore. "Musna, unveil."

Without the delay of a moment he was obeyed. The woman unwound the scarf of fair white muslin which had concealed her face, and stood before him with a smile upon her lips.

"Zeinip!" exclaimed the excited Suleiman; but his ejaculation was met by a stolid and unconscious look from both the slave and her master. "Answer me, sister of Sheitan!" he persisted, "answer me for your life, how came you here?"

"Amân!" groaned out her owner; but the negress did not move a muscle.

"Ajaib chay—they are wonders both!" cried the furious Suleiman, turning fiercely on the old man. "Dog! whence came this woman? In what hellish plot have you engaged, that you bring her here to laugh at me to my beard? Are there no laws in Stamboul, that you dare to trifle thus with one who trades in the city, and spreads his prayer-carpet in the mosque of St. Sophia? Am I a giaour, that you thus defile the grave of my father?"

"Eh vah—mercy on us! What means my lord?" asked the slave owner in his turn: "Is not the woman an Abyssinian? and did I not buy her honestly at the market of Adrianople. When the sun rose this morning, four of them occupied my carpet: the day is well nigh spent, and Musna alone is left: the rest have found purchasers among the Effendis of the city. Even she herself should have been provided with a new master ere this, had I not demanded a heavy sum for one so well skilled in housewifery. A young gallant cheapened her only an hour since for the harem of his mother, and we parted for a hundred pitiful piastres—Look at her, Effendim; if, indeed, you lack a slave to tend your daughters—and surely, my lord, whose beard is white, hath daughters—for you will scarcely meet with one so skilful in her duties."

"Haif! haif!—shame! shame!" impatiently interposed Suleiman: "I tell you, rogue and juggler as you are, that the slave is already mine, and I dare her to deny it."

"Amân! amân!—alas! alas!" sighed the old man in his turn, affecting a look of deep concern: "would that the stricken one could obey your bidding."

"What mean you, hoary sinner?" demanded his angry listener: "ne oldou—what has happened? I am weary of this folly, and can bear no more."

"On my soul be it;" answered the slave-dealer, with a gesture of deep humility, while the negress calmly and deliberately readjusted her veil: "Who shall murmur against the decrees of Allah, and the will of the holy prophet? Were it not so, the piasters had been mine, and I had long ere this shaken the dust of the city streets from my feet—Musna is skilful in the harem, and ready at the bath; but my lord bids her speak, and she cannot obey him—she is swift of foot, and willing of hand, but worsd are denied her—Musna is dumb!

The merchant looked incredulous, and his resolution was taken at once. "Bosh der—it is nothing;" he said hastily; "even thus I will purchase her—name your price, and if you be neither a Jew nor a Ginour, the slave is mine."

"The Effendi will pardon me that I intrude on his privacy;" said a detested voice close to the elbow of the exasperated Suleiman; "I come but to pay over to Mustafa a few hundreds of piastres for an Abyssinian slave, and I will immediately retire. Inshallah! the purses are true, and the negress is mine, is it not so, Mustafa?" And Hafiz turned to the old man, who was engaged in counting the money, which he had put into his hand.

"She is yours;" said Mustafa gravely; and motioning to the negress to follow her new master, he was about to address the shawl-merchant, when he was interrupted by an angry exclamation, as Suleiman flung himself across the path of the slave, and dared her to follow the son of Najib.

But the dumb woman, apparently unsuspicious of his meaning, merely moved aside, and made her way to the gate by a less direct line; while Hafiz, with a light laugh, affected to treat the interference of Suleiman as a jest, and said gaily as he moved away; "The Effendi may be right in deeming my bargain a poor one; but my mother hath already many about her who have the gift of speech, and to her it will be little drawback that I bring her one who cannot add to the outery."

The shawl-merchant literally gasped for breath; he dared not offer any open violence, nor detain the woman by force, lest he should be seized by the kavashlir,* as a disorderly person, and hurried before the cadi; while, mingled with his rage, came an intrusive memory of his former mistake, when he made a prisoner of the slave Semsi, who had doubtlessly amused her mischievous mistress, and the whole harem, with an embellished version of his jealousy, and of the hints which in his anger he had inadvertently suffered to escape him. Under these circumstances he considered it more expedient to permit the departure of the mysterious negress and her purchaser; and to endeavor, this time at least, to entrap them ere they had leisure to rejoice over the success of their new scheme, should they indeed be wound up in the web of his annoyances.

But the felech—the constellation of Suleiman was adverse. An araba, drawn up by the side of the street, received the slave; and the driver, having bent for an instant towards Hafiz, who gave his directions in so low a voice as to be inaudible to the bystanders, drove off at a pace as rapid as the defective pavement would permit.

The result requires little explanation; for the speed of the merchant was no match for that of the carriage; and when he at length reached the vault, he was more vexed than surprised to be half deafened by the peals of laughter which resounded through the subterranean; and to find the lady and her attendant in the full flow of confidence and hilarity.

"Effendim," commenced the merchant sternly; "I have purchased for you a new slave, who will be with you to-morrow; and I have transferred Zeïnip, at some pecuniary loss, to a Cæsarian merchant, who has been deputed to supply the wives of the Pasha of the Dardanelles with four attendants. To-night, therefore, she will remain in the vault, but at dawn her new master will be here to claim her.

"Oghour ola—heaven speed you! that were a tale worth telling;" laughed his wife. "Know you so little of a woman's nature as to believe that she will nurse her wrath for so many hours? If you take Zeïnip from me I shall fall sick; I will neither touch my zebee, nor sing the ballads to which you love to listen. See then if you wish to part us."

The merchant ground his teeth, and all his doubts and suspicions came back upon him—but he was powerless; and profiting by past experience he resolved to affect an indifference which he was far from feeling; and to endeavor, by appearing unconscious that any mystification was intended, to throw the conspirators off their guard, and thus take them in their own toils.

Acting upon this somewhat tardy resolution, Suleiman smoothed his ruffled brow, called a smile to his rigid lips, and gave a ready assent to his wife's new arrangement, to the no small astonishment of his tormentors, who were prepared for an obstinate opposition. And so long, indeed, did he linger in the vault, that the pretty Hanoum began to fear that the patience of Hafiz would fairly fail him ere the departure of her incomprehensible husband!

At length, however, Suleiman departed, quite unconscious of the next and final surprise which awaited him; and when he was out of hearing, Hafiz sprang laughingly through the chasm, and bounded into the centre of the floor.

"Joy! joy!" he exclaimed, as the young beauty rose from the sofa to receive him; "six of the doors are conquered—six of the locks are shivered—six of the keys are lost—and for the seventh, my sultana—for the seventh and the last, we have an easy remedy. The araba yet waits which brought our faithful Zeïnip from the slave-market, where she played her part like the favorite of a padishah*—the caïque dances on the ripple at the pier that juts into the harbor beside 'The Gate of the Garden'—that trusty caïque which is to bear us across into Asia; there all is prepared for our flight; and when once we have reached the mountains, we may defy all the jealous husbands in Stamboul. But

* Police of the city.

* An Emperor.

you weep, my houri! Light of my eyes and shadow of my existence—do you regret that your word is pledged?"

For a moment the weeping Hanoum made no reply: her woman-spirit quailed for an instant; but her resolution was taken; and, placing her hand in that of her lover, she turned on him a smile, in whose light her tears were forgotten.

Zeïnip, meanwhile, was busying herself among the wardrobe of her mistress, when she brought a golden bracelet, a cachemire shawl, and a box of essence; the prayer-cloth in which Hafiz had enacted the kneeling-slave—the head-dress that he had worn as the Pasha's wife, and the dark veridjhe in which she had herself figured in the slave-market—and having laid them separately upon the table, she disturbed the tête-a-tête of the lovers, to remind them that her portion of the comedy was concluded.

"Mashallah! our good Zeïnip hath more prudence than we can boast, my sultana;" exclaimed Hafiz; "we waste moments that we can ill spare—here are six of our successful engines—and here"—and as he spoke he took from amid the folds of his girdle seven keys, six of which he broke deliberately one after the other, and added to the separate heaps—one only remained entire, and that he laid alone and apart.

"Sun of my sky!" he murmured, as the muffled Hanoum prepared to follow him through the subterranean; "Tchabouk, tchabouk, gidelim—quick, quick, let us go—our sands are gold until we have left Stamboul behind us—they must not run to waste; and back, janum—see, by soul! he who was your husband at least owes me one debt of gratitude—for I have left him a goodly key with which to secure the door of his pretty prison-cage, when his bird is flown!"

PART III.

CHAPTER XIX.

"By the soul of the Prophet 'tis a good story!" exclaimed Saifula Pasha; "I know not when I have heard a better! But was not Suleiman the shawl-merchant an ass, and the father of asses, to let his beard be plucked out, handful by handful, by a pair of plotting women, and a cripling? Allah buyúk der—Allah is great; he could have had no more wit than a dromedary."

"And what became of the kiupek—the dog of husband?" demanded the laughing Carimtil Hanoum: "Did he keep his next harem above the earth, or did he try the same experiment a second time?"

"History makes no further mention of him;" replied the young Greek, with assumed gravity. "What should it tell of a man who had placed his reliance on seven morsels of metal, when he might have been safer by far had he trusted to appearances from the first, and not taken to his house the promised wife of another? There is a better moral in my story, kadeun;" she continued, turning towards the Circassian, "to those who look for it, than appears upon the surface. The gold-seekers do not carry away in their vessels the water of the stream, but they wash the sand when they would find the ore."

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly;" said the satrap: "we care not for any thing further than the fable itself—the moral is but beng*—it sets one to sleep."

"Your highness drinks of the mirage, like one who wanders in the desert;" interposed Katinka; "the tale that I have told is no fable; and the lovers yet live."

"Pek ahi—it is well done;" said the Pasha yawning: "As for the merchant, he was a domous—a hog; and they spiced his dolmas for him after a wise fashion; but you have measured your tale with a mitkal,† and have filled it to overflowing, for the night has grown on us since you began it. Had it not been a good story, you would have been cramming our mouths with hashish;‡ but it has truly been as light as the air-bag of a camel,§ and our eyelids are scarcely yet weighed down."

It was, as the Satrap had remarked, wearing deep into the night; and when sweetmeats and coffee had again been served, he descended from the sofa, resumed his papooshes, and returned to the salemlick, leaving the two friends once more together.

"I cannot sleep, khatoun;" said the Circassian: "your tale, merry as it was, has troubled me. Have we not been laughing at the Pasha to his beard?"

"His highness would not listen to the moral, janum;" replied the laughing Greek; "his wit, like the piety of a santon, sometimes sleeps, and he cares not to have it awakened. He will dream pleasant dreams on his sofa to-night—Care not for him, but rather let us pass into the garden, and breathe the sweet air of the lime-blossoms; for my brain throbs with fatigue, and the soft odors of the flowers will calm its pulses."

A fond smile was the only answer, as the Circassian thrust her small feet into her embroidered slippers, and led the way to the palace-terrace. Thence they descended, by a flight of marble steps, into the parterre; and having lingered awhile beside the basin, to see the scales of the gold fish with which it was filled glitter in the moonlight, they slowly entered the lime-avenue.

The night wind was making gentle minstrelsy with the leaves, and the flowers were pouring themselves out in perfume, while the fall of the many fountains came soothingly to the ear, and completed the luxury of the hour.

"It is in moments like these," said Katinka, as the two ladies flung themselves down among the cushions which a slave who followed them heaped above a Persian carpet, under a stately tulip-tree; "moments of external calm, when the moonlight seems to slumber on the beautiful bosom of the earth, that the ashes of the past sweep in clouds over the soul. Carimtil, does

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* A narcotic. † Turkish measure. ‡ A narcotic.
§ When these animals are distressed on their passage through the desert, they blow from their mouths a light blood-tinted skin which preserves them from the flowing sand.

not your spirit fall back upon the days when, loved and loving, as woman loves and is loved but once, your arm wreathed in that of Anastatius, you wandered, surrounded by an atmosphere of delight, among the scented groves and beside the sparkling streams of your delicious land? When the words of your chosen one rose on the air like perfume; and the light of his eyes outshone the watching moon! Are the ties which bind you to the Moslem so holy as those which linked you to your first love? The chains may be golden, but still they are mere fetters; and the free spirit sickens beneath constraint."

"Of what avail, sister of my soul, are such inquiries?" asked the Circassian in reply; "kismet—it is my fate! You have but to look on my dim eye and my faded cheek, and to remember what I once was, to feel how little all this splendor has touched my heart, though I have been compelled to bow before the power of my constellation. Could I purchase with a year of this empty and profitless profusion one hour such at those to which you have just alluded, how gladly would I crush all my future life into a few short days, and live it out at once in happiness!"

"Na to ne—there it is!" retorted the young Greek; "your heart plays the rebel, and yet you affect to feel horror at the thought of emancipating yourself from your present thrall. Think you, that once more free, I would waste an hour in the harem of the Moslem, were it not from the conviction that the day is not far distant, when—"

"Nay, nay, no more of this to-night;" murmured the Hanoum, as she turned aside her head, and her tears glittered in the moonlight; "my dreams are already evil, and yet I sorrow to awaken. The deep and hopeless grief to which I was a prey ere your arrival has been exchanged for an anguish far more acute, and yet to which I cling as though it were a joy."

Katinka smiled, and for a time there was silence, while the Circassian was left to her own thoughts, from which she started suddenly, and turning towards her companion, asked anxiously; "How will you contrive to inform him that we are here?"

"Am I not a Greek?" demanded Katinka; "sorrow has taught me subtlety. Ere this he must be on his way."

A gush of tears from the beautiful Circassian replied to the intimation, as she threw herself upon the bosom of her friend, and wept aloud.

"Why, this is idle, khatoun!" said the Greek, soothingly; "your fate is in your own hands; you have but to bid me drive him hence, and he will obey you, and carry his broken heart to his own land."

"He has perchance forgotten me"—sobbed out the fair Carimfil.

"Do the flowers forget the sun, or the lake the moonlight? Come they not at the appointed hour? Wherefore then should you, who are brighter than the flowers, and fairer than the moonlight, doubt that your lover will fly to your feet when he is summoned there?"

The argument was unanswerable; for there is no consolation so satisfactory to a pretty woman as that which is deduced from her own beauty; and although in the present instance, the fair mourner asked no further assurance of her lover's probable advent, she began to consider it as less doubtful than it had appeared a moment back; and it was consequently with a bright smile that she listened to a thousand trifling, but, to her, interesting details, which her companion poured into her willing ear as the time went by unheeded. The attendant slaves, who occupied a mat a short distance from their mistresses, had long fallen asleep, lulled by the plashing waters and the sighing wind; but the dreams of the two friends were waking dreams, rendered the more delightful from a sense of their reality.

Katinka was the first to remark that the shadows were growing shorter and fainter, and the night almost spent.

"We are playing truant strangely from our gilded cage;" she said, as she pressed her lips to the brow of her companoin; "and may chance to prove our imprudence to-morrow by our suffering—and lest we should have already incurred this penalty, I will, ere we leave the garden, sing to you a song which you must well remember, for it was a tribute to your own bright eyes, in one of the laughing hours when our visions were only of joy. You cannot have forgotten it—for I, who did but smile because *you* were happy, can yet see the minstrel, seated at your feet, beneath a cedar-tree, his mandolin in his hand, and his gaze riveted on the brow of his beloved. Listen——" and she swept the strings of her zebec, and sung her wild ballad to a melody which is sometimes the accompaniment of the graceful Romaika.

SONG OF THE GREEK LOVER.

I've heard of isles beyond the sea,
Where summer neither fails nor fades,
Where leaves are ever on the tree,
Where verdure ever clothes the glades—
I've heard of birds so gay and bright,
That as they hover round the bowers
Whose blossoms woo the noonday light,
They look like fair and flying flowers.

I've heard of coral caves, beneath
The heaving bosom of the ocean;
Where many a sea-nymph twines her wreath,
And warbles out with tuneful breath,
Her young and beautiful emotion—
I've heard of mountains bleak and bare,
Shaming with barrenness the vision,
Which yet embosom'd gems as rare
As ever shone in halls Elysian.

I've heard of fountain goddesses,
With drooping head and flowing curls,
Who, in their liquid boddices,
Whene'er they wept, shed tears of pearls—
I've heard of arial spirits, flitting
In beauty through the summer beam;
I've heard of river nymphs, calm sitting
Beside some leaf-embower'd stream.

In short, I've heard of many things,
All beautiful, and bright, and free;
And 'mid these fond imaginings,
Lady, my thoughts have flown to thee!

I take the sunshine of the isles,
Those homes of everlasting spring;
And as I coin them into smiles,
Upon thy brow those smiles I fling.
And the bright birds! I lend their grace,
Their buoyancy, and happy voices,
To thy glad tones, and that fair face,
Which every heart and eye rejoices!

But when I come to nymphs and fays,
To goddesses, and sprites celestial,
I drop all metaphoric lays.
And thank the fates that thou'rt terrestrial!
For in thy young and sparkling beauty
Thou art to me more fair by far,
Than if I tendered mere lip duty,
To thee in semblance of a star.

Yes, rather would I wreathe around thee
A garland of each flower that blows,
Than have to tell that I had found thee
A sprite, soft sleeping in a rose—
And 'twere far pleasanter with thee
O'er gem-inued rocks to climb and climber,
Than thine enchanted form to see
Enclosed within a wall of amber.

Thus then, though idly I may dream,
And liken thee to things celestial;
I say again—I love thy beam
The better that it is terrestrial!

"Ah! well indeed do I remember it!" exclaimed Carimfil Hanoum, clasping her hands passionately; but it was now the turn of the young Greek to preach prudence, and to urge the necessity of returning to the house.

"Sleepless eyes will be dim;" she said, smilingly; "and late vigils make a dull harem; here are yet some hours to the dawn: let us rest, and to rest while we may, kadeun; it is now too late alike for smiles or tears."

In half an hour the harem of Saifula Pasha was buried in sleep.

CHAPTER XX.

Meanwhile, a more active scene was transpiring elsewhere. A Tatar, who had been privately recompensed, was despatched to Circassia, to the dwelling of the young merchant, Anastatius Maniolopolo, with a scroll of parchment, inscribed with delicate Greek characters. The missive was received with a delight which won golden acknowledgments of his fidelity from the giver; who asked not by whom it had been intrusted to him, but retained his services as his own guide on his journey to the province of Saifula Pasha. A short time sufficed for the arrangement of his affairs, which he placed under the superintendence of a Greek friend: and half wild with the joy of finding his sister still in life, when he had so long wept her as dead; and of learning the undiminished affection of the beautiful girl to whom he had given his heart; he bade adieu to Circassia, accompanied by Safii, his Tatar guide, without having framed one feasible plan for the regulation of his future proceedings; and contented, in the first rush of his delight, to breathe the same air as his loved ones, and to trust to his happy fate for the future.

Anastatius Maniolopolo was, perhaps, in the most enviable frame of mind, as he galloped his fleet steed among the mountains, to which man can attain in this world: careless of the past, enjoying the present, and without a fear for the future! Had not the dead come to life, and the lost one been found? Why then should he dread what was to follow? She would fly with him—she would leave her gilded prison, and once more live over again in his company those glorious hours which the horrors of war had terminated so abruptly.

Such were his thoughts, as, followed by Safii the Tatar, he reached on the second day of his journey a lovely valley, lying like a huge emerald at the mountain-foot, and traversed by a fair stream, which, fed by a spring in the higher lands, and falling in a natural cascade down the face of the rock, formed in the bottom a lovely river flowing above party-colored pebbles and sparkling sand, and over-arched at intervals by groups of forest trees, among which the stately and umbrageous maple and the delicate weeping birch were conspicuous; while tufts of mimosa and henna bushes, with their minute blossoms, as white and as sweet as the flowers of the jasmine, made the air balmy with their fragrance. Storks and cranes flew over their heads, and numbers of pheasants rested among the branches of the tall trees, which were also vocal with singing birds. The wild vine flung its leafy garlands from stem to stem, and the grapes were hanging from it in blushing clusters, wooing the hand of the travellers. Numbers of the Jerbuah or leaping mice,* common in the country, were sporting on the banks of the river; and the turf beneath the trees was enamelled with flowers.

It was a scene that Benuzzeer, the Persian Claude, would have loved to paint; and here the travellers sprang from their saddles, in order to enjoy their noontide meal upon the grass; and while Safii was kindling a fire, and preparing their repast, the lover walked apart on the margin of the stream, and lost himself in visions of delight, such as could only be realized in Peristan.

The sun, riding in mid course, fell brilliantly on every surrounding object, and rendered the freshness of the running water, and the coolness of the long grass beneath the trees, doubly refreshing; and it was not until he had been twice summoned by his hungry companion, that Maniolopolo abandoned his delicious revery, to minister to the grosser necessities of existence.

And even then, when the repast was spread out before him, the young Greek could scarcely withdraw his eyes from the glorious landscape; his heart overflowed with happiness, and Nature seemed to sympathize in his joy; while all around was so thoroughly in unison with the harmony and elasticity of his own feelings, that Maniolopolo did but scant justice to the meal, to which his companion was paying homage as devout as ever Ghebre lavished upon the sacred flame of his faith.

It was almost with regret that the young Greek once more rose from his fair and fragrant resting-place, and prepared to resume his journey. But the remembrance of the beautiful Carimfil pierced through the mists of memory like a bright star; and as he vaulted into his

* The Jerbuah (otherwise Gerboa) or leaping mouse of Circassia, is also a native of Northern Africa, Nubia, and Egypt; it is about the size of a squirrel, legged like a kangaroo, and has long ears; it has a habit of laying its tail flat upon its back, and leaping to a considerable height or distance; from which peculiarity it derives its name.

saddle, and struck the sharp spur into the flank of his fleet-footed Arab, the name of his young love was on his lips, and hope again buoyant in his heart.

"My lord loves this fair scene;" said Safil, as, after a brief space, the young lover once more checked his gallant horse, and gazed around him; "and in truth it looks as though Joy had built her nest among its branches, and Love rocked her first-born on the river-blossoms: and yet, I have heard a darker tale told of as smiling a valley as this: a tale in which the muddy torrent of misery overflowed the bright plain of youth, and the rude hand of violence clasped the mantle of helplessness:—but, after all, what are these fables of past times? are they not bosh—nothing."

"Nay, not so, Safii;" replied Maniolopolo; "there is much to be learnt from the legends of the massaldjhis, if we only read them aright. Tell me this tale as we ascend the mountain; it will beguile the way."

The Tatar smiled; and having flung the bridle on the neck of his steed, at once complied, with the air of one who feels that he is conferring a benefit.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TATAR'S TALE.

In the famous city of Schamachie, the capital of the province of Schirwan in Persia, lived a merchant named Ali, who, from his immense wealth, was considered as a second Karoon.* He traded with the Franks in raw and wrought silks, and the wove cottons of the West; with the Muscovite dealers in furs, leathers, and metals; with the Tatars in horses; and with the Jews—may their father's graves be defiled!—in gold and silver, brocades and weapons, woollen goods and tapestry: in short, there was no caravan passed in or out of the city in which the merchant Ali had not a large venture; and so favored was he by the Prophet that he seemed to live only to prove the fallacy of the proverb, which says that, for every pearl of price that sees the sun, the diver must descend a score of times to the bottom of the ocean. Certain it is that, as often as he dipped his right hand into the bowl of fortune, he drew up the gem from the depth.

Moreover, the merchant had a son—a youth of pride and promise; and of a disposition so gentle that it seemed as though he had been nursed by the Peris, and fed with the honey-dew that the early bee rifles from the rose. Even as the azure veil of the firmament hides the ten thousand houris who live amid the sunbeams, so did his modesty conceal from all, save a chosen few, the divine perfections of his nature.

Mohammed, for that was his name, was one day walking in the pleasant and fertile environs of the city, musing over the ruined wall of the southern quarter which was so demolished by Shah Abbas, and sighing in the gentleness of his spirit at the cruel effects of violence, when the slowly sinking sun, pillowing its golden brow on its cushion of crimson and purple, warned him to return to the house of his father in time for the evening meal.

As he passed slowly along one of the narrowest and least frequented streets of the city, his ear was suddenly outraged by the voice of anguish; and advancing anxiously in the quarter whence it came, he saw an old man of stern aspect, who, with ferocious gestures, was urging on the wali's guard to tear a young and beautiful female, whose veil had escaped in the struggle, from the arms of her aged parent, while she rent the vault of heaven with cries and supplications.

Mahommed sprang forward like the light-hoofed deer before the tread of the hunter, and at once inquired the cause of this iron-hearted violence; as the maiden turned aside her graceful head with a blush which threw a new sunlight over her beauty. The story was soon told. The father of the young houri was the debtor of the hoary sinner who stood by, enforcing this deed of darkness: and his child was about to be torn from him, and sold into slavery, in default of other payment.

The voice of sorrow was soon turned into that of joy, and the happy father laid the forehead of thanksgiving in the dust of gratitude, as Mohammed, out of the abundance of his generosity, paid down the required sum, and freed the beautiful Zohara* from the grasp of her captor. But, alas! the son of Hali had but transferred the chain of slavery to his own heart; and when, in obedience to the old man's prayer, he passed the threshold of the father of Zohara, and saw her mother weeping at his knees, while the maiden herself stood by in her young loveliness, partially shrouding her face in the folds of her robe, he felt that the sun and moon of his earthly sky would hereafter be the eyes of the fair creature whom he had rescued. It was true that at present the mists of sorrow obscured the sunbeams of beauty, but Zohara was like the water-lily which is ever the loveliest in its tears: and as the young man quitted the roof to which he had now restored happiness, he felt that an arrow was in his heart, which he sought not to pluck out.

Mohammed had studied like a moullah in the colleges for which Schamachie has so long been famous, and the boasted sciences of the Franks were no more than atoms in the beams of his knowledge; but from this time forth he sheathed the bright spear of study in the breast of indolence, and wandered during whole days beside the streams of the valley, or beneath the shadows of the forest-boughs, weaving sweet fancies of which the fair Zohara was ever the brilliant subject.

Such a passion as this could end only in marriage: and it was not long ere Mohammed, the son of the wealthy Hali, asked for his bride the daughter of the pennyless Timsah, whose worldly possessions would not have loaded the weakest-backed camel in the city. It is not difficul

* The Croesus of the East.

* Morning Star.

to imagine how he was answered; and while the mother of the young man was preparing to receive the wife of her son, he passed whole hours beside her, gazing on her fresh cheek, where nature had crushed its roses to paint the fairest skin that ever flushed at praise; and into her deep eyes, where the light seemed to slumber, save when his smile called it forth in living fire. Graceful was she as the safsaf, and fawn-like as the light-footed maidens of Singol; while her voice was low and sweet as the night-wind among the tombs of the early dead.

Rèchid Aga was the friend of Mohammed; they clung together like double pomegranates; and, in the exuberance of his joy, the unwary young man poured into the ear of his chosen associate the tale of his approaching happiness. Rèchid listened, and a wild wish grew in his soul, and poisoned it like the breath of the upas. The painted wings of vanity were folded about his heart; and, as he curled his dark and glossy beard over his fingers, he began to ask himself wherefore the feleeh of Mohammed had shed a light upon his path which had been denied to him? If the maiden was so fair as the eyes of his friend had made her, she must be a banished peri, condemned to visit earth for a time, and to be won by a mortal—Why then should *he* not be that favored one? And as Eblis thus prompted him, vague thoughts and hopes grew into shape and tangibility within his bosom; and he resolved to learn all that the trusting friendship of Mohammed might lead him to reveal; seizing, therefore, with the hand of sport, the skirts of confidence, he smilingly asked a thousand questions, to which his friend replied with unsuspicious frankness; and thus the poverty of Timsah, and the obscurity of his position became known to him, as well as the beauty of Zohara, and the story of her rescue.

Rèchid Aga left the presence of his friend with treachery in his heart. His fancy had been taken captive by the glowing picture of his peerless beauty so soon to be a bride, and he resolved that should she be but half as lovely as she had been painted to him, she should be his, if craft or violence could win her.

As the steel-hearted leopard springs on the trembling chamois, so rushed the treacherous Aga on his prey! The house of the slumbering Timsah was fired at midnight; and the shrieking Zohara borne through the flames, only to be placed on a swift horse, encircled by the arm of his rider, and panting with affright.

As day dawned the horseman reined up his rapid steep, and springing to the earth, drew after him his pale and sinking burden.

It was a glorious morning; and their halt was in a valley where happy hearts, blessed in each other, might have been content to dwell for ever. Much time was spent in restoring the maiden to consciousness, for her swoon was long and heavy; and as Rèchid Aga hung over her, and bathed her pale brow with the pure water of a mountain stream, and crushed in her small hands the aromatic blossoms of the henna-plant, he felt that the words of Mohammed had been weak in painting her beauty. He had laid her down beneath the tall boughs of a maple tree, on whose roots the fresh moss grew rankly, clustered with deep-blue violets; and when the fair Zohara at length opened her eyes, and beheld beside her the friend of her affianced husband, she clasped her hands in a transport of joy and gratitude; for she guessed not that he had stained the skirts of his honor with the defilements of treachery, but at once believed that he had preserved her from the flames in friendship for Mohammed.

As the Aga caught her meaning, he eagerly encouraged the delusion; and, spreading before her some dried fruits, with which he had come provided, he urged her to partake of them ere they pursued their way back to the city. The gentle Zohara, grateful for his care, smilingly obeyed; and, as her false-hearted companion hastened to the stream to procure for her a draught of its refreshing water, she looked eagerly and admiringly about her, on the fair scene amid which she was seated.

The clouds, those graceful cup-bearers of the sky, were riding like snow-flakes upon the clear blue bosom of space; on every side bloomed clusters of bright and many-tinted flowers, worthy to be the envy of the constellations; the sun, a heaven-inspired painter! had sketched a thousand beautiful designs on their leafy tablets; and sweeter than the musk of Tartary was the perfume which accompanied his touch. The forest-boughs dropped honey, for the haunt of the wild bee was among their leaves; and the ruby cups of the bursting buds were each sealed with a diamond drop of dew. The distant mountains bathed their brows in light; and the lesser heights were clothed in draperies of many-colored vegetation; the tall trees which overhung the stream looked like stately beauties mirroring their gracefulness in the clear waters; while the more flexible safsaf, the weeping willow, and the feathery birch, bent low into the wave, as though faint with enjoyment. The slender-hoofed hind at intervals bounded past, light as the wind that waved the branches; and the bulbul nestled amid the leaves above her head, and not yet weary of his melodious griefs, was pouring out a song to which the peris might have loved to listen.

As Zohara contemplated this fairy scene, her soul was steeped in the honey of delight; the thorns of care, and the gnawing caustic of sorrow, were alike shut out; and when the Aga held the cup to her lips, sparkling with the cold rock water, she thanked him with a smile which spread the glossy feathers of hope over the black heart of falsehood.

But ere long the serpent-tongue of guilt betrayed its worthless purpose; and the affrighted maiden learnt the unholy passion which had caused her to be thus borne away from the roof of her father, with a terror which denied her utterance. The vows breathed by her perfidious suitor did but rouse hatred in her bosom; and as she became more calm, she wedded the name of Rèchid Aga to every reproachful epithet with which her memory supplied her. She reminded him of the heavy chain of gratitude that had been flung around her by the generous aid of Mahommed, ere she yet had learnt to love him; and she vowed by the soul of the prophet, and by the grave of her father, that she would rather

die by her own hand, than be the wife of another. The protestations of the Aga fell on her ear like water upon sand, and left no impression; while the young man gnashed the sharp teeth of disappointment against the shivered weapon of defeat, as with her small dagger in her hand, which she had drawn from amidst the folds of her girdle, she threatened to sheathe the steel of death in her heart, if he did not leave her on the instant.

The aga urged and expostulated in vain. He represented the impossibility of her return to the city, alone and unprotected; but the maiden spurned alike his threats and his entreaties; and she had raised her arm to strike, preferring death to further communion with her treacherous companion, when the tramp of horses was heard in the distance; and before Rèchid Aga could warn her of the probable danger, a wild shriek from Zohara summoned to their side a party of predatory Arabs.

The maiden had scarcely time to cover her face with her robe, when the foremost of the train checked his steed under the shadow of the tree beneath which she was sitting; while in the next instant the aga, who had drawn his scimitar on the first alarm, was wounded, overpowered, and bound to one of its branches.

So unlooked-for a capture, almost in the vicinity of the city, was hailed with delight by the Arabs, whose chief immediately claimed the maiden as his spoil; and having looked upon her beauty, talked exultingly of the number of purses which would be freely paid down for so fair a purchase; while others appropriated the horse and weapons of the aga, the whole of which, as their practised glance at once detected, were of great value. Having satisfied themselves on this point, half-a-dozen of the most distinguished of the party seated themselves on the grass, and prepared to partake of the fruits which were still spread before the maiden; while the rest, formed into separate groups on the margin of the stream, drew from out of their

avelling-bags their less delicate contents, and commenced a hurried meal.

Zohara, meanwhile, looked on tremblingly, and vague projects of escape rolled across her mind; but, like wreaths of vapor they left nothing tangible behind; and as she turned aside from her captors, and her eye fell on the drooping and wounded aga, the origin of all her sufferings, her heart froze within her, and her pulses stood still, as though Azraël had pressed his finger upon her brow.

Coiled among the branches above her head, she beheld an enormous serpent, slowly moving along towards the bough to which the unhappy young man had been secured. The sunlight fell flickering through the leaves and touching at intervals the bright scales with which he was covered turned them into jewels; his deep green eyes looked like emeralds, and his forked tongue protruded its poisoned lance from the blood-stained cavern of his yawning jaws. On, on he moved—and Zohara could not stir a limb, nor utter a cry for help—on, on, until his head rested on the shoulder of the wounded man, and his gleaming folds were coiled around his body. Here for awhile he remained, as though contemplating the scene beneath; and then gliding away into the thick foliage as noiselessly as he had stolen forth, he disappeared among the leaves.

Again Zohara breathed freely; and she would have warned her captors of the vicinity of their dangerous enemy, and besought of them to rescue the insensible aga from so horrible a death; but at this moment, the Arabs, having drunk too deeply from their wine-skins, began to wrangle among themselves, and never ceased their dispute until the slumber of inebriety stole upon them, when, one by one, they laid their heads upon the earth, and slept.

Now, indeed, the maiden began to let the wings of hope flutter about her heart: but she yet felt the necessity of caution, for although the groups by the river bank followed the example of their chiefs, and flung themselves into the attitude of repose, she knew that theirs would be but the lighter slumbers of fatigue, which an unguarded movement might serve to dissipate. While, therefore, she was carefully turning in her mind the most feasible means of success, her thoughts divided between her terror of the serpent, and her hope of escape from her enemies; the mighty snake once more appeared above her head, and as her eye again rested upon it, she crouched down with clasped hands and clenched teeth, without power to withdraw herself from the danger.

The serpent, however, glided down the tree, and passed her by unheeded, attracted by the scent of the wine-skins which yet lay beside the sleeping Arabs. Twice, thrice, he reared his crested head high above them; and then plunging it into the liquid, he drank deep, and flung back into the wine a few heavy black drops of the foul poison which hung about his jaws.

The noise of his retreat, as he again glided swiftly into the underwood, with a rattling sound, accompanied by a shrill hissing noise, aroused the Arabs, who started from the earth, and clutched their weapons; but, when, on looking around, they could discover no cause of alarm, and saw one pale captive seated beneath the tree, and the other yet bound to its branches they only muttered an imprecation; and seizing the skins of wine, passed them one to the other and resumed their rest.

Now was the moment come when Zohara felt within her the courage which grows out of peril She glided to the side of the aga, but he did no unclose his eyes—she touched his hand, it wa cold and nerveless—and the maiden started wit a new terror, for she felt that she looked o death.

A sudden impulse shook her, and she drev forth her dagger. Were not they who wer sleeping but a few paces off her enemies? an might she not deliver herself from their grasp Those at her feet could injure her no further, fo she knew that they had quaffed poison with thei last draught. She moved towards the margi of the stream, but her heart grew sick; she fe that, if when the sword is in the hand of powe generosity is the seabbard of heroes, so mue should mercy be that of women!

The steed of the aga was standing, fastened t a mimosa bush, not fifty paces from her; ar

with the speed of lightning she disengaged the bridle, and sprang upon his back; but ere she could commence her flight, a second trampling of horses sounded through the valley, and at once the sleeping Arabs vaulted into their saddles, and, shouting to their chiefs, prepared to meet the coming enemy. But their chiefs answered not; they lay prone and motionless upon the earth, their faces blackening in the wind, and the poison oozing from their parted lips: and the wondering tribe were yet busied in endeavoring to awaken them, when a band of horsemen, led by Mohammed the son of Hali, came like a thunder-cloud across the valley, sweeping down all before them.

Zohara was saved! The "Morning Star" once more lit up the sky of Mohammed's happiness; and the dark-hearted aga paid the forfeit of his treachery.—But here we are on the mountain brow, Effendim; and, with the help of the prophet, we should be past the dark ridge which cuts against the clouds yonder, before sunset; so we have little time to waste." And as Safii ceased speaking he gave his good horse the rein, and, followed by Maniolopolo, was soon descending into the valley.

PART IV.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Ne oldoo—what has happened?" demanded Saïfula Pasha, as his chibouque-bashi handed to him his fourth pipe, while the Cadi of the town was devoutly kissing the hem of his robe. "If my head were as large as the mountain of El Caf, which surrounds the habitable globe, it would scarcely suffice for all its duties: and if my arm were long enough to reach from Stamboul to Scanderia, it would still be too short to grasp all that it is required to hold. But speak, Cadi Almadhafer—what has happened in the city?"

"May the condescension of my lord increase!" said the justice, as he lifted his head from the earth, and obeying a motion of the pasha's hand, assumed a sitting posture. "I believe that the Ibn Sheitan—the son of Satan, has arrived among us."

"Min Allah—Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the satrap, flinging out a long thread of smoke. "And yet," he added with a faint smile, as he looked down upon the pumpkin-headed, unwieldy little coward at his feet, "you are a wise man, Cadi Almadhafer, and moreover a lawyer—you are, therefore, fully competent to form a judgment on such a point. And how comes he to our quiet province? Is he a sakalsiz—a no-beard, like the natives of Frangistan? or is he in the true likeness of Eblis, horned and tailed? Speak, good cadi,—Mashallah! I listen."

"May my lord's lip never want a jest!" was the reply; "but truly this is no theme for merriment. The baseborn stranger, who is now brawling under the very palace-walls of your excellency, is, as I hear, (for I have never looked upon him myself,) handsome enough to be the high priest of Anirân.* He walks the bazâr like my lord himself—flings his piastres from him as freely as a padishah—feeds all the ragged pezevenks† in the city—and has given to a black-eyed almè‡ a cachemire rich enough for a vèzir's harem." And as he concluded this catalogue of vices, the corpulent cadi paused for breath.

"Chok chay—that is much!" said the pasha complacently; "he will leave money in the city."

"I sent to his house," pursued the cadi, "to learn who he was, and whence he came, as is my wont with all strangers; and his reply was this—'Tell him who sent you, Yuzbashi'—for to do him honor I entrusted the inquiry to the captain of your excellency's guard—'that when I put my beard into his hand, he shall be free to pluck it out'—and so he turned upon his heel, and left the chamber."

"Almadhafer," said the pasha, "you are an ass"—and, having delivered himself of this opinion, he smoked on for a time in silence. "Have you never heard, Effendim," he resumed at length, for the cadi had not ventured to controvert the assertion of his superior; "have you never heard that the spur is for the steed, the koorbash for the buffalo, the capidgi-bashi for the traitor, and the hand-mirror for the young beauty? Cadi Almadhafer, do you mean to be a dog all your days?"

To which question the obsequious judge only replied by an emphatic "Min Allah—Heaven forbid!"

"Listen to me, then," said the satrap; "let this giddy-brained stranger alone; send no messenger to his house, ask no questions of himself—it is unseemly: but cadi—fold your feet upon the carpet of watchfulness; if his servants love rakèe, let it poured into their cups—the fiery sherbet of the Franks unlocks the lips of all men, and lays their hearts upon your hands, where you may read them at your leisure. Let him give his feasts in peace, but be careful that some of your own spies sit down to every repast,—let him be fooled and flattered, and made merry with songs and dances; and he will surely fall into our power by some act of inadvertence, which he will be glad to buy off with gold. Shekiur Allah!—we wish him no harm; and we have need just now of such as can pay their avanias§ with an open hand!"

"Sen bilirsen—you know best;" said the obedient cadi, whose disappointment at the calmness with which the satrap received his intelligence of the arrival of a wealthy stranger at the quiet city of the pashalik was beyond his power of concealment: "Inshallah! my lord knows best—bakalum—we shall see."

The hour at which the satrap was accustomed to give audience had arrived; and the cadi, having once more attempted to kiss the extremity of his garment, and being condescendingly prevented from so doing, passed at once from the presence of the pasha; who followed slowly, supported on either side by a chaoush,‖ who held him up under the arms, as though he had

* Hymen. † Rascals. ‡ Dancing-girls.
§ Fines. ‖ Officer.

been a cripple, as is usual with all high personages in the East; to whom locomotion, on occasions of solemnity, is apparently supposed to be considered peculiarly injurious. The great man was followed by two chokhadars, or cloak-bearers, his keeper of the purse, his chibouque-bashi, his cafejhe-bashi, and four soldiers of his guard.

As he made his way across the wide hall of audience to the divan at the upper end, all the applicants who thronged the doorway prostrated themselves to the earth, while the officers and individuals of sufficient rank to approach his person, bent down, and laid his hand upon their heads.

"Alhemdullilah!—all are sure of justice while Saïfula Pasha is satrap of the province;" commenced the pasha himself, as he took his gorgeous pipe, with its pale lemon-colored amber mouth-piece, enamelled with blue and gold, from his chibouque-bashi; while a second attendant slid a small brazen dish under the boudaka* "Who has any thing to ask from the favorite of the Padishah, the Light of the Earth, and the Lord of the Three Seas?—Let him speak—I listen."

The words were yet upon his lips when an aged Jew detached himself from the crowd at the bottom of the hall, and, sinking upon his knees, made his way thus to the centre of the floor, where he flung himself with his face upon the earth. The appearance of the grey-bearded Hebrew was by no means calculated to prejudice the spectators in his favor; his turban was of coarse cotton, of which the original color had long been a mystery; his brow was deeply and closely wrinkled, his quick restless eyes were partially hidden by a pair of thick and wiry eyebrows, his prominent nose was pinched and sharp, and his thin lips were pressed closely together, as though he could not part gratuitously even with his breath, without an effort to retain it. His grizzled beard hung to his girdle, which was of black woollen, and bound above an outer dress of blue and white cotton much worn and discolored; his feet were bare, for the ragged papoushes which he had left at the door had been their only covering; and altogether Yacob the Jew was as unpropossessing an individual as could well have been selected to open the divan.

But, ungainly as he was, he was not unknown to the pasha, who stroked down his beard, as he saw the Hebrew perform his prostration; and exclaimed, without removing the chibouque from his lips:—

"Khosh geldin—you are welcome, Yacob: it is some time since we have seen you here. How are your affairs, Hebrew? Is your gold in bars, or in coin? and do you come to make us your treasurers, lest the metal should not be secure under your own roof?"

"Heaven help me! Should I venture to trouble my lord if it were thus? Ai, ai—alas! alas!—I come to the mirror of justice only when I am wronged, that the light of my lord's countenance may be turned upon me, and the tears may be dried in my aged eyes—I am here to put up a complaint against my neighbor Stephanaki the serudjhe,* who has defrauded me of my just rights."

"Stephanaki," shouted a chaoush close beside the satrap; "come forth, and kneel in the shadow of my lord the pasha, whose attribute is justice."

The call was instantly obeyed, and a fine-looking young Greek, wearing the picturesque and becoming costume of the islands, knelt beside his accuser. Stephanaki was in the first bloom of manhood, with a laughing eye, and a sunshiny expression of countenance, which even the dread presence of the pasha could not wholly overcloud.

"Mashallah!" murmured the satrap to the khoja or secretary who was squatted at his feet, with his ink-bottle in his girdle, and a huge strip of parchment resting upon his knee ready to be made use of, while he dipped his calam or reed-pen into the ink in order to commence his duties: "Mashallah! this is as it should be; a dervish against a woman, and a Greek against a Jew—Bakalum—we shall see."

A motion of the pasha's hand intimated to Yacob that he was to speak: and he at once commenced his complaint.

"Is not my lord as one who has sat on the right hand of the padishah, and whose mouth has been filled with the gold of truth? In my soreness of spirit I said—'I will away to the giver of health, the promoter of joy, the great and just Saïfula Pasha, for does he not hold the reins of life and death? and is he not like the sun at noonday, without which the earth would be dark?'"

"Taib!—well said, Jew;" nodded the satrap, as he toyed with his perfumed beard; and there was a sudden chorus of voices in the apartment, all murmuring "Taib! Taib!"

"At the last mahāk,"† pursued the Jew, in the same humble and submissive tone, and without suffering the slightest token of elation to escape him at the approbation which his words had elicited, "came Stephanaki to my poor hut to purchase dhourra;‡ I was at meat, and I bade him rest awhile until my meal was finished, when I would wash, and come forth to the store-house wherein I had housed the grain; but he pleaded haste, and thus I was obliged to leave the food almost untasted, lest he should go elsewhere, which might have been inconvenient to the poor yonth."

"Had you not done better to have asked him to share it with you?" demanded the pasha.

"Now, by our father Abraham!" exclaimed the shrinking Israelite: "would my lord desire me to eat with a Christian? to sit at table with a filthy Greek?"

"True;" said the pasha with a quiet smile. "I had forgotten that the two infidel drinkers of wine, the Tchifoutş and the Giaour, were unclean even to each other! Allah kerim!—On with your tale, Hebrew."

"We were long ere we concluded the bargain;" continued Yacob; "and I finished by selling my grain some piastres too cheap—"

* Pipe-bowl.

* Horse keeper.
† Decline of the moon.
‡ Indian corn.
§ Jew.

"But he *did* buy of you at last; say you not so?" demanded the satrap.

"He did;" replied the Jew; "but he should have paid me at the very least—"

"Khoja," said the pasha, slowly removing the chibouque from his mouth, and looking towards the secretary; "write that Yacob the Jew shall, before sunset, pay an avania to the pasha of one hundred piastres, for selling dhourra within the walls of the city, without authority—now Hebrew, once more we listen."

But if the Jew had successfully concealed his triumph when he was environed by plaudits, he was by no means so fortunate when he found himself betrayed by his own folly: he plucked his beard until the hairs remained in his grasp, he thrust his turban awry, and wrung his hands as though he was ruined for ever. His paroxysm gave the pasha time to reflect; and that he had done so, he very soon gave proof, by again addressing the scribe. "Write, likewise, that Stephanaki the Greek raïah shall also pay to the pasha, by the same period, his avania of fifty piastres, for having purchased within the city walls certain bags of dhourra from a cheater of the revenue."

The khoja was just about to record this second reflection of the mirror of justice when the Greek, prostrating himself in the most approved manner, exclaimed; "The words of my lord the pasha are as the diamonds of Samarcand flung forth upon the path of life. Surely my lord will suffer even a vassal to gather up some of these precious jewels, and to examine their lustre. It is true, oh. Light of the World! that I purchased the dhourra of this rascally Tchifout; but I made him deliver it to me on the meidan* beyond the city gates. He is indeed guilty, and deserves the fine which your highness has in mercy made very disproportionate to the crime; but I have committed no offence, as my lord will learn, when the kiupek—the cur, has told his tale."

"Kiupek in your teeth, dog of a giaour!" retorted the enraged Jew, glad to have secured an object on which to vent his wrath, without danger to the soles of his feet. "Who are you that you should fling dirt upon my head? What are you but a Greek? Are you not, moreover, like the rest of your degraded race, a liar and a cheat?—haivan der—you are an animal."

"Ajaib—wonderful!" ejaculated the pasha. "Yacob has found his tongue, and is now head brawler of the city! Peace, I say, old man. Is the divan become a Theriaki-tcharchi,† or a Timerhazè,‡ that I am to have my ears rent by your clamour? Take care of your own; and meanwhile, I have heard enough. Stephanaki, you have gained your cause. I am satisfied that you are a bash-pezevenk—a great rogue; for, although every Roumi§ rascal can talk of the deeds of his ancestors, Mashallah! there are few among you who dare venture to speak of his own. Nevertheless, I say, your cause is gained, for you have kept your temper, and the Jew has lost his; by which I know that he is in the wrong. Write, khoja, that the Hebrew Yacob is fined fifty piastres for bringing before the Divan a cause which he could not support."

And while the unhappy Israelite was once more giving way to a burst of grief, the mirror of justice murmured to the cadi, who was seated near him; "The rascally Jew can well afford to pay his avania; but I question if the gidi mascara—the young scaramouch, in the embroidered leggings, does not carry all his piastres on his back."

To which sagacious deduction, the Cadi replied by his usual "Tnib—excellent! my lord sees through the darkness of midnight—who shall dispute his wisdom?" But as he again settled himself upon his carpet, he muttered between his closed teeth: "Curse on the unbelieving Jew! he should have preferred his complaint to me—I would not have mulcted him in more than a hundred piastres in all; and moreover, he should have gained his cause."

The next applicant was a woman, who, taking off her slipper, turned the sole upwards, and demanded justice on her husband, who had put her forth from his harem, and refused to allow her a decent maintenance in the house of her father.

As her own statement went to show that she was neither young nor pretty, and that she had moreover led the unhappy man a life which had by no means tended to increase his attachment to this world, her case was soon dismissed; and she was fined twenty piastres for vague and frivolous accusations against a good Moslem, who had been careful before the Divan sat that morning, to forward to the satrap a packet of rare and costly gebeli,* whose aroma was actually escaping from the chibouque of the pasha, while he listened to the tale of the wife.

In this instance, as the virtuous wrath of the satrap was more than commonly excited, he ordained that the fine should be paid before the complainant left the court; and remarked, moreover, that if any rumour reached him of a new application of the slipper of the miserable woman before him to the ears of her husband or his young wife, the consequences would be serious; after which, he declared himself exhausted; and deputing the cadi to the sent of justice, retired from the sight of the crowd of applicants who still thronged the hall of audience; and, supported by his attendants, withdrew slowly and gravely to the women's apartments, to forget in the society of the beautiful Carimfil and her Greek friend the toils of the morning.

Coffee and sweetmeats were served when he had taken up his position on the sofa, and received the salutations and condolences of his companions; after which Katinka sang to her zebec, until the satrap gave a few indications of drowsiness, by no means flattering to her minstrelsy; when, anxious that he should not have cause to complain of ennui while she possessed the means of diverting his idleness, she laid aside her instrument and exclaimed suddenly: "Let not my lord's eyes close before he has heard the tale which I have been pondering for his amuse-

* Plain.

† Resort for opium-eaters, where night-brawls and heavy blows are frequent.

‡ Lunatic Asylum.

§ Greek.

* Tobacco.

ment. It may be that it will possess the power of relieving his spirit from the fatigues of the divan and the affairs of the city." And, as the pasha smiled his assent, she at once commenced the narrative of:—

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE ARAB STEED.

Ildji Reza was the son of a rich merchant of Damascus; and, being the only child of his father, to whose prayers the prophet had long been deaf, by refusing to his wives the honor and advantage of giving him an heir to his immense wealth, the boy necessarily became the pet and plaything of the salemliek, and the idol of the whole harem.

His beautiful Georgian mother, proud of the supremacy which the birth of her son gave her over the mind of her husband, grew haughty and imperious; and the Buyûk Hanoum of Yezid, (for so was the merchant called) who had been the daughter of a distinguished emir, retired in disgust to her father's house, and refused to return beneath the roof of her husband, however great the instances which he made to reclaim her.

The secession of the principal lady of the Merchant's establishment left the Georgian mother supreme mistress of the harem; and the fact of this ascendancy, derived from her son, only produced still greater and more ill-judged indulgence towards the boy himself: every whim, however senseless, every caprice, however extravagant, was not only indulged, but applauded; and he accordingly grew up a perfect imp of Eblis, both in beauty and mischief.

I say in beauty; for the experience of every day tends to convince us that the popular prejudice which peoples Jehanum with ghouls and afrits, is as false as that the tattered cloak of a dervish always covers a saint. More than half the evil which is wrought upon earth is the work of individuals whose beards are glossy and well-combed, and whose turbans are seated upon brows as smooth as the Prophet's palm; and he who asserts to the contrary eats dirt, or has walked from Stamboul to Mecca with his fingers in his eyes, and the skirts of his robe defiled by the abomination of ignorance.

With regard to his other attribute of mischief, I believe no one ever denied *that* to be the son of a burnt father, so I shall not insist on the propriety of my description.

Had Yezid been as rich as King Karoon, the youngster grew up in a spirit well calculated to decrease his wealth. The hours which his father believed to be spent in study in the medresh of the Mosque of Sultan Dnoud, were passed among the most profligate of the youth of the city: and as all the slaves found it to their advantage to be silent—for Ildji Reza was as generous as he was profuse—and as the worthy merchant was descending the hill of life, and greasing the beard of years with the pillauf of dotage, he pursued his career unfettered; while such was the fascination of his beauty, and the influence of his mother, that there was not a woman in the harem of Yezid the khawaji,* who would not have sold her jewels to minister to his caprices.

But the most serious extravagance was yet to come. Suddenly there appeared in the city a dealer in horses, who brought with him animals of such surpassing beauty, that all the young men of Damascus who had ever tugged at anything more exciting than a mahar† well nigh lost their wits. Day by day the dealer and his horses traversed the principal streets of the city; and so beautiful were many of these creatures, that more than one harem-lattice was thrown back further than it should have been, either in admiration of the glorious animals, or of the gallant young Effendis who followed in their wake. The dealer was a shrewd man: he had gathered up his feet on the mat of calculation, and spiced his sherbet with avarice: he was the very Khawaji to bring his beasts to a good market; but for a few days he affected unwillingness to part from them—he loved them as his life—called them janum, guzum—my love, my eyes, my soul—feigned to whisper flatteries in their ears, while by some subtle art he taught them to look as though they comprehended and appreciated his gentleness; and showed so much love for his already tempting merchandise, that every person who had gold to lavish on a whim, was convinced that never horses were worth so many purses as the horses of Ali the Toorkoman.

When he at length suffered himself to be prevailed on to exchange them for piastres, it need not be told that they were counted up to a good sum; and many times had Ildji Reza been among the bidders for the different animals which were paraded one by one through the great thoroughfares of the city; but on each occasion the Toorkoman had set him aside with a low "Yavash, yavash—softly, softly—your time is not yet come. The camel who holds his head high is guided by the ass that leads the string; so let my lord be led in this matter by his slave; and folding the skirts of patience under the feet of reason, wait yet a while until the bit is in the mouth of the beast which is alone worthy to bear him."

Perplexed as he was by this unaccountable conduct on the part of the merchant, Ildji Reja complied in silence; but when a score of noble horses, each more beautiful than the last, had found owners among the young gallants of Damascus, the Toorkoman disappeared, much to the chagrin of the son of Yezid, who daily saw his associates galloping along upon animals to which his own, which had nevertheless been purchased at a heavy price, and given to him by his father, was but as a buffalo.

So jaundiced, indeed, was his spirit, by this unlooked-for disappointment, that ever, as his acquaintanees greeted him, he seemed to see the laughter of mockery in their smile; and when they jested with him on his delay, or condoled with him on his annoyance, he felt that they were now revenging themselves for a host of petty mortifications entailed on them by his uncalculating profusion.

The young man's heart burnt within his

* Merchant. † Camel's bridle.

bosom, and he well nigh fell sick with vexation; when one day, as he was walking moodily along, he was overtaken near the eastern gate of the city by a beetachy, or mountain dervish, who saluted him as he passed with a courteous greeting, which broke in upon his revery; and raising his head to reply to the salutation, Ildji Rezà on his side was at once attracted by the tone and look of the devotee.

He appeared to be about sixty years of age, but time had neither furrowed his brow, thinned his cheek, nor dimmed the lustre of his large clear gray eye. His glance was keen, fiery and searching; his step firm and assured; and his voice as full and melodious as though he were yet a stripling. He wore a tunic and khirkheh, or cloak of camel's hair, girt about his waist with a leathern girdle, over which flowed his snow-white beard; while a conical cap edged with fur, crimson papooshes, and a prayer chaplet hung round his neck, completed his costume, and proclaimed his sanctity.

"'Tis a fair day, father;" said the young man, respectfully; "are you long from the mountains?"

"I travelled to the city, my son;" replied the dervish, "some twelve weeks back, in company with a Toorkoman Arab, who sought to dispose of a string of horses; and when I parted from him at the khan, where he had taken up his abode, I hastened to the dwelling of a kinsman, beside whose bed stood Azrael and his attendant spirits: there did I watch and pray until yesterday: and I am now on my way home, praising the power which has removed a sufferer from a world of care and misery."

"Can you really rejoice that the wings of death have folded themselves about the soul of one whose blood leaps in your own veins? and that a warm and sentient spirit is now dark in the darkness of the tomb?"

"And why not?" asked the dervish; "Do we show our love for our dear ones, by wishing to protract their period of wretchedness? Evallah! I trust that no fond heart will put up such a prayer for me."

"Did you not tell me, father, that you travelled to Damascus in company with a kinjek—a dog of a horse-dealer, who lately traded in the city?" asked the young man, for whom so melancholy a discourse possessed no attraction; and who suddenly conceived a hope that, through the medium of this holy man, he might obtain some information, enabling him to discover the abode of the Toorkoman; "know you what has since become of him? and where he is now throwing dirt on the beards of true believers?"

"Ne bilirim—what can I say?" replied the beetachy:—"Have I not told you that I have been the tenant of a sick room, whence the world is ever shut out? How, then, can I give you tidings of the bazàr, or of the merchants who frequent it?"

As he spoke, the clatter of horses' hoofs sounded in the distance; and soon a horseman appeared mounted on a coal-black steed of such incomparable symmetry and beauty, that even the beetachy, unused as he might be supposed to be to feel any interest in so purely worldly an object, uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and stroked down his white beard with an "Ajaib!" as fervent as it was prolonged.

If the Dervish was thus affected by the appearance of the animal, it may be imagined that Ildji Rezà was transfixed; and as the rider flew past him, seeming to be traversing the world on the wings of the wind, or mounted on one of the flying horses of Peristan, he almost shouted in the excess of his rapture.

"Wallah billah—by the Prophet! to be the owner of that steed, I would——"

"What would you do, my son?" asked the beetachy.

"Any thing that may be lawful for a good Musselmaun;" was the reply: and Ildji Rezà heard, or fancied he heard, a low chuckle which came unpleasantly to his ear; "Long have I coveted a steed which should have no peer. Alhemdullilah—praise be to Allah! here he comes again!"

And it was so: the horseman had returned upon his path; and, diverging to the right and left, and vaulting his high-blooded Arab over every impediment, he at length checked him close beside the young man and the dervish, with a suddenness that brought the fiery animal on his haunches, while the smoke issued from his transparent nostrils, and the foam flew from his mouth.

"Khosh buldûk—well found!" shouted the rider, whom Ildji Rezà at once recognized as the Toorkoman dealer; "How says my lord now? Did I not well to hold back his hand until I brought to Damascus a horse such as had never yet been seen in the city streets?—Yavash, yavash—quiet, quiet, Thunderbolt:" he added, addressing the animal, that was impatiently pawing the earth with his small hoof: "see you not that I would talk with the beyzadeh?"* and the creature quailed beneath the rebuke, and stood like a statue hewn in black marble beside the path.

"What means this, khawaji?" exclaimed the young man eagerly; "Whence are you? and why have you been so long absent from Damascus? How many purses do you demand for this brave beast? And how became you possessed of an animal worthy to have carried the Prophet?"

"Chok chay—that is much;" smiled the Arab; "but I will answer my lord as I best may. It means that I have brought for him the horse of which he alone should be the owner—I am even now from the desert—I have delayed my return until I deemed the animal matchless alike in speed and docility—I demand for my merchandise a price which must be paid ere I consent to make him the property of another—and I have possessed him since he sported a graceful foal beside his mother, in a green oasis, near which we had pitched our tents. Is my lord answered?"

Ildji Rezà smiled in his turn; "Ai, mascara—scaramouch!" he said gaily; "for the last moon I have been smoking the chibouque of bitterness, for I believed that you had cast ashes upon my beard; and not a moment ago I asked tidings

* Son of a Lord.

of you from this holy man, who travelled with you many weeks back, from the mountains!"

"Khosh buldûk, father:" said the Toorkoman, looking for the first time toward the dervish: "I must have eaten dirt that I did not see you when I first stopped beside the Effendi. Down, Thunderbolt, and make your salâm to the holy man." And the obedient animal once more obeyed by sinking gently upon his knees, and laying his nose in the dust.

"Mashallah! 'tis a beast which might well shame many a True Believer;" said Ildji Rezà; "Bashustun—on my head be it—the horse is mine."

"Are the coffers of Yezid Effendi well filled?" laughed the Toorkoman; "My lord has not yet learned that the piety of a dervish and the qualities of a horse should never be taken upon trust."

"Nay, Khawaji, you are uncivil;" said the young man: "but our good father must pardon you, for you have not folded your feet upon the cushion of caution; nor have you made slaves of your words. You should have more reverence for the khirkheh!"

"Heed him not, Effendimou—my master;" interposed the bectachy: "his calling is one of light mood and free speech, and he means me no evil—his words are like the sands of the desert, they pass by, and no man inquires whence they come."

"W'Allah—by Allah! 'tis well put;" exclaimed the Toorkoman: "when the boudaka is full, I smoke it; but when once the ashes are knocked out, I forget the flavor of the gebeli. Phrases savoring of the sosun* and the bannuffshâ† are for the use of the harem: they are not for the wandering merchant, whose medresch‡ is the way-side."

"They fail you not, however, Khawaji;" said Ildji Rezà, as he hung over the coal-black Arab, and passed portions of its flowing and silky mane through his fingers, as though they had been the love-locks of a young beauty. "But we wander from our purpose: tell me the price of this wind-winged steed, that I may count you the purses, and make it mine."

"Listen to me, Effemdim;" said the Toorkoman emphatically; "this animal has been to me as a child—it has shared alike my tent and my repast; my voice has become music in his ears, and my will the impulse of its being. I cannot sell it for gold—all the purses of all the padishahs of the East should not buy it—I will only part from it to secure what is yet more dear to me."

"And what, in the name of the Prophet, may that be?" asked the young man in some surprise: "Can there be aught on earth that a man whose beard is black, would value beyond an animal like this? Affiet ollah—much good may it do you. If it be in my possession or in that of Yezid my father, it is yours."

"Taib—well said!" exclaimed the bectachy: "the words of the beyzadeh are precious as the gems of Araby—he wastes them not idly."

"Will you swear this?" asked the khawaji calmly.

Ildji Rezà hesitated for a moment: and then, glancing at the dervish, and perceiving that he was looking towards him with a placid smile, he answered boldly; "That will I, by the soul of the Prophet!"

"Nay, we will not make the Prophet a party in the compact;" said the Toorkoman; "swear by your own hopes of Paradise, and by the beard of your father, and I am satisfied."

"Chok chay—that is much!" exclaimed the young man; "but so be it. May the houris never receive me into Paradise, and may the beard of my father be eternally defiled, if I fail you."

"Taib! taib! I say again;" exclaimed the dervish; "I love the daring of a free spirit; and now, Khawaji, to your share of the contract—as I have accidentally been a witness to the bargain, I will not proceed on my way until I see the bridle of the animal in the hand of the beyzedeh."

"The horse is his, father:" said the Toorkoman readily; "I am willing to fulfil the pledge that I have given;" and he placed the rein of the coveted steed in the grasp of Ildji Rezà; who bewildered with delight, would have vaulted into the saddle and galloped off, had not the Khawaji laid his hand upon his arm, and detained him.

"My lord is as yet but my mir akhor;"* he said, with a smile which almost withered into a sneer: "I have satisfied him; but he has, as yet, given me naught save promises, strengthened, however, by a vow which he dare not violate. It is now his turn. My demand will neither exhaust the coffers of the worthy merchant his father, nor cost himself a piastre. During my sojourn in Damascus, I chanced—it avails not how—to look into the bright eyes of the daughter of Kassim Bey—the peerless Delsaïsè Hanoum. Nay turn not on me that withering frown, Effendim; the heart of the maiden is as pure as the waters of the fountain in which she was laughingly contemplating her own beauty when she knew not that any gaze was on her. From that hour I loved her—in that hour I strove to win her—But how? As I wandered gloomily through an obscure street, I followed unobserved two portly Effendis, who were evidently on their way from some coffee-kiosque to their own dwellings. Twilight had fallen upon the city, and they believed themselves unobserved; and thus, as they moved slowly along, they threw their words out right and left, as the mimoso-bush throws out its thorns. They were the merchant Yezid, and his powerful friend Kassim Bey; and then and there I learnt that the beautiful and gazelle-eyed Delsaïsè was the promised bride of the Khawaji's only son. Does my lord read the writing on the parchment?"

"You would have the maiden for your wife; is it not so?" asked the Ildji Rezà.

The Toorkoman nodded assent.

"If that be all;" laughed the young man; "bir chey yok—it is nothing. If you can win her father to consent, let her be your's; I am no woman-wooer, and I have renounced my claim.

* White lily. † Violet. ‡ College.

* Chief of the Stables

I would rather have this peerless Arab in my stable, than the fairest maiden of Damascus in my harem."

"Pek ahi—it is well;" retorted the Toorkoman; "but that is not enough. Shall I strew dirt upon my head, by asking the daughter of a Bey for my wife? Shall I expose myself to the gibes and jeers of every idler like a spinning Santon, by telling my condition and the wild object of my desires? I will eat sour pillauf with no man. You must become for once an earnest lover; you must repent your first decision; and not content with waiting the pleasure of a capricious mistress, and a cautious father, you must put every art in practice to win the young beauty *ere the next moon wanes;* and, having won her, you must instantly mount your trusty steed, and enveloping the maiden in her mantle, and placing her before you, leave the city by the southern gate; and never draw your rein until you arrive under the shadow of the rock-seated tower* which overhangs the river. I will be within the walls awaiting you; and there I will relieve you of your burden. Will you again swear?"

And once more the infatuated Ildji Rezà, driven to destruction by his felech, answered gaily and readily, "I will."

Little more passed that day. The son of Yezid uttered a hasty parting salutation to the khawaji and the dervish, who remained together; and springing upon the noble Arab, sped, like an arrow shot by a strong arm, towards the city; while the clatter of his horse's hoofs drowned the laughter which followed him upon the wind.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

GREAT was the exultation of the young man when he remarked that every eye was turned upon his steed as he hurried along. In the pride of his spirit he committed a thousand extravagancies and drew upon himself the gaze and the envy of the whole city. He passed not the habitation of one of his acquaintance without indulging his fiery horse in as many caprices and caracoles as brought all the fair inhabitants of the harem to their lattices; and it was not until he reached his father's house, and with his usual impetuosity was himself providing for the comfort of his new acquisition, that his thoughts recurred to the singular contract into which he had so recklessly entered; and then the difficulties that opposed themselves on all sides at once flashed upon him. But it was now too late to retract; he was fettered by a vow; and he had no alternative but to breast the stream as best he might.

When he entered the house, he accordingly shut himself into his apartment to ruminate on the most feasible method of commencing his operations; and after mature deliberation, or what approached as near to it as Ildji Rezà was able to bestow on any subject, he left his chamber, and joined Yezid the merchant, in his own room, where he was quietly smoking his chibouque on a corner of the sofa.

"Salàm Aleikum;" said the son, as he passed the threshold with a respectful salutation.

"Aleikum Salàm;" replied the merchant, without withdrawing the pipe from his mouth; "you are early from the coffee-kiosque this evening, Ildji Rezà; whither are you now bound?"

"I would ask to share your sofa, Effendim, if your thoughts are not so differently engaged, that my words will sound harshly in your ears."

The delighted Yezid stroked down his beard with a happy smile, as he summoned a slave with a chibouque for his unexpected guest; marvelling, as he did so, what such an unusual proceeding might portend.

Pipes having been supplied, and the slaves withdrawn, the father and son sat for a time enveloped in the vapors of the delicately-scented gebeli; Yezid glancing from time to time at the handsome youth by his side, with a fond pride which blinded him to the wilfulness of his disposition; and with, perhaps, a pardonable vanity endeavoring to trace in the high smooth brow, the large wild dark eye, the rich curved lip, and the short, thick, curling beard, a renewed picture of his own youth; while Ildji Rezà himself was turning over in his mind how he might best introduce the subject which was now uppermost in his thoughts.

"Effendim;" he said at length; "you may remember, that some months back you talked to me of bringing home a wife to my harem; and that I made no willing reply to your suggestion, because I had never laid my head upon the cushion of quiet, and desired still to be left free to follow the dictates of my own will. What shall I say?—I have since dwelt upon your words; and I have heard from my mother that the maiden whom you had selected for me is as beautiful as a moonbeam, and as graceful as a gazelle. What is written, is written—I will marry her!"

"Alhemdullilah—praise be to Allah!" said the merchant: "the sun is at length rising in the East. My son, life has hitherto been to you like the fiery sherbets of the Franks, pleasant and poisonous: but you are now recovering from the partial insanity under which you have labored: and flinging away the husks of the dhourra, you will at last begin to hoard the grain. But what say I? The bey is angered by your rejection of the maiden, and may perchance not listen to a renewal of our suit. You were hasty, Ildji Rezà, to speak ere you had turned the words on your open palm, and seen that they were good and fitting."

The young man cast down his eyes, and remained silent.

"The wife whom I had chosen for you," continued his father; "had been described to me as a mirror of beauty; a lily whose leaves were scarcely yet unfolded—a violet which had grown so secretly amid the seculsion of the harem, that she would have been as a jewel, which you would have dug from the mine ere another eye had rested on it. But yet forget not, my son,

* On the south-westerly side of the city, a small building is erected on the crest of a steep precipice, beneath which flows the Barrady.

should my words yet prevail with the father of the maiden, that you are a man, and that your beard has grown: do not, in the contemplation of her beauty, forget that your days must not be spent in the harem of your wife. What are the loveliest maidens that they should be suffered to hold an undue empire? Like the fair-seeming flower of Caraminia which poisons the wind as it sweeps over it, the unnatural dominion of a wife enervates the mind, and weakens the energies of her husband. Never forget, Ildji Rezà, that young and beautiful though they be, they are yet women; and that in short, my son, they are all bosh—nothing!"

The listener nodded his concurrence to this sentiment.

"Tell no treason to a courtier—no heresy to a moullah—and no secret to your wife:" pursued the merchant, perceiving that the attention of his son was poured out upon his words; "The tongue of a woman is more dangerous than the scimitar of a warrior, for you can never tell where its blows may fall, and a wise man wastes not his words upon children. Neither put too much trust in your slaves: but ever be vigilant yourself to protect your own honor. Why did the Prophet, who overran the world with a sword in one hand, and a houri in the other, put a veil before her face, and a lattice before her casement? Was it not to point out how little dependence should be placed upon her own discretion?"

"Well said, Effendim," broke forth the young man earnestly: "it was—but fear not for me—no kelb will dare to laugh at my beard!—no zamparalik* for the mouths of the massaldjhes will ever issue from my harem! Inshallah, few know better than I the just value of every Aga Baba† in Damascus."

"And yet, my son, many have been wounded by the blade of which they well knew the temper—I have spoken."

"Wallah billah—by the Prophet! and you have spoken wisely;" replied the son.

"And if I warn you not to build up your faith on the fidelity of an eunuch;" followed up Yezid; "so do I also counsel you never to let the folly of a woman ruffle your beard. Patience, my son, under the affliction of a wife's folly, is like the red earth of our own plains, which deadens the sting of the noxious reptile that has fastened on us."‡

"Korkma—fear not:" returned the young man: "your lesson shall not be lost upon me; and now, I pray you, to hasten my suit with the bey, that when I close the door of my harem, I may no longer find it empty."

"Allah buyûk der;" was the only reply of the merchant, as Ildji Rezà descended from the sofa, pressed the hand of his father to his lips and forehead, and hastily quitted the apartment.

From the presence of Yezid the young man passed at once into the harem, and made his way to the chamber of his mother.

Amidè Hanoum was still a handsome woman; and the smile with which she received her son lit up her noble features, and gave a lustre to her eye, that for the moment almost renewed her youth.

"Khosh geldin, Ildji Rezà;" she said fondly, as she flung back the heavy sleeve of her gold-embroidered antery, and extended to him her small white hand, which he immediately raised to his heart and lips; "You are welcome—and what news bring you from the city, my son? for to-day I have received no guests, and my slaves are as dull as an empty chibouque."

"Evallah! Damascus, fair mother, is scarcely more full of kief* than your own harem; its antiquity,† like that of a moullah, has done no service to its beard. A caravan passed out at sunrise on its way to Aleppo, numbering among its merchants two Frank beys, whose dinars were more plentiful than their garments, which made good sport for the idle youths who were congregated at the great coffee-kiosque;‡ but the train soon disappeared along the banks of the Golden River,§ and the streets are again quiet."

"And what errand brings Ildji Rezà, the pride of Damascus, to the sofa of his mother?" asked the Georgian fondly; "Is his purse empty, or his head heavy from last night's revel?"

"Asteferallah—heaven forbid!" laughed her son; "for those are two evils which have not even the charm of novelty to recommend them. Ai, ai!" and he wrung his hands as if in anguish while a mocking light danced in his eye: "I have been converted, and instead of gold, I am now coming to crave a wife."

"Wallah!" exclaimed Amidè Hanoum; "this is an hour for which I long have looked. How will the Khawaji Effendi rejoice, when on his next visit to the harem, I read to him this new page in the volume of delight! And the wife whom I have wooed for you, Ildji Rezà, guzum is fair as the snow-flake upon the mountain pausing on the threshold of her loveliness, with the heart of a girl, and the beauty of a woman—the Bey her father of the best blood in the empire, and the Hanoum Effendi, her mother, a very model of propriety and politeness—Nay, more:" continued the Georgian, as she remarked the indifference with which her son listened to these advantages; "it must not be breathed save between ourselves; but as you are now prepared to regard her with the eyes of affection, I may venture to whisper it in your ear—she loves you, Ildji Rezà!—She has seen you from her lattice as you passed along the street—she has watched you from her araba as you galloped along the plain—she was told that you were to be her husband—and now when she is restless, and her slaves would soothe her t

* Bit of scandal. † Chief of the harem guard.
‡ In the plain beyond the city is found a red earth which cures the sting of venomous insects.

* Spirit.
† Damascus is said to be the most venerable city in the world; having been built by Uz, the son of Abraham, and grandson of Shem, the son of Noah. It was, moreover, the birthplace of Abraham's steward, Eliezar.
‡ In the city of Damascus is a coffee-house, capable containing with convenience five hundred individuals. The building is divided into two equal portions; one being appropriated to the hot summer months, for which its arrangements are admirably calculated; and the other, those of winter, where no less attention has been paid to the comfort of the visiters.
§ The river Barrady—formerly called by the Greeks the Chryssrrhoas, or Golden River.

sleep, they tell her tales of Ildji Rezà, for she will listen to none other."

For the first time the young man's breath came quick, and his lip quivered. "And she is fair, you tell me, mother?" he said, falteringly.

"As a peri!" answered Amidè Hanoum; "and when I wish to awaken her into brighter beauty, I talk to her of my son!"

"And will she listen?"

"As a hadji listens to the Koràn at the Prophet's tomb—with clasped hands and bowed-down-head. Her soul is as a mirror which reflects but one image, and that one is Ildji Rezà!"

The young man with difficulty suppressed the groan that rose to his lips: never until that moment had he felt how bitter it must be to sacrifice one who loves you: "'Tis at the best a mere girlish fancy;" he said, endeavoring to suppress his emotion: "were she told to-morrow that she must marry Mansoor Aga my friend, the mirror would receive a new shadow, and I should be forgotten!"

"My son!" said the Georgian, earnestly: "'Tis not given to man to read a woman's heart! Do you believe that the same power which fetters our actions has dominion over our souls! Alas! you will not be convinced; and every day of your experience you eat the bitter apple of regret, when you might be enjoying the pomegranate of contentment. The first character inscribed upon a woman's heart is indelible—others may follow, which for a time appear as lasting, but they are written only by her fancy or her vanity, and they are effaced by time."

"But has she not been told that when the bey her father offered her to the son of Yezid in marriage, he folded his hands in the sleeve of his garment, and turned away?" asked the young man. "Can she love one who was insensible to her beauty and her tenderness?"

"My son;" said the Georgian earnestly: "affection never reasons; the heart is not logical—it is content to feel."

"And the bey? Think you that he will yield her up to one by whom she has been slighted? He, at least, will have no advocate whispering in his heart."

"Ildji, my son;" said Amidè Hanoum, as she held her feather-framed hand-mirror towards his glowing countenance, and his eye rested upon his own luxuriant beauty: "the nightingale turns not aside from the rose-garden of Nishapor, when he may fold his wing in peace amid the blossoms. The bey loves his child, and he knows that thou art beloved by her: the eye of beauty is too bright to be dimmed by tears, salt and bitter enough to mingle with the waves of the great sea desert."

"And would she really weep for me?" again demanded the young man, touched to the heart by the words of his mother.

The Georgian, for all answer, again raised the mirror, and pointed with a smile, half archness, and half pride, towards its surface, which once more reflected the image of the questioner.

Ildji Rezà sighed; and a strange curiosity grew upon him to see this lovely woman, who amid his neglect, and his irregularities, had ventured to love him. Hitherto he had held his mother as a thing apart, which had, by some inexplicable good fortune, escaped from the pollution that had been poured forth on her sex: for the son of Yezid new nothing of women save their vices; but he now began to believe that there might yet be others, pure, and beautiful, and loving, whose smiles would be as a foretaste of paradise. His father had told him that his promised bride was lovely as a daughter of Peristan, and his mother dwelt upon her innocence, her love, and her devotion.

Ildji Rezà fell into a delightful dream; and when he at length left the harem, he was an altered man.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

THE son of Yezid first bent his steps to the meidan,* resolved to restore to the mysterious Ali his ill-omened Arab; but none knew to whom he alluded. A numerous caravan was preparing to depart at daybreak on the morrow for Bagdad, and all save himself were active and preoccupied.

The space immediately around the building was heaped with merchandise; there were scimitars, carefully packed in woollen wrappers, lest the weather should destroy their brightness — sword blades, knives, curious bridle-bits, and other articles skilfully wrought in iron and steel, for which the city had long been famous; while a few bales of merchandise, of a more costly and perishable nature, were carefully heaped together a little space apart, and guarded by black slaves. The artisans, meanwhile, to the amount of two or three hundred, whose credit was involved in the safe transport of their handicraft, were shouting, cavilling, and directing, at the pitch of their lungs; and completed the confusion of the scene.

Strings of camels huddled together, some standing snuffing the air, and others lying placidly on the earth; their long thin necks

* A large field near the city, in which stands a caravanserai for pilgrims and strangers, who are maintained during their sojourn there at the expense of the sultan.

outstretched, and their soft, sleepy black eyes, slowly rolling from one side to the other as any sudden outburst of tongues roused them lightly from their lethargy, were also conspicuous; while in the midst of them reposed the asses which led the train. Here and there the horse of a wealthy merchant, with its softly padded saddle, and tasselled brow-band and breast-plate, was led through the space by a groom; while crowds of hungry and yelling dogs were seen in every direction, quarrelling and fighting over the garbage which had been flung out by the slaves of the caravanserai.

A group of hadjis stood looking on from a distance; and a few buffoons, santons, and dervishes, were gliding among the crowd: but the merchants and their followers were too busy to heed them; and Ildji Rezà, convinced that he should obtain no information at so bustling a moment, slowly passed out of the enclosure and entered the city gate.

Ere he left the meidan, the sun was rapidly sinking in the west; and as his road lay past the palace of Kassim Bey, he involuntarily slackened his pace when he emerged from the covered street. On his right hand the fortress-castle, with its graceful oval, flanked with four square towers, was casting long shadows across the earth, but he heeded them not: his thoughts were occupied for the first time by a woman!

It was strange that since Yezid the merchant had asked for his son the daughter of Kassim Bey, the young man, regardless of the honor of such an alliance, had never spent a moment in speculating upon the probable change which it would work in his fortunes: but now—when he was conscious that to satisfy a selfish vanity, he had sacrificed all the advantages which might accrue from it, even should he yet succeed in his suit, he had worked himself into a belief that he was madly in love with the maiden; and, come what might, he was determined to judge with his own eyes whether she were worthy of all the panegyrics which had been lavished upon her beneath the roof of his father.

Coupled with this resolution grew a regret that he had spoken to his parents of his change of temper. Should they at once win the young beauty to his harem, he could have no opportunity of estimating her attractions through the medium of his own ingenuity, but must yield her up on the instant to his arch tempter, the Toorkoman. Regrets were, however, unavailing, and he at once resolved to spare neither subtlety nor danger to achieve his purpose.

In the first rush of this new fancy, Ildji Rezà thought of the Aga Baba of the bey, who, as he judged from many a past experience, would scarcely be proof against his gold; but when he dwelt upon the idea of the fair girl who loved him, he resolved not to be indebted to so gross a medium for his success: and forgetting, in the energy of this new pursuit, the fearful penalty by which it was to be accompanied, he paused under the shadow of the bey's dwelling, and sent a searching glance along the whole façade of the building. But the harem, as is generally the case, overlooked the gardens of the palace, and had no communication with the street, save by casements too high and too well guarded to admit of any ingress; and one door, which was watched day and night by an eunuch. This difficulty, however, to the excited imagination of the young man, only added another charm to those which already encompassed his mistress; and from gazing on the long dreary walls of the building, he turned away to follow those of the extensive pleasure grounds of the harem.

Tracing them as they climbed the gentle ascent behind the city, he noted with an experienced eye, every point which might promise advantage; and remarked that several tall cedar trees flung their long arms into the road beyond, as if wooing the incursion of the adventurous; when, satisfied of the practicability of securing an entrance into the forbidden territory, he returned slowly homeward, and flung himself upon the sofa of repose.

But dawn had scarcely flooded the East, when Ildji Rezà, who had passed the night in dreams which seemed to have been steeped in the sherbet of paradise; whose cushions had been smoothed by houris; and whose brows had been fanned by the breezes that breathe of Peristan; sprang from his sofa, his brain throbbing, and his pulses leaping like those of a chamois, and proceeded to the stable where he had left, half buried among the flexible leaves of the dhourra, his incomparable Arabian. If the creature were to be the engine of his misery, it might, at least, ere the dark hour came, be the instrument of his triumph; but as he approached it, and listened while it neighed out with delight when he drew near, as though among so many strangers, it had recognized a familiar face, he half forgot his fears, his doubts, and his misgivings, in his admiration of an animal, such as he had never before beheld.

Springing to the saddle, the excited young man passed out through one of the eight gates of the city, and following the banks of the Golden river, galloped for awhile about the plain, fanned by the perfume-laden wind, and seeming to follow it in its course; his bridle-rein hung loose upon the neck of the gallant horse, but it needed not the guidance of its rider; and Ildji Rezà felt a proud conviction that never before had mortal steed obeyed the unuttered wishes of him who should have pointed out its path, like the animal that he bestrode.

As he returned to the city, and passed the

palace of Kassim Bey, anxious to afford to the latticed inmates of the harem a view of his skilful horsemanship, he irritated the creature both in the mouth and flank, to make him prance and caracole: and he was conscious that he was displayed to the greatest advantage, though his seat upon the saddle continued to be safe and as easy as though he had been upon his sofa; while a faint scream which came to his ear from behind the guarded casement of the women's apartments, convinced him that, however secure he might himself feel, his situation appeared by no means equally so to the lookers-on. The voice of fear had been that of a young person, for it was musical even in its terror; and Ildji Rezà forgot to speculate on the extraordinary properties of his horse, in the belief that it could have been none other than that of the fair Delsaïsè herself.

There is a charm in the voice of woman, even although it may be lifted in terror; there is a mellowness, a depth, which seem to have been drawn from the recesses of the soul—a music, which neither fear nor anguish can totally overpower—and Ildji Rezà felt it even to the remotest corners of his soul. She loved him; she feared for him—for *him!* And what part was he about to play in this strange drama? All was yet in the hands of fate; but his word was pledged; he was vowed to the ruin of loveliness and innocence; and he must abide by the pledge that he had given.

Having come to this conviction, the wisest thing that the young man could have done would have been to avoid every opportunity of dwelling on the beauty and perfections of his promised bride; and the sacrifice, when he was called upon to make it, would thus have been rendered less bitter; but by that extraordinary perversity of judgment which constitutes the weakness of human nature, he not only drew from his mother, already too willing on her side to expiate on so pleasant a theme, every particular relating to the maiden: but hour by hour, the inclination to look upon her grew more strong; and hour by hour, his reason made fainter efforts against the infatuation.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

Day again waned; and, as the many-colored clouds that clustered in homage round the setting sun, paying back in glory the light which he shed over them, were repeated in fainter tints on the ripple of the noble river, Ildji Rezà left his home: and alone, and on foot, bent his way to the palace of the bey.

As he passed the door of the harem, a female slave, closely veiled, and muffled in a dark cloak, issued forth, and closed it hastily behind her; and the young man felt at the moment as though the unconscious woman had shut against him the gate of paradise. In the next moment he resolved to follow her; he could not have accounted for the impulse; he did not seek to do so; and, for a considerable time he contented himself with tracking her up one of the covered streets and down another; until, at length, when she arrived in the bazar, and he observed from the nature of her purchases, and the readiness with which she paid the price demanded, without hesitation or cavil, that they must be intended for the use of some one of very superior rank to herself, a hope grew upon him that she might even be the confidential attendant of Delsaïsè Hanoum; and no sooner had the idea suggested itself, than he walked quietly up to the carpet of the dealer of whom she was purchasing an embroidered handkerchief of great beauty, whose muslin centre was richly bordered with a wreath of flowers, exquisitely wrought in needle-work, with colored silks and gold; and, affecting to be also in search of a similar article, he turned courteously towards the female, and requested her to assist him in the selection. Thus addressed, the slave glanced from beneath her veil at the speaker, and immediately saluted him with respectful deference.

"Is not my lord's will mine?" she asked, as she turned a longer and more earnest look upon the young man; "and shall it not be even as he commands? May his days be many, and his shadow never decrease;" and she began to turn over the handkerchiefs with renewed energy; "But how may I tell the taste of my lord? were I still purchasing for my mistress, I would take this—" and she held towards him one which was wrought into a garland of minute rose-buds; "but it tells a tale of happy love, and my lord may not seek to make so soft a gift."

"Were I sure that it would be welcome, that is the very present which I should wish to offer," replied Ildji Reza, looking earnestly towards her; "but if it were returned to me with a sprig of rue among its folds, I cannot tell to what my felech might drive me in my despair."

"How say you, Hadji Ferhat?" laughed the slave, addressing herself to the green-turbaned dealer; "does my lord look like one whose love-gift is likely to be returned upon his hands?"

"Mashallah!" retorted the crafty dealer stroking down his beard, quite satisfied by the manner of both his customers that there was a mystery in the affair, be it what it might, which he could not fathom, and resolved, if possible, to turn it to his own advantage; "Mashallah! I would peril my whole stock of merchandise on the chance—but if my lord

really wishes to make a love-gift, shall I not show him a scarf of cachemire, of the color of the leaf that the rose shuts closest to her heart; having a border of golden threads, wrought into a passionate ballad of the Persian poet, Hafiz?"*

"Ne istersiniz—what do you want to do?" asked the slave in affected anger; "would you play the Jew with the Beyzadeh, Hadji? Do I not know the scarf? And am I not aware that my mistress, the beautiful daughter of Kassim Bey—(may his weapon never rust!) would herself have purchased it, had you not cast ashes upon your beard, by asking a price that would frighten any one but an infidel Frank?"

"And have I not a right to do so?" demanded Ferhat in his turn, with considerable asperity: "Is there such another scarf to be found in Damascus?—Bak, Effendim;" he continued, as he drew the delicate drapery from its case of cedar wood, and laid it before Ildji Rezà; "Is that a thing to be cast before dogs?"

"Inshallah! no;" replied the young man, as he lifted a corner of the beautiful scarf; and with glowing cheek perused a couplet. "How many purses do you ask for this pretty toy?"

The price named was exorbitant; but Ildji Rezà scarcely heeded its amount, as he drew forth the embroidered bag containing his money, and paid down the gold without a remark; the pilgrim-merchant looking meanwhile as grave and collected as though he had only completed an honest bargain, instead of playing the knave as none but a hadji knows how to play it; and ringing every piece of coin separately lest he might be duped in his turn.

The slave meanwhile, remained quietly looking on, as if conscious that she had not yet completed her share of the adventure; but when Ildji Rezà had folded the scarf in the scarcely less beautiful muslin handkerchief, she paid for her own purchase, and after a courteous "Salām alickam," slowly moved away.

The youg man was less tardy in following; and was by no means surprised to observe that when she quitted the bazār she took a totally different road home from that by which she had come; avoiding the close and covered streets, where at every instant she was liable to be elbowed by some passer-by; and selecting the more open path that wound among the orchards and gardens by which the city is so thickly intersected. Nor did Ildji Rezà require to be informed of her reason for thus preferring a circuitous route, to that more direct one which would in half the time have conducted her to the door of the bey's harem; but he at once gave her credit for the tact it displayed; as most of the gardens were enclosed by high walls, rendering the road as private as the circumstances required; while at the same time she avoided the appearance of expecting that he would again address her.

Having at length reached a spot more secluded than any which they had yet passed, the young man quickened his pace, and overtook the attendant of his mistress, who at once understood his purpose; and after as much hesitation as she considered necessary to enhance the value of her concession, and sundry assurances of the risk which she ran of her lady's displeasure, the scarf was transferred to her care, accompanied by a thousand hyperbolical asseverations, and a broad piece of gold, which was no less graciously received.

As they parted, twilight was falling over the earth; and Ildji Rezà, in order to escape from his own thoughts, sauntered into the great coffee-house, and joined a party of his associates, who were smoking their chibouques, and sipping their coffee. to the music of a couple of mandolins, and as many small Arab drums, played upon by Jews; while two fine youths, the sons of one of the musicians, sang in alternate stanzas some of those lengthy and monotonous ballads in which the Turks delight.

"Khosh geldin, Ildji Rezà:" shouted the first idler who perceived his entrance; "you are so late that we feared you had been seized by the Wali—but gel, gel—come, come; here is room for you beside me—and these dogs of Hebrews are in full voice to-night. Wallah! I have been trying to persuade Naim to shave his beard, and expose it for sale in the bazār: it would fetch a good price, were it only because he has a pretty daughter."

"My lord is merry to-night;" said the patient Jew, as he forced a smile at the pitiful pleasantry, and glanced down upon the long, grizzled beard which depended to his girdle; "and what am I that I should restrain his mirth."

"Taib—well said, infidel;" laughed the young aga; "is it not much that we suffer such dogs, and fathers of dogs as you are, to wear beards, and to lock up their daughters?"

And his companions exclaimed simultaneously, "Chok chay—it is much."

"May it please your highness?" faltered out the trembling Jew, whose very lips became livid at the second mention of his daughter: "My child Sara departed for Aleppo by the caravan that left the city yestermorn at sunrise."

"Hast thou dared, Kelb?" asked Hussein Aga removing the chibouque from his lips and fixing his eyes sternly on the wretched man: "By whose permission did she pass the gate? has thou forgotten we have already

* These beautiful and costly scarfs are by no means uncommon in the East. They are sometimes inscribed with passages from the Korān: and at others, as in the present case, with popular love ballads.

taught thee that the soles of thy feet are not made of camel's hide? Why went she to Aleppo?"

The miserable Naim quailed beneath the question: "As the Prophet is in Paradise"—he began, but he was instantly silenced by a cry of "Unbeliever! infidel! whose dog art thou that thou should'st dare to talk of the Prophet of the Faithful? Wherefore went thy daughter to Aleppo?"

The aged Hebrew wrung his hands in agony: "She is gone, your highness, to nurse a sick kinsman, who is on the bed of death."

"Alhemdulillah!" sneered another of the party: "I have also a kinsman at Aleppo. How say you, Aga, shall we overtake the caravan, and protect the pretty Sara by the way?"

The handsome young aga nodded smilingly, and was about to reply, when Ildji Rezà exclaimed, "Jew, thou liest in thy beard, for I saw the caravan pass out, and even watched the women as they mounted, and not one of thy spawn was among them."

More threats were uttered, rather in sport than in anger by the party of young men; and then the subject was suffered to die away; and the Hebrews resumed their discordant minstrelsy, for which they were ultimately rewarded with quite as many curses as coins. Time meanwhile, wore on; and it grew deep into the night; nor was it until every good Musselmaun had long dropped his head upon the cushion of rest, that the idle and dissolute young men, who, after the departure of the Jews, had exchanged their coffee and sherbets for the more potent beverages of the Franks, separated each to his dwelling, with quickened pulses and throbbing brains.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

Far differently had the young and innocent Delsaïsè passed the early hours of the night. The slave Ziba no sooner parted from the son of Yezid, than she hastened to the harem of her master, and having delivered to the wife of the bey the various purchases which she had made in the city, she left the apartment in search of her beautiful young mistress. She lost no time in the palace, for she knew that at this hour the fair girl was ever to be found in a garden-kiosque containing a fountain of white marble, and overlooking a small parterre, of which the flower-beds were fashioned into intricate and pleasant forms, and filled with a variety of sweet-scented and gaily-colored blossoms. Thither she accordingly bent her steps, but even accustomed as she was to gaze upon the lovely Delsaïsè at all hours, she yet paused a moment in admiration ere she entered.

The tapestry curtain was drawn aside, and the moonlight streamed into the kiosque; where, after turning the waters of the basin into liquid diamonds, it fell on the fair form of the young beauty, who lay, wrapped in a flowing robe of soft white muslin, on a divan of silver tissue. Her long dark tresses, plaited with large pearls, fell over her bosom; a crimson turban enctured her brow; her head was pillowed upon her hand, and her large eyes were bent earthward: her papooshes of purple velvet sprinkled with gems lay on the carpet near the edge of the fountain; and one of her small feet, dazzling in its whiteness, hung lightly over the front of the divan.

The step of the slave aroused her from her revery, and, as Ziba prepared to enter the kiosque, she started and looked up: "You are welcome, Zibamou;" she said, with a sweet smile; "you have lingered later than usual in the city, and I have wearied for you. Tell me—have you seen him?"

The slave seated herself upon the carpet at the feet of her young mistress, and looked up into her eyes. "You have then thought of him, Effendim, during my absence; and yet, of what avail to think of one who has slighted you, scorned you, and shaken the dust from his feet as he passed your threshold? But turn not away in anger. I have never blamed him when other tongues in the bey's harem have been loud and bitter; I am not about even to chide you for your question; but rather to tell you that you have done well, for I have talked with him in the bazàr."

"Ziba! my own Ziba!" exclaimed the beautiful girl, clasping her fair hands together in an ecstacy of delight; "this day must be marked as the happiest of my life! And did he speak of me? Did he ask if I loved him? And, above all, Ziba, my dear Ziba, did he say that he loved me?"

"Mashallah!" cried the laughing slave; "here are a hundred questions in a breath: why it would require the lungs of a moullah to answer them! Listen, and I will tell my tale; but first, oh! sultana, he is as handsome as the day. He has eyes—no, never, never did I behold such eyes!—teeth—talk to me of pearls. I say ouf! pearls are as henna beside them—hands like the water-lily—and a beard—Astefer allah! there is not such another beard in Damascus."

"But what did he say, Ziba?" interposed the anxious girl: "I know that he is handsome enough to turn the heads of the houris—I have seen him from my lattice—tell me rather, therefore, what he said?"

"You have seen him, Effendim, say you!" echoed the slave, in an accent of scorn. "You cannot even guess what he is like! Have you eyes that will look without winking on the

sun? Sen bilirsen—you know bèst; but if you have not, you have never seen Ildji Rezà."

"But what said he, Zibamou?" again urged the maiden.

"He said," at length commenced the slave: "that he lived but for you—that his thoughts all flew to you with the force of a stone hurled by an elephant—that he dreamed of you on his sofa—that his blood turned to fire when a fear of your displeasure grew upon him—that—in short, sultana mou, if I undertake to repeat to you all he said, we shall get no further by day-dawn; enough that he extorted from me a promise that I would meet him again to-morrow."

"Happy, happy Ziba!" murmured out the excited girl.

"Nay, for that matter," laughed the handmaiden; "it is even as it may be: do I not go to hear him talk of you? Say rather, happy Delsaïsè Hanoum, who will be the bride of the handsomest youth in the city: for his bride you will be, in spite of all that is past, as surely as though it had been foretold by the sagest karabash of Damaseus. Think, my sultana; did not the pretty daughter of the Wali marry a hunchback? Did not Isau Aga give the only child he had to Daoud Effendi, whose odious squint ever reminds one of the Evil Eye? Has not Djamilè Hanoum thrown away your favorite playfellow, Shereen, upon old Amin the Cadi, whose beard is as white as your hand? Eh, vah! who is the happy one here? Answer me that."

And the young beauty sighed out in her delight; "You are right, Ziba: it is indeed I."

"Guzel—good;" said the attendant: "but do you believe that nothing more passed between us? Astcferallah! Ildji Rezà is no sakalsiz! See!" and she drew from beneath her cloak the costly present of the son of Yezid, which the maiden seized with a scream of rapture. "It will tell its own tale, and needs no words from me. But hearken, Effendi mou—my mistress; you were to have been the wife of this young man, or I would have undertaken no such mission."

The prudence, tardy as it was, of her companion, was, however, lost upon the beautiful girl, who, full of the delight of being beloved for the first time, had already pressed the offering of her lover to her heart and lips, and was now busily employed in deciphering the characters of the embroidered border. When she had read the whole, she again embraced the splendid token of Ildji Rezà's affection; and then, bending over the faithful Ziba, she repeated to her in a clear whisper the words of the ballad, which many a Persian maiden, almost as fair and as fond as herself, has sung to her mandolin:

LOVE AND THE LOTUS.

FROM HAFIZ.

When in the east, the golden sun
Has risen from his ocean bed,
And o'er the earth, so lately dark,
The glories of his brightness shed;
The Lotus, on the river's breast,
Lifts, with deep love, her dewy eye,
And thanks him for the life and light
He sheds upon her from the sky.

At noon her loving gaze pursues
His proud career, untired, unturn'd;
And when at length he slowly sets,
She watches every beam that burn'd,
Until the last is lost—and then
She downward bends her gentle head,
And leans in sadness o'er the stream,
To weep till morn his brightness fled.

So, lady, do I turn to thee,
Through every change, in every hour;
Heedless of all on earth beside,
Save thy pure beauty's thralling power;
In thy loved light I live—but when
I lose the glory of its ray,
Like to the Lotus, bow'd and bruised,
My spirit weeps itself away.

"Mashallah!" exclaimed Ziba, as the murmur of the sweet voice ceased; "'tis the love-song of a peri! And even so, sultana, does the Effendi talk. If many of the fair messages with which he entrusted me were to be put into verse, they would make just such ballads as that! Wallah! what shall I say to him to-morrow in reply?"

"What ought you to say, dear Ziba!" asked the innocent girl; "you shall tell him what you will: only forget not to assure him that I love him as the lotus loved the sun: and that even so have I watched him when he has passed under the windows of the harem—for the rest, you know best—say to to him what you will."

"Taib, Effendimou—well said, my mistress but have you nothing to send him as a token that I am an honest interpreter of your heart?"

Delsaïsè hesitated for a moment; young and unpractised as she was in love, she yet shrank with instinctive delicacy from so decided a measure; but the encouraging words and flatteries of Ziba soon won her to consent, and she ultimately severed from her head one of its glossy braids wreathed with pearls, and, having entwined it about a bunch of jasmine flowers which lay beside her on the sofa, she delivered it into the keeping of her attendant. "My heart goes with it;" she said, as a tear swelled in her large dark eye; "but there can be no evil in the gift to one who, you assure me will one day be my husband."

"Evil!" exclaimed the slave: "who dreams of evil? Even if you had given it to the Effendi with your own hand, where could evil exist? Was he not chosen for you by the be your father? and might he not have married you if he had wished it, months ago! Is he not now eager to do so? You owe him at least a return for the grace that he has done you.

"Nay, chide me not, Ziba;" smiled he

mistress, whom the energy of the attendant had served to reassure; "I am so happy that I cannot listen to any words save those of affection and gentleness. How shall I repay you, dear, kind Ziba, for the interest that you have shown in my happiness? My heart leaps as if it had but newly sprung into life: and I could almost chide the darkness that will last so many hours, before you can again see him!" and she buried her face among the cushions of the divan, and shed a flood of those passionate tears which seald the spirit from whence they spring, and destroy for ever the bloominess of its first perfect purity: tears wrung by the impulses of earth from the hitherto untouched soul; withering as they fall, and blighting in their hot flow the very sources of their being.

From this luxury of grief she was aroused by the rustling of leaves immediately outside the kiosque; it was not the sighing of the wind, for the night was calm and still, and not a breath bent the starry jasmine flowers, whose shadows were reflected on the marble floor. The ear of Ziba also caught the sound, but murmuring to herself "Here comes that Ibn Shaitan—that son of Satan, the Aga Baba—may his pillauf be made of green rice!" she quietly dropped her head once more upon her knees, regardless of the interruption.

But the fair Delsaïse was not of the same opinion: and she still continued to gaze through the open door, fearing she knew not what, and ashamed to confess her fame to her attendant, until the clear moonlight was shut out by the dark figure of a man, who stood on the threshold.

The maiden uttered a faint scream, and drew closer to the slave; while the intruder, clearing the marble basin at a bound, flung himself at her feet, and, raising his eyes to hers, disclosed the countenance of Ildji Reza!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

I HAVE said that, ere the young men who were congregated at the great coffee-house separated for the night, they had drunk deep, and become excited with noise and clamour: but I have yet to tell you that when the son of Yezid once more found himself alone, his brain burning, and his brow fevered, he turned aside from the street leading to his father's house, and followed the same solitary path that the slave had selected some hours before. For a time he walked slowly, buried in thought, and indulging in a halcyon dream, rendered only the more brilliant by his partial exaltation; but as he pursued the subject, his step grew hurried and irregular, his breath came quick, and the blood receded to his heart. Suddenly he stopped, hesitated, and then with the speed of desperation rushed down a narrow road leading to the palace-gardens of the bey. When he had reached them, he walked for a short time to and fro beneath the wall, gazing upwards upon the overhanging trees; until, having selected that which best suited his purpose, he unwound his turban, and fastening a heavy stone into the long scarf of which it was formed, flung it skilfully across a projecting bough, and thus securing his ascent, soon found himself upon the wall, looking down upon what to his excited imagination appeared to be the entrance of the Seventh Heaven!

All was indeed calm and beautiful in that sweet spot—the nightingale was pouring forth his love-song to the rose; and the moon was flooding the earth with silver: the flowers were paying back her light in fragrance; and the lotus blossoms were mirrored in the sparkling water, as they bent their heads beneath the diamond shower that fell upon them.

For a moment the heart of Ildji Reza quailed within him. The stillness and purity of the scene had schooled and sobered his wild and phrensied feelings; and he felt like a guilty soul hovering on the confines of paradise. But this involuntary compunction endured not long: another rush of reckless emotion followed; and he flung himself amid the branches of the cedar tree, and descended into the garden.

Hastily he readjusted his turban: and then he stole along under the shadow of the wall, in the direction of the palace; when suddenly he came upon the kiosque of the fountain. His path being undetermined, he bent his steps thither; and he had arrived nearly at the threshold, ere the possibility of its being tenanted suddenly occurred to him, when he hastily concealed himself among the shrubs by which it was surrounded; until he distinctly distinguished two female figures within. In the next moment, he became satisfied that one of these was the slave Ziba; and as he gazed upon the younger and fairer creature on the divan, his heart at once assured him that this could be none other than Delsaïse, his promised bride. For a while he gazed entranced, drinking in her pure moonlighted beauty; until, no longer able to control the feelings which overwhelmed him, he rushed forward and flung himself at her feet.

The exclamation which had risen to the lips of the young beauty died away, and the question arose in her mind—Had he heard her last words? Was he conscious that the tears which yet glistened in her eyes had been shed for him?—She glanced towards her attendant, but there was nothing to reassure her in the aspect of the paralyzed Ziba; imprudent as she had been, the affectionate woman had never dreaded such a catastrophe as this!

For a while there was silence; the timid girl remained with averted head and heaving heart, incapable of uttering a sentence; and the entranced and happy Ildji Rezà hesitated for the first few moments to break so exquisite a pause; while Ziba, painfully aware that she was not altogether blameless in the affair, hid her burning brow upon the lap of her mistress, and sobbed aloud.

"Fairest of the daughters of Peristan!" at length whispered the enraptured lover, as he possessed himself of her small white hand; "Houri, whom the Prophet has sent on earth to show man in what mould the shapes of Paradise are made—Star of the summer-night, before whose light the moon herself grows pale—Sultana, at whose feet the world might bow in homage, and yet fail to render thee thy due—Wilt thou not speak to me, that I may listen to the music of the bûlbûl? Wilt thou not smile on me, that I may see the day dawn in the east, while to all beyond thine influence the earth is wrapped in darkness? The lowliest of thy slaves is at thy feet—his life is in thy hands—he asks it of thee as a boon."

He paused, and a smile, like the dawn to which he had likened it, stole over the fair features of the bewildered girl; but she had not power to articulate a syllable.

"Take that forfeit life;" pursued the young man, conscious of his advantage; "that life which my entrance here has placed at your mercy. I shall yet be happy, for I shall die at your feet!"

"Asteferallah—Heaven forbid!" murmured the low soft voice.

"I shall live, then!" exclaimed Ildji Rezà, as he flung his arm about the shrinking girl, and drew her to his bosom; "My love—my soul—my bride!"

"Eh, vah!" whispered Ziba, rousing herself from the paroxysm of terror: "What is this, Effendim? Are you a man, that you steal thus upon our privacy, and peril our lives? Have we deserved this at your hands?"

But Ildji Reza heeded her not; the fairest creature whom the earth ever held was in his arms—upon his heart—her long hair swept across his hand—her breath came to his cheek. She loved him!—his image alone occupied her; and how could he think of aught save her?

Ere they parted, the dawn, veiled in her dusky mantle, was slowly ascending the sky; and the awakening birds were twittering in the boughs, and shaking from the leaves, among which they had been nestled, the diamond-drops that they had worn throughout the night; the lovers had even talked of future meetings; and the fair cheek of the maiden had flushed crimson as she promised to hold the visit of her imprudent suitor a secret from all save Ziba. Often did they murmur a low farewell, and as often did Ildji Rezà delay yet another moment, to press the delicate fingers of his mistress to his lips, and to hear her breathe out another parting word. But the slave, as she marked a few streaks spread across the sky, red as the banner of the Prophet, would brook no further venture; and, while the weeping and bewildered girl waved her last adieu to a lover whose rashness had not only perilled his own life, but hers, Ziba hurried him to a point of the wall where a decayed buttress afforded a safe and easy means of escape from the garden; and, as he failed not at the same moment to remark, secured to him as commodious a mode of ingress.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

THE new moon sprang to the brow of night, and crowned it with a crescent of silver: and the beautiful daughter of Kassim Bey, and the son of Yezid the Khawajì, sat hand in hand in the kiosque of the fountain, and looked upon its pale and feeble light. It grew larger, until it sailed like a bark formed of one vast diamond upon the wavy clouds of the calm star-lighted heavens; and still they gazed on it together: changed only in having felt their love brighten and increase like the orb on which they looked; still he was at her feet, and held her hand, and beguiled the hours of night with gentle words; and the innocent and unsuspecting girl loved the growing light, for she knew not that to her it portended evil. And next it rose to its high place like a burning world, poised in mid-air, and ruddy with the flame which fed upon its heart; till, as it reached its throne of sapphire sprinkled with diamonds, it grew clearer and purer in its brightness, and flooded all the earth with silver. And the lovers were yet together—tracing its quivering light upon the leaves, and weaving sweet fancies worthy of such an hour.*

But mahâk* came at last; and, as the young man watched the outline of the fair orb diminish, he suddenly remembered his vow, and quiet departed from him—the fair cheek of his beloved looked livid in the clear light, and a sadness seemed to dwell in her deep eyes. He remembered his vow, and his spirit melted within him. On that night he tore himself from his beautiful mistress with agony in his soul. There might yet be time to save her—he bounded along the garden path; he climbed the wall like a chamois; he looked neither to the right nor to the left, to mark if he were observed, but ran madly down the road in the direction of the city; conscious,

* Decline of the moon.

even amid his anguish, that the shout of detection followed at his heels.

Like a hunted animal, he doubled upon his pursuers; he crouched along under the shadows of the building; he rushed like a maniac across the open spaces which intervened upon his path. And still he flew on in the direction of the Meidan, until, in the broad moonlight, immediately confronting him, he saw the beetachy who had witnessed his unholy vow.

"Well found!" shouted the dervish; "a few bounds more, and you are saved; haste, haste, the blood-hounds are at your heels?" Instinctively he obeyed; and, grasping the hand that was extended to him, he followed like a child. He heard the shouts, which had so lately grown with terrible rapidity upon his ear, die away in the distance; and then he flung himself down upon the earth in a paroxysm of agony; and writhed like one in the death-spasm.

"And whither were you bound so fast, my son?" asked the dervish, as Ildja Rezà, slowly recovering his self-possession, raised himself on his elbow, and glanced wildly round the tomb into which his companion had dragged him: "What has the owl of affliction screamed into the hollow of your ears, to move you thus? You struck the fiery hoof of speed on the stony path of flight, like one who escaped from the pestilence—what may this storm of passion signify?"

"Father?" gasped the fugitive: "I am accursed—I have become an Ibn Sheitan—the son of Satan—touch me not with the hem of your garment: but pass on, and let me die."

"Ne oldou—what has happened?" again urged the beetachy: "when we last met, you seemed to soar above the power of your felcch, and to have expanded the wings of pride in the akash* of happiness—Why do you now grovel in the dust of disappointment?"

"Where is the traitor Ali?" asked the young man in reply; "where is the Toorkoman fiend who bought from me the strings of my heart, and the pulses of my being? If you cannot bring me to him; then once more I say—let me die."

"Pouff! pouf!—pshaw! pshaw! Young blood chills not so soon;" retorted the dervish; "talk not of the dues of Asràel while you have the power to defraud him of them. Why do you despair? Has your gallant steed foundered? or has he spurned the bit? Why seal the trouble of your heart with the signet of secrecy? The physician who has not learnt the nature of the malady can never save the patient. Tell me your grief; and who knows but I may find its cure. Have I not already saved you from the negro hounds who were yelping at your heels, attracted thither no doubt by some imprudence of your own? Why then should you hesitate to confide in me?"

"What can I say, oh! father?" exclaimed Ildji Rezà passionately: "I have strewed the path of vanity with the pearls of happiness, and they have been trodden under foot. Oh, that I could grasp the skirts of the future with the fingers of repentance: and that it were yet my fate to call Delsaïsè my own!"

"Are these tears, these pangs, then for a woman?" asked the beetachy scornfully: "and is it indeed the son of Yezid, who so lately laughed the sex to scorn, who now moistens the marble floor with the drops of unavailing and unmanly passion? Have you not the steed in your stable, whom you coveted more than all the beauties of the imperial harem? and do you play the sakalsiz for a puny girl?"

"You chide in vain, father:" said the young man, recovering his self-possession by a violent effort; "rather assist me to find the wretch who has cheated me into ruin—my vow must be cancelled, though I pave the floor of his tent with gold—Let him take back the horse, and restore to me my soul—and then let us part, never to breathe the same air again."

"You talk wildly, my son. Ali the khawaji has left the city. You cannot now pluck the rings of obedience from the ears of destiny—You have sworn, and you must abide by your oath."

"And when?—when?" gasped out the victim.

The dervish pointed to the moon; "The mahàk has commenced;" he said solemnly. "you remember the compact."

Ildji Rezà smote upon his brow with his clenched hand, and ground his teeth like a maniac.

"When will man learn his error!" murmured the beetachy, communing with his own thoughts: "Thus is it ever that the shallow cup of youth overflows with the froth of folly: and that time brings only repentance as its dowry."

"Can you not save us both?" urged the young man; "oh, father! could you but imagine half her beauty, her gentleness, her truth, you would feel that such a fate must destroy her, as that which my own madness has drawn down—do you ask gold? I will pour into your lap the pure ore of Sumatra which is current over the whole earth. Do you love power? I will be your slave, and make my laws of the desires of your lips—Your days shall flow like the sacred waters of Zimzim:* and your nights shall be nights of peace. But save us, father, or we perish. Read the stars for us, and teach me how we may escape."

* Eastern philosophers insist on a fifth element, which they designate *akash*; and which they invest with perfect purity.

* A fountain near Mecca.

"Son of Yezid:" replied the dervish; "why do you thus sit down in the sepulchre of sorrow, and heap ashes upon your own head, when you should arouse the man within you, and shake off the woman-weakness that bows your spirit. Love is the very moon of madness, laughing amid the darkness over the terrors of its power; a ghoul, whose food is the heart of its victim, and whose wine is its tears: whose bonds are the chains of folly, and whose music is the howling of those who wear them. Earth is full of its bitterness; and the very houris who have dared its sway, have bowed beneath the curse; joy dwells not with them in the paradise of the faithful, and its flowery paths are strown for them with burning sand. Up then, son of Yezid, and fling off this diadem of serpents, which you have woven about your brow."

"Dervish, you preach in vain;" said the mournful Ildji Rezà; "help me if you can—to chide me is useless—he who has once looked on the light cannot dwell in darkness with a merry heart."

"Ne apalum—what can I do, my son?" asked the bectachy; "Listen to me; the mahâk has but commenced; you have yet time for reflection. But beware of repeating the folly of to-night. You have been seen and pursued: and, had I not been upon your path, to guide the foot of flight into the way of safety, you would ere now have been sacrificed to the offended honor of the bey. Be thankful therefore for your escape—La illaha illallah—there is but one Allah! and you are yet in a whole skin. Rest quietly here for to-night. You are safe under the shadow of a holy name; and you will not be the first sinner who has owed life and limb to the same protection. Here is food:" and he produced from beneath his khirkheh a handful of dates and a flap of bread:—"and here:" and as he spoke he dislodged a stone within the tomb, and drew forth a small skin filled with liquid: "here is wine—wine from Cyprus—as sweet and almost as thick as honey—You look amazed, young man, but you have yet much to learn, even in the good city of Damascus. And now, eat and refresh yourself; while I go forth and strive to learn whether you were recognized in your flight. If the Ibn Sheitan—the sons of Satan—who pursued you, know no more than that they gave chase to a man, without suspecting his identity, then may you go boldly to the house of your father, and recommence your career of folly: but if the cry was raised at the heels of the son of Yezid, you must gather up the skirts of speed, and pass the city walls while there is yet time. Farewell then for a while. When you have eaten and drunk, you can replace the skin in its hiding-place; and should I tarry on my mission, you must lay your head on the pillow of patience, and sleep or dream till my return."

And, without awaiting further parley, the dervish strode out of the tomb.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

Ildji Reza sat for a time with his head bowed upon his elasped hands, like a figure hewn in stone; but after a while the faint sickness of exhaustion stole upon him, and he lifted the wine-skin to his lips, and drained a deep draught. Again and again he raised it; and at length sleep stole upon him, and, stretching himself along behind one of the pillars which supported the dome of the building, he was soon buried in slumber.

How long he might have slept he knew not, when he was suddenly aroused by a hoarse peal of laughter immediately in his vicinity; and, raising himself gently on his elbow, he discovered that the night was spent; and that, to use the figurative expression of a Persian poet, "morning, in her mantle of dun edged with saffron, was, like a shepherdess of the plains, driving her fair flock of stars before her to the shade."

The chilly dawn was peering into the building; and as his eye became familiarized with the faint light, Ildji Rezà discovered that he had slept in company with the very outcasts of the city. There were two filthy hadjis, covered with rags, and loud with ribaldry: a couple of those convenient wayfarers who receive the wages of wealthy indolence, and save at once their own souls and those of their employers; while they drive a lucrative trade by vending to the home-staying devotees shreds of rag, morsels of painted glass, and splinters of marble, collected at the Prophet's Tomb. It being part of the system of these money-making pilgrims to enhance in the eyes of their patrons the fatigues and difficulties of their undertaking, they are always careful to appear before them both ragged and filthy; and those who now attracted the attention of Ildji Rezà were masters of their trade.

It was from the throat of one of these hadjis that the laugh had proceeded which roused the young man from his slumber; and it had scarcely died away when a howl, deep, prolonged, and fierce, as though it had been uttered by a wild beast in the recesses of the desert, formed its hideous answer; and as the son of Yezid grasped his handjar, and bent forward to learn its cause, he saw, crouching near the base of a pillar, a miserable wretch whose elf-locks fell over his lank and haggard countenance, and whose grizzled beard, dank with the night dew, and matted into thick ropes from neglect, hung to his waist; his

legs were bare from the knees, and covered with scars, as though his path through life had been among briars; his raiment was scarce, and coarse, and worn; and his long thin fingers were clasped in the mass of hair that hung over his wild fierce eyes, dragging it aside, as he glared upon a santon, or professional saint, who was squatted on an old rug beside him.

"Peace! father of asses!" said the elder hadji, shaking his clasped hand at the wretched maniac; "this is what thy vain folly has done for thee. Do you remember this howling idiot, Hadji Latif?" he asked of his companion: "there were none like him at the Tekiè of Scutari, when he first joined the brotherhood; but his zeal was stronger than his head; and though, as you may see by his scarred limbs, and the seams upon his chest, he tried to keep it cool by blood-letting, it grew too hot for him at last—"

"It burns! it burns!" howled the miserable maniac, catching a glimpse of the hadji's meaning: "La illaha illallah!" and as the words passed his lips, he fell flat upon the earth, with closed eyes and rigid limbs.

It was a spectacle of horror: and springing to his feet, Ildji Rezà bounded across the floor, and rushed through the portal of the tomb.

"A spy! a spy!" shouted the santon; "Let us away, my friends, or we shall have the city guard upon us."

The hadjis appeared to consider the advice seasonable, for, tightening their girdles, and replacing their turbans with all speed, they left the building; being probably too well acquainted with the tender mercies of the Cadi of Damascus, to be desirous of placing either their feet or their throats at his disposal.

Ildji Rezà stood for awhile in the chill morning air, panting for breath, and sick at heart, ere he remembered the wretched maniac in the tomb; when, shaking off the disgust that had grown on him, he slowly retraced his steps, and found the miserable man still lying extended on the marble floor like a corpse; his livid lips parted, and drawn tightly back from his large and discolored teeth: every limb inflexible and rigid, and his long wild locks scattered over the pavement.

To fling over him water from a fountain which was near at hand, and to force down his throat a draught of the wine which the beetachy had left for his own use, was the work of a moment to Ildji Rezà; and, as the madman writhed and struggled with returning consciousness, he soothed him with words and accents of gentleness, such as had probably not met the ears of the ill-fated man for years.

"Gel, gel, gardash mou—come, come, my brother;" he said kindly; "rouse yourself, or I must leave you in your misery, for I look to be summoned ere long;" and the maniac turned his deep hollow eyes upon him in wonder as he asked,

"Who are you?—Monker and Nakir have left me, the mist rolls back, and the blue sky once more floods my soul—Where am I? This cannot be Paradise, for I have not trodden the Eternal Bridge: and the earth on which I lie chills me as though I were pillowed on a serpent."

"You are safe, quite safe;" was the reply. "Sit up, lean on me, and swallow some of this cordial; here are none to harm you."

"Harm me!" echoed the maniac, as he drained a deep draught of the refreshing wine of Cyprus; "my day of fear is past;" and he clasped his long bony hands together, and his head drooped upon his breast as he murmured; "By sea and by land—by storm and by calm—in the crowded city—on the wide waste of waters—above me, beneath me, about me on every side—they are ever there!—ever!—and she, my own one, my beloved Comladeve,* she for whom I bore all, she alone is absent—"

The low despairing tone of the dervish struck to the heart of Ildji Rezà; he knew that it was the mere wailing of a madman; but he felt, as he listened, that it must have been a biting misery which had shattered the intellect of the wretched man beside him; and again he soothed, encouraged and condoled, until his accents melted the spirit of the stricken one, and he wept tears in which there was no bitterness.

Suddenly he grasped the arm of the young man, and said eagerly; "I know not what you have given me—I care not—but, though I am mad—mad—with a bursting pulse and a burning brain, I can thank you—and you shall hear all—*all!*—I have not told the tale for years—I never thought to tell it again—but a sudden strength is come upon me; and, ere I die, I will clear my breast of the frightful secret. Allah kerim! the vulture that gnaws my heart will soon miss its meal—the worm that has coiled itself in the cells of my brain will ere long unwreathe its folds—" And flinging his arms frantically in the air, he yelled out like a wounded animal, ere, by another transition of feeling, he cowered closer into the corner of the building, and in a rapid voice commenced his wild dream of the past.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

"I KNOW not what crime I had committed; I am ignorant if I was even accused of any;

* Water-lily.

but at midnight men stood beside my bed, and around it; and my narrow chamber was filled with dusky forms, seen dimly athwart the darkness. Shapes of fear they were; armed, and strong, and tall in the shadow; and their heavy weapons struck discordantly and harshly on the marble floor as they moved silently about the chamber.

"I strove to speak, but I could not; Allah knows the terror which froze up my soul! my tongue seemed parched, and clave to my fevered palate: fear had paralyzed my energies, and I could not move a limb.

"I had little time to struggle with the dread that pressed upon my spirits; a strong grasp raised me from my mat, and busy hands were soon folding my garments round me. They put my turban on my head, and fastened it beneath my chin with the chain which had sustained my dagger; my arms were pinioned tightly behind my back, and secured by my own costly shawl—that shawl which I had bound in pride about me when I last beheld Comladeve, the peri of my spirit. What a vision did that memory conjure up! I was about to be borne I know not whither; the hour would come when she would look for me again; when she would have renewed the henna on her delicate hands, and scattered perfumes in her hair; when she would listen near her latticed casement for my coming step, and hear only the breath of the evening wind sighing over the roses and the lotus-flowers; her zebec would be silent, and her heart heavy; for her loved one might not stand beneath her window in the starlight, nor look with her upon the moon.

"These thoughts swept hurriedly over my soul like the winged steed of Mahomet through a stormy sky. I struggled, but the effort came too late—I was lifted from the earth; a coarse beneesh was folded round me, and I was flung rudely across a war-horse guided by a strong hand. Away we flew like the wind! and shrouded as I was, I distinguished the hoof-clang of many steeds, and the hoarse tones of their riders, urging them to yet greater speed.

"On, on, we sped; and, as I lay panting across the animal which bore me, the coarse covering pressed rudely upon my mouth and nostrils, and I sickened for air. For a while I became senseless, and when at length I again breathed freely, the wind of an autumnal evening was fanning my brow like the wing of a peri. I thought that I had wakened in Paradise; and I hastily looked up to meet the dark eyes which were to welcome me to the everlasting bowers.

"I gave but one glance, ere I again closed my aching lids: I was surrounded by dark forms; they pressed closely about me: and a crowd of turbaned heads were turned towards me, as if awaiting my restoration to consciousness. A deep murmur ran through the throng as I looked up; again a strong hand lifted me from the earth, and I involuntarily gazed once more around.

"We were standing on the verge of a dark rock; and the wide sea, in all its might and its majesty, was beneath us. I gave one frenzied shriek—it was the voice of my agony, as I hung in air for an instant in the grasp of that iron hand!

"As the scream died away, a deep voice sounded in my ear—the words were seared into my heart—How often since that moment have I uttered them with the laugh of partial insanity, or the hollow tone of reckless despair, when none were near to listen:—

"'Be the sea thy home—the grave which it offers to others, it shall refuse to thee—for seven long years shalt thou float on, and on—Earth shall fly from thee; and the inhabitants of the earth shall reject thy fellowship—Thou shalt look on forms that thou hast loved, and hearken to tones which have been dear to thee—Thou shalt look and listen and it shall avail thee nothing.'

"A hoarse laugh from the assembled crowd followed closely on the awful words; and, ere the discordant mirth had wholly subsided, he who held me strode yet nearer to the edge of the dark rock. Instinctively I closed my eyes: a sickness as of death came over me: there was another yell of fiendish joy—another hellish mockery of mirth—a sudden fall—a loud plash—and I was floating like a corse upon the waters.—

"Oh! the agony of that moment!—I writhed—I struggled—I strove to wrench away the bonds which bound my arms—but, at every heave of my tortured body, at every spasm of my fettered strength, I only sank deeper into the wave; and as I rose again exhausted and panting to the surface, I threw back the salt water from my mouth and nostrils in nauseous streams.

"As the breeze swept over me, I caught the breath of flowers, the scents of earth! But I heard also the clattering hoof-strokes of the demon train who had borne me to the coast rapidly returning to the city. My heart swelled almost to bursting; and had not my brain been scorched, I could have wept. I looked up; the gray twilight was deepening around me—Wretch as I was, this alone was wanting to complete my misery!

"Night was gathering in the sky, the long, dark, fearful night; and I turned my eyes despairingly on either side. In one direction the tall rock from which I had been hurled rose bleak and frowning, while the waters chafed and bellowed at its base; and the light spray fell back, far across the waves, like rain As I gazed, distant and twinkling lights appeared in many a chasm, and I knew that they betokened the habitations of men. I could see in my mind's eye the narrow hearth of the fish-

erman, peopled by his children and their mother; and again I buffeted the waters, and felt half a maniac as I struggled with my bonds.

"The night thickened around me, and the murky clouds gathered like the sable wings of the angel Asrael; not a star was in the sky, and the moon looked not upon the earth, nor across the sea, where I lay like a log upon the waters. The wind freshened; and I felt that I was rapidly borne away from the land. There was a mightier heaving in the billows, and a deeper murmur from the depths of the ocean: while the sea-birds shrieked out as they dipped for an instant their ill-omened bosoms in the wave, and then pursued their way to their rocky resting-places till the morrow. Alas! I had no resting-place! I prayed to the Prophet that I might die; but, from the depths of his amaranth bowers, he heard me not; and I lived on.

"And now a fresh agony grew upon me. The folds of my turban became weighty as the moisture penetrated even to my hair-roots; and I was bowed back heavily into the waters.

"Bashustun—on my head be it, Effendim! You have never dreamed of hours so long as those of that dark weary night; with its shrill winds, its angry sky, and its deep dreamy solitude. Ere morning dawned I had writhed so violently in my bonds that the blood gushed from my ears and nostrils, and trickled down my beard. I was weak and spiritless; and at length I wept like a child. They were the first tears of my manhood, and they were wrung from my heart in agony and bitterness.

"As the light broke, a huge sea swept over me; and though but a moment before I had prayed for death, yet now I panted and struggled with the suffocating element, and felt almost joy when the mighty billow was overpast.

"The day came—the glorious day! Wreaths of clouds, beautiful in their blended tints of gold and gray, floated in the east, like heralds of the rising sun. Again I heard the shrill shriek of the water-fowl, and saw the gleaming wings of the sea-gull and the cormorant as they flew over my head. Sounds of unearthly music rose from the ocean-cells, like the welcome of the water-gods to the daylight; whispers swept along the wave as the breeze rippled it; and the golden tints of the morning sky danced in brightness on the waters. Crowds of flying-fish darted high into the air, and fell back one by one as the moisture dried upon their wings. Many a shark in pursuit of prey darted along so close beside me as to heave the very billow by which I was upborne, yet it saw me not. I was plunged deep, deep into the waters by the heavy fin-stroke of the mighty whale as it passed me by; and the fairy nautilus hoisted its transparent sail, and guided its tiny bark fearlessly within my very grasp.

"Hunger came upon me, and thirst; and the sun, as it rose in the heavens, beat maddeningly upon my uncovered face. I had prayed for daylight: I had watched and panted for it throughout the long, long night, and it had come at length, only to bring with it an accession of misery, for I sickened beneath the fierce heat and the blinding light.

"During the darkness I had drifted far out to sea; the wilderness of waters was around me: not a vestige of man, nor of that earth which is his inheritance, was left to cheat me into hope. The spectral albatross clave the air with white and motionless wing, and cast its long, dark, solitary shadow far across the wave.

"Then came evening, with its softened light and its subdued breeze; and my aching eyes were cooled by its approach; though I shuddered as I remembered that night would follow in its train.

"Well might I shudder with prophetic dread; for *that* night taught me that I was never, during my ocean-pilgrimage, to close my eyes in sleep! I spent it like the last; at times I was furious, and struggled and shrieked in my despair; and at others I lay bleeding, exhausted, and almost reckless, on my billowy bed.

"Years passed over me thus, chequered only by an occasional accession of misery, by storm, and hurricane, and tempest. Famine and thirst were still gnawing at my heart, and yet I could not die—"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED

MEN say that I am mad; and it may well be so—it was in truth a maddening thing to lie year after year in my helplessness, storm-worn, sleepless, hopeless—Inshallah! there is another world for the True Believer, where the tempest-breath and the billow will never come—"

"And did you still live on alone?" demanded Ildji Rezà, interested despite himself in the strange tale of the maniac; "Had you no companion in misery? no occupation to beguile the dreary days?"

"Companion!" echoed the dervish with a wild laugh. "What companion would you have given to me? not a mortal—no; no!—he could have held no communion with me—I was no longer an inhabitant of earth, but a loathed and unnatural being, living a charmed life—breathing upon an element which would have brought death to my fellow-men—foredoomed to years of unholy existence—where could I hope to find a companion? Occupation!" he pursued still more earnestly. "Can

you not guess my occupation? I learnt to note the hours by the appearance of the sunbeams on the water, or the position of the stars; and I collected the ashes of madness, which, after smouldering for a time, at length burst into a flame, and seared my brain.

"At times I lay quietly upon the surface of the ocean, and, fixing my eye upon a particular wave afar off, I watched its progress, and laughed long and loudly when at length it broke over me; and at others I shrieked an echo to the shrill cry of the sea-fowl, and felt a cunning exultation as I found how fully I had caught the discordant note; and heard the bird, mocked into a belief that it was the call of one of his own species, answer in his turn.

"But not always did I thus sport with my unhallowed wretchedness; these were my hours of revel, and the startled spirit soon shrank back into itself—into its idiot vanity or its maddening despair!

"How often, during these miserable years, did I look on land: ay, even watched the fisherman while he drew his nets; and caught the sound of laughter as it came shrilly along the waves;—then, even although I felt the impotence of my efforts, I again strove to burst my bonds—panted—yelled in the agony of my helplessness, as I sank into deep water; and writhed like a baited animal when I once more rose to the surface.

"All day I have floated past the land; at times dashed furiously against projecting points of rock, and then cast back, maimed and bleeding, on the retiring breakers; at others gliding slowly and smoothly along a smiling shore; breathing the breath of flowers, cooled by the long shadows of stately trees, listening to the lowing of cattle, the song of birds, the sounds of music, the voice of children—unseen, unheard, unpitied!

"Thus sped my days: my nights brought no mental rest, for sleep was denied to me—Effendim, Min Allah—Heaven forbid!—that you should ever know how the brain grows crazed under the unwinking watchfulness of years!—the long, long wakefulness which knows no rest—the vigil that is unbroken! And yet I longed for night; for its darkness, weary and withering as it was, offered me at least a respite from the tedious monotony of the ocean and the burning fury of the sun. Sometimes, too, the pale moon rode high in heaven, and the sea gleamed like a sheet of molten silver, while I lay there, the only dark speck to mar the glory of the scene.

"On such nights I was ever sad and resigned to my destiny; I did not struggle—I did not shriek—I lay calmly, and wept like an infant; or, after gazing a while on the fair moon, I fixed on a bright star above my head, and fancied a world of happiness for Comladeve and myself in such a sphere of light; and, as I gazed, the houri of my soul would stand upon the vapor that swept across the moon; and point to the star on which I loved to look; and lo! it changed; and I saw the diamond key that opens the portal of the Prophet's paradise; while she beckoned me to a death of blessedness which I could not die! That vision brought madness with it—and then I held discourse with the sky, and with the sea, and again played the maniac.

"One evening, after a day of fierce heat, as I lay inhaling with avidity the cool breeze which slept along the wave, and feathered it with its refreshing breath, a distant object caught my eye, and I gazed upon it with delirious joy! Nearer it came in its pride: it was—it *was* a ship! Ay! on she came, with her sails set, and her bowsprit bending at intervals even into the very ripple as the fresh breeze sped her on. I could see her tall masts, her white canvass, her complicated cordage; and, more than all, I could see many of her crew—men! my fellow-men! my brothers!

"They came not from my own land, for their unturbaned heads were bare, and the wind played among their long and curling locks—they were not of my own faith, for the Christian symbol streamed from the mast of the stately ship—but what cared I for this? They would save me; I should once more be restored to the world, to Comladeve and to myself. Can you not believe that my joy was maddening?

"One among them stood like the spirit of the huge ship; and looked and spoke with the glance and the tone of pride. In the intervals of my struggles and of my cries, I watched him narrowly; once I thought that he pointed towards me, and my heart leaped with transport; but he turned suddenly away, and I saw him no more. Still, however, the full and lordly voice met my ear—alas! had I known the import of the words it uttered, the pealing of the midnight thunder had been more welcome.

"As I strained my eyes to look on the gallant ship, her sails shivered for an instant in the wind; I heard the myriad ropes beat heavily against the deck, as if cast down suddenly from many hands; and, ere I could draw another breath, the vast canvass one more opened to the breeze; and away flew the swift vessel like a mighty bird, and left me, writhing and wretched—an alien, and an outcast!

"How I watched the ship as she receded! The figures on her deck became less and less perceptible, and soon totally disappeared; her long, masts, and sails, and cordage grew into one confused but wondrous mass; and, finally, she dwindled to a mere speck upon the ocean.

"Yet still I watched her—Allah! how my eyes grew to that fading object as it slowly melted into thin air in the distance! I hope

no longer; but I had looked on *men*, and listened to the human voice; and when even the dark speck utterly disappeared in the horizon, I buffeted the waves anew, and exhausted my strength in struggles with my unyielding bonds.

"When the light came again, I searched around, as though I could yet look upon the glorious vision—but I saw it no more. I lived upon the memory of that ship for months. I could have described her, as though she had been still before my eyes. I remembered every look and gesture of the proud spirit who governed her. I saw once more the graceful bound with which, after the temporary check, she again darted on her way—it was inscribed upon my heart and in my brain."

The maniac paused: and, grasping his broad forehead with his bony hands seemed as though he thought to still the pang his vision had called up; while Ildji Reza sat beside him, marvelling how great a share memory could claim of a narrative in which madness was blent with suffering. Wild as it was, there was yet a connecting principle in the tale to which he had been listening, that seemed too mighty an effort for a mind shattered like that of the wretched object on whom he looked; and the young man remembered that, ere the lamp of life is extinguished, its flame sometimes lights up for a short period the long-faceated sepulchre of the brain: and thus he remained silently beside the dervish, awaiting with the reverence which is ever paid to madness by his countrymen, the termination of a recital which was evidently exhausting the strength of the narrator.

"Ekhi kateti—there is something; something that we neither see nor understand. Khawaji;" at length pursued the maniac, "upon our path, in the air we breathe, about, above, and around us—I was the prey of that power, be it what it may—I am so still—there are moments when I am mad—mad!—when the subtle enemy has drunk up the juices of my being, withered the marrow of my bones, and turned the stream of my blood to fire—but to-day the clasp is slackened from my heart—the demon sleeps—and I am again one of those to whom the world was given as a heritage. Yet I am not always so—and, least of all, when I was floating over that endless, endless sea. Do you dream that I saw none but pleasant scenes while I rode the wave, and mated with monsters? Ai, ai—wo is me! You are young, and the world has used you gently—you are strong, and your limbs have never writhed in bonds. You!" and he laughed the shrill mocking laugh of frenzy; "how can *you* guess at all I saw when the whirlwind and the tempest had done their work? Often, after a night of storm, did a pale bloated corse pass close beside me; the fixedly-opened eyes glaring, glazed, and ghastly, upon mine, soulless and sightless; the lips parted as if in the death agony; and the work of corruption begun. Horrible! most horrible! And yet, Wallah billah—by the Prophet! this was but the natural effect of an element on which man might not live, save by demoniac means; and I only loathed myself the more, as the foul corse was borne beyond my ken, that my lot was not even as that of him who had perished in the deep waters. *He*, at least, had buffeted the billows with unshackled limbs—had striven manfully with the fate which threatened him—and, when the bitter agony was overpast, had *died*. *I* had been bound; had striven—struggled—suffocated—suffered all the pangs, the awfulness of dissolution, and yet lived. The tide wave bore away its dead, and I envied the cold and loathsome corse!

"But my cup of agony had not yet overflowed. The sun had set gloriously, and its golden beams still glowed and glistened on the ocean-wave, when again my ear was filled with sounds which had long been strangers to it—sounds of mirth and music—and, like a thing of light, a gay bark swept gracefully along, with a gilded crescent at her mast. Yes—she came from my own land! She came to bring me life and happiness! There were revellers on the deck of that fair ship; her silken sails were looped with flowers; and silver vases, filled with perfumed incense, were shedding their costly breath upon the air; I heard the shrill tones of the fife, the ringing notes of the zebec, and the clangour of the martial cymbal—for a while I spoke not—stirred not—my gaze was riveted on one bright form, which moved like a spirit of beauty among the revellers. Misery, madness, famine, had failed to blot *that* image from the records of my brain—I gazed like one who would exhaust himself in a long, last look, for I *felt* that it was Comladeve—she whom I had loved, whom I had almost won. Yes, *she* was *there!* Her long hair was floating to the breeze; her eyes were flashing like meteors; her white arms were bare, and gleamed like sea-foam; she was dancing on that vessel's deck, to the sound of the clashing cymbals!

"Now, indeed, I writhed and struggled to free my limbs from the bonds which fettered them; with the violence of my frantic efforts, I sank deep into the waters, and the waves closed above my head; but it was only for a while; and ere long I rose again panting and suffocating, to the surface. As my breath returned, I strove to speak, to utter the name of my beloved, to call on Comladeve to succor and to save me; but I gave voice only to a shrill scream, like those of the aquatic fowl whose cries I had mocked in my madness—speech had departed from me!

"Vain were it for me to tell you all—Allah kerim—Allah is merciful—I was close

beside the vessel, and they saw me not. I shrieked aloud in my agony, but they did not heed me. As the bark swept along, the tide carried me forward in its wake; and when the moon rose, and the breeze freshened, I saw Comladeve lean pensively over the vessel's side; and, as she raised her eye to heaven, a tear fell from it—She stood not long alone; a tall figure approached her; a jewelled crescent glittered in his turban, and there were gems in the hilt of the handjar in his girdle. As he reached her side, he murmured a few words in her ear: he breathed them softly and fondly, but *I* heard them, whispered though they were! In an instant his arm encircled her, and her head rested tenderly upon his shoulder—again he spoke, and as the voice ceased, he looked up. Allah! needed there this? Was I not yet a wretch? It was my brother! that brother whom I had loved even as my own soul—*he* was beside my betrothed bride—*his* arm was twined around her waist—*his* voice murmured the words of passion—and I—I was near them—borne on the same ocean—breathed on by the same wind—lighted by the same moon—and they heeded, they heard me not."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

"Allah csmarladek—Allah have you in his holy keeping;" murmured Ildji Reza, carried away, in spite of his reason, by the phrensied energy of the dervish. "This was indeed a grief."

"But I survived even that!" laughed out the maniac; "and a new trouble grew upon me as I looked upon the lovers—I felt that mysterious sighing steal along the surface of the sea, which I had learnt to be the wailing of the water-gods over the coming ruin of the tempest-wrath; murmurs arose from the ocean-depths, the awakening of the storm-breath among the billows; the huge porpoises rolled over uneasily; and the hungry sharks congregated round the goodly ship. Too well I knew these signs — they foreboded death—death, Khawaji; the sickening, struggling death of the angry billow and the shrieking wind—I knew them all, for I had watched them for years, and they had never failed!

"For myself I feared not—what could I fear? They did not even promise me the death for which I prayed; but for *her*—for Comladeve—for my soul's idle—the water-lily over which the tide of sorrow never should have passed—for her I trembled with a dread for which the pangs of death had been a rich exchange; and I yelled forth in my terror sounds of fearful warning. *She* heard them, and started convulsively. Like the blossom o the nrgis* bent she over the murmuring bil lows; but not as she was wont to look whe she listened to my voice, looked she at tha moment. Gardash—brother—have you eve gazed into the eye of a peri who had folde the wings of her affection upon your bosom and forsaken the flowery paths of pleasure fo the shady home of peace? Ha! ha! sh looked down, down, deep into the heaving se —not with love—not with tenderness—no with trust—it was wild, maddening, phrensie terror that gave a fierce light to her eye, an threw a shadow over her pale brow: anxious ly she searched among the billows for the fear ful creature which had uttered a sound s dread; but though her gaze seemed fixed o my very brow, she saw me not: and, after while, she again raised her bright looks to th evening sky.

"*She* looked calmly on an horizon which t me was fraught with terrible warning: dar clouds were flitting rapidly over the face o the heavens, and congregating in one dens mass, so black and heavy that it seemed t oppress my breathing; the moon had risen, n in beauty, but red as blood; while the lowe fringes of the huge black cloud caught the r flection, and flung back far upon the wave their ensanguined shadow. At intervals, fiery vapor played in fearful light round th gilded crescent at the mast of the doomed shi and ran along it from point to point—the came a deep hollow peal, which was com menced by the dark cloud, and echoed fro every cave of ocean; and again the dee waters swelled and heaved in their might, lik the fettered limbs of a giant; though the su face of the sea was yet calm, and the vess rode as smoothly as though it had been glidin over the bosom of a lake.

"But the storm came at length: a sudden fla struck on the crescent once more, and ran dow the mast, clasping it round and round like fiery girdle, cast by some avenging spirit fro his loins—the huge cloud parted in twain and the storm-god howled forth his summo to the tempest! Instantly was it answered the giant billows burst their bonds at on and rose high into the air, crowned w foam.

"Allah! 'tis a rare sight to see the fury the waves when they are lashed to madness the storm-wind—when the surf flies hi against the heavens, as though it mocked th vapors drifting over head—and the sea ope wide its yawning sepulchres, and gapes for t dead who are so soon to fill them.—But wh these are the young, the beautiful, the loved—the treasured of your spirit, the cheri ed of your soul—Ha! ha! ha! can you feel the wild delirium, the bitter excitati the maddening impulse of the conflict?

* Narcissus.

"I saw the light ship tossed like a ball against the sky, and then thrown back into the deep trough of the sea, like a stricken bird. Again I saw it raised on high until the holy crescent—the symbol of the Prophet—seemed to have grown into the dark, threatening, mysterious cloud, and I felt it again fall back; for, as it came, a portion of its rent mast fell over the side, and struck me heavily as it touched the waves—down I sank—down—down—struggling with that mighty mass of ruin, until it again rose buoyantly to the surface, carrying me with it once more above the billows.

"The ship and her proud crew had parted for ever—fragments of the wreck were riding in the foaming waters—I caught the breath of the scattered incense; and flowers, and costly turbans floated past me, as I panted to regain my breath. What cared I for these trifles? They were of the world, and to me they were bosh—nothing. I thought only, looked only, for Comladeve—and I saw her! Her dark hair floated like a cloud upon the wave which bore her up—her veil had escaped, and her beloved countenance was revealed in the moonlight—she was within my reach, and my arms were pinioned—I could not grasp her!

"I uttered one cry in my agony; and then, with frantic violence, I hurled myself against a portion of the wreck. La illaha illallah—there is but one Allah! the effort, the struggle, the attempt to brave the death which had so long evaded me, brought partial freedom—I had burst my bonds! For a moment I could lift raise my arms high into the air, strike the palms of my spread hands forcibly together, and scream out a withering shriek of half-maddened delight—but soon came the remembrance of Comladeve—she was already carried far, far beyond my reach—but what was space? labor? time? 'I was free'—free! I cast my heavy turban from my head; I parted the waves with a powerful stroke, and I gained rapidly upon my mistress—Nearer! nearer! I grasped her mantle—I drew her forcibly towards me—her pale cheek touched my hand—my breath was in her hair—one more effort—one more—and I should hold her to my heart—I, who for long years had been *alone*—alone, upon the waste of waters—one more effort, and she would be mine. Allah—wonderful! my Comladeve—the blossom of my soul! I made it—I strove to beat back the mighty billow, but it overwhelmed me—a huge fragment of the wreck passed over us, and I lost my hold—Comladeve was gone—gone for ever!"

A wild shriek broke from the lips of the dervish, as he buried his head upon his knees, and cowered under the vision which his own distempered fancy had conjured up; while Adji Rezà, excited beyond all power of forbearance, sprang to his feet, and hurriedly whispered: "Oghour ola—Heaven speed you—but tell me, what more? what more?"

"Bana bak—look at me;" said the wretched man; "can you not read the characters that the foul fiend burnt into my brow when he fled howling before the fury of my despair? We met face to face—there—on the wild waves just subsiding after the tempest; we met, and struggled as demons only struggle; we wrestled together; but I shouted aloud the name of the Prophet; and as he cowered before me, he grasped my brain, and seared it with his fiery touch.

"After this I slept; ay, slept! I had dreams, too: dreams of sunshine, and birds and flowers, and cool green leaves, and gushing streams; and I wandered among them with Comladeve; but at length I awoke; awoke, to find myself stretched along the earth! The sea was near me, but the tide did not touch me where I lay; bright shells were scattered along the strand, and the morning sun was glittering gaily on the waters. I beat the earth with my hand, and the blood flowed from it; I rose to my feet; the dark rocks heaved under my weight, and I staggered and almost fell; *but I felt the earth!* I was once more like my fellow men, and I crawled along amid the high grass, and the painted flowers, till I found that which I sought; it was not the houri of paradise; it was not the rose-garden of Nishapor; it was a human being, a creature of my own kind; a holy man a santon of the desert. Mashallah! how I yelled forth my joy when I saw him leaning upon his staff; but he repulsed me with scorn and loathing—*he*, the first human being whom I approached for years—Lahnet be Sheitan—Curse on the devil! he struck me with his staff; spurned me with his foot, and turned away to tell his chaplet, while I fainted with famine.

"Khawaji, my soul is sick. A light has flickered to-day about my brain, which had been long put out. They say that I am holy, for I can pierce my side and my breast with sharp weapons, and torture my limbs with searing iron, and nipping bonds; they know not that the fire and the knife had done their work ere they folded the khirkheh of a dervish about me, and gave me a place in the Tekie. But all this nearly ended: the solid earth reels before my eyes, and the daylight grows dim and dusky, yet the film has passed from my soul: I have been called Ibn Sallah—the Son of Prayer. None knew the curses which had withered me for years! And to-day—now—come nearer to me, stranger though you be, to-day I *can* pray: the cry of my spirit is no longer vras, vras—kill, kill! but I say to you, Allah esmarladek—Allah take you into his holy keeping, for the bitterness of life is almost past."

"Allah buyûk der—Alla is great!" said Ildji Rezà; rouse yourself, and all will yet be well; but if you fold your feet upon the carpet of despair, Monker and Nakir will soon seat themselves upon its border, and the shadow of their dark wings will obscure your soul."

"The mountain of El Caf is high, and encloses the world," replied the dying man; "but it cannot shut out Asrael the Destroyer. The bridge of Al Sirat is steep, and narrow: the footing is but a hair's breadth, yet it must be trodden by every True Believer who would reach Paradise. I am content; I do not die the howling maniac that I have lately lived; I see my wretchedness, I feel my desolation; Khawaji, pass on, and leave me: Allah kerim—Allah is merciful! Your charity has reconciled me with my kind, and I shall go in peace."

"Nay, not so;" commenced Ildji Rezà, as a swift but stealthy step approached the tomb-house, and the bectachy passed the threshold; "chance has flung us together on the way-side of life, and I will not forsake you in your extremity: Min Allah—Heaven forbid!"

"Kim boo—who is that?" demanded the new-comer, hastily, as he stopped beside the son of Yezid. "Wallah! this is no time, Ildji Rezà, to play the nurse, when you should be under your father's roof, to answer to the voices of those who call you. Away then with the speed of the simorg* you are as yet unsuspected; delay, and Bashustun—on my head be it, if some babbling fool do not whisper somewhat of the tale ere noon."

Ildji Rezà glanced towards the dying dervish; nature had exhausted herself in the effort which he had made to retrace the troubled vision of the past; and life was ebbing fast. Man's care could avail no longer; and with a deep-breathed "Aghour ola—Heaven speed you;" he turned away, and prepared to quit the tomb.

"Allet ollah—much pleasure attend you:" smiled the bectachy; "but forget not, young man, that I cannot be ever upon your path with a strong grasp, and a skin of Cyprus wine. Be wary, therefore; and the Prophet be propitious to your prayers."

"And this poor sufferer?" said the son of Yezid, pointing towards the dying wretch, who had now flung himself along the cold pavement of the tomb: "you will not leave him in his misery?"

"Away—I will abide here while he needs me;" was the reply; "I shall not be long delayed."

And without further parley, Ildji Rezà walked forth into the clear calm air of morning, with the feeling of one who has awakened from a horrid dream.

* The roc.

The breath of the lemon trees was flooding the atmosphere with perfume, and the scented dews were dropping from the branches beneath which he passed. The incense, offered up by Nature to the Eternal, was ascending on all sides; and the glorious sun, the visible presence of the Deity, was calling into life all animate objects, gilding the leaves and the river-ripple, and shedding warmth, and brightness, and beauty over the whole creation.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

In the city all was already astir. The lowing of the camels, and the barking of the watch-dogs of the Meidan; the shouting of the slaves at the caravanserais, and the cry of the muezzin from the minaret of the Great Mosque; all proclaimed that the sun had risen; and many a pious Musselmaun was on his way towards the stately temple which was built by Heraclius, in honor of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, but which it is now death to any Christian to enter.

Ildji Rezà walked swiftly through the streets; and stepping over the two slaves who were yet lying sleeping in the outer hall of his father's house, hastened to his own apartment. When he had closed the door, and flung himself down upon the heaped-up cushions which his attendants had prepared for his repose, he began to review more leisurely the events of the past night; and eager as he was once more to sun himself in the eyes of the beautiful Delsaïsè, he could not conceal from his own reason that all future attempts to invade the garden pavilion must prove abortive as well as perilous, when the vigilance of the bey's household had been once aroused. Nor could he wholly divest himself of a feeling of extreme and anxious terror, as he remembered that suspicion might have attached itself to his fair and gentle mistress; and that although he had individually escaped the penalty of his rash adventure, it might be visited in tenfold severity upon her!

On—on—progressed thought; one dark memory linking itself to another, and forming a bitter chain of wretchedness. The Toorkoman—the steed—the mahàk—the deadly vow by which he was fettered—that vow from which there was no appeal, and no release—by which Delsaïsè would be sacrificed; and he himself die ten thousand deaths!

To look back upon the past was madness, and with the natural buoyancy of youth, he turned after a while to the future; and began to devise new stratagems, which were each discarded in turn as unfeasible, or likely to be unproductive of success, until he at length

esolved to trust to his felech; and after aving swallowed his coffee, to repair to the ammām, and take advantage of any good ortune or lucky chance that might betide im.

Having decided on this very simple mode f action, Ildji Rezà, after a short rest, rose om his couch, and having smoked a chibuque, hastened to the shop of the Armenian arber who was wont to operate upon the eads and chins of all the handsome youths Damascus.

"Khosh geldin, Effendim;" said the operor, as Ildji Rezà entered the spacious paved partment, surrounded by sofas, on which ere congregated, even at this early hour, alf a score of the gay young gallants of the ty. "You are welcome, my master: and e rather that I last night received a packet soap from Stamboul, and scented oils from myrna, which have not yet been rubbed upon e beard of any Effendi who frequents my op. And sooth to say, Khawaji, you have ed of them, for your chin is in a disarray hich would go nigh to ruin my reputation you were to walk through the teharchi unmbed, as you have entered here. There is ews, too, in the city—the harem of Kassim y has been attempted: some idle maskara karamouch) with better legs than wits, was en to leap the wall of the women's gardens: d such screeching and screaming have not en heard under that roof since it was raised; the Aga Baba himself told me, when he me in just at sun-rise, in order that I might pair the ravages of the nocturnal chase in hich he had been engaged—"

"And as usual," laughed out Latif Effendi, rowing forth a volume of smoke in which he as nearly enveloped: "the oldest and the liest of the women made the uproar, while t young ones ran to strive for a parting glimpse of the intruder."

"Hai, Hai—true, true—on my head be it:" d Ildji Rezà, forcing a mirth which he was from feeling. "What is written, is written: al the lovely are never the merciless. But o was the Delhibashi—the prince of madn—who attempted so rash an exploit?"

"Some say it was Ashref the Numidian lon-merchant, who had become enamored o he negress Gadilla, the dusky hand-maiden o hat queen-lily, the fair Delsaise, the Bey's oy child;" again broke in the waggish Latif; "but others affirm that it was none o er than our worthy host here, Apic Oglou, wo had dreamt a dream of the young Hanoum Effendi herself, while beating up the suds destined to lave the thick head of the Cadi; (may h beard prosper!) and who—"

"Me? Astefer allah! Me?" exclaimed the armed barber: "Heaven forbid! Is it for m to dream dreams of a Bey's daughter, and to put my neck into the bowstring? St. George, St. Nicholas, and St. Lawrence preserve me from such mad presumption!"

A peal of low chuckling laughter followed close on the barber's deprecatory exclamation; while, withdrawing his turban, Ildji Rezà seated himself, and ran his fingers complacently through his luxuriant and glossy beard.

"Guzel, pek guzel!" said the Armenian admiringly, as he also passed his hand over it; "handsome, very handsome! Bashustun—on my head be it, there are not half a dozen such beards as this in Damascus!"

"Say half a hundred, Apic, my friend, say half a hundred:" smiled Latif Effendi; "or you will lose your practice, seeing that we are all more or less touched by your decision! for myself I care not; I am beyond your malice—but Sarim the Bynbashi, Benezer the Saraf, and Mazzouk the Khoja of His Excellency Aslan Pasha, will one and all feel themselves aggrieved: as I hear that they have been wickedly called sakil-siz (no beards) by the idle boys of the city: and that they have not rejoiced in the name."

"Min Allah—Heaven forbid that I should anger the Effendis by a light word:" said the mild Armenian; "but even as the Yuzbashi (the captain of a hundred) loves to handle a good weapon, so do I joy to comb out a fine beard."

As the barber spoke, he threw around Ildji Rezà a fringed and embroidered napkin, and prepared his razors, by trying their temper on the palm of his hand; and while he was thus engaged, one of the itinerant perfume-merchants so common in the East, an old and withered woman, whose feeble steps were supported by a staff, stopped on the threshold, and invited the Effendis to examine her wares.

"No, no; see you not that their excellencies are engaged?" said the Armenian, motioning her away; "pass on; we need you not!"

"Sen ektiar der—you are the master;" replied the old crone quietly; "but surely these handsome gallants must want something to send to the young beauties whom they worship; and *you* will not spoil my market. I trust, Apic Oglou, you whom I have known for so many years, and to whom I have not been quite useless."

"Evallah—to be sure, to be sure;" hastily interposed the barber; "I owe you no ill-will, Satira; but to-day you will lose your time by loitering at my threshold."

"Satira!" exclaimed Ildji Rezà anxiously: "did you call her Satira! Is the worthy woman who has been thrice before the Cadi, and once bastinadoed, for introducing into the hidden chambers of the harem certain missives, where words of passion were inscribed with gold dust upon the leaves of roses? Is she—"

"It is myself, Effendimou, my master;" said the old woman, nodding her veiled head, and turning her dim eyes towards the inquirer,

as she advanced into the apartment, and deposited her essence-case on the lip of the marble fountain; "It is myself, khatoun, my darling: and, aged as I am I care neither for the Cadi nor the thong. What shall I show to the Beyzadeh? I have dyes, and soaps, and unguents; essences, and spices, and pastilles made of all the precious gums of Araby, and sparkling with gold-dust; I have calams for tracing gentle words; and all the love-ballads of Hafiz, written in characters of many colors. I have amulets, and charms, and spells: bouquets of spices and garlic, to preserve the young mother and her infant from the influence of the Evil Eye:* and—"

"Have you any charm to preserve us from the influence of the black and bright ones which flash upon us as we walk the bazär, from beneath the jealous yashmacs of our young beauties?" asked Latif: "for the Evil Eye, we of Damascus fear it not; and care not though—"

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly, Effendim;" broke in the old woman; "Allah bûyûk der—let us utter no words that we have not thrice turned in the palms of our hands, lest we wish to gather them up again when it is too late."

And a murmur of "Taib! taib!—well said, well said;" from the groups around the apartment, bore testimony that the feeling of defiance towards the Evil Eye was not so common in the good city of Damascus, as Latif Effendi, in his lightness of spirit, would fain have had it believed.

"But you ask if I have spells against bright eyes, Effendimou? Min Allah—Heaven forbid. How should I vend my wares, and to whom, if the peris of paradise were to fold their wings, and wither into afrits? And how should I pass away my hours, were it not that I always carry home the merchandise that I sell, and deliver with the gift the 'Oghour ola—the Allah speed you,' of the giver?"

"Mashallah! she speaks well;" laughed her listeners.

"And who see I there, on the sofa beyond?" suddenly exclaimed the crone. "Can it really be my lord Aboudahab himself, the light of my eyes, and the hope of my soul! Na to ne—there it is—I sought you all yesterday, again, and found you not; and to-day, when I looked no longer, thinking that my lord had left the city, I encounter you here, and may do mine errand."

"And what errand can Satira, the discreet perfume-merchant, have with the staid and pious Aboudahab?" shouted one of the young men. "Speak, Effendim, what can be the business of this veiled houri with you?"

"Allah hilir—Allah alone knows;" said the handsome young Yuzbashi of the pasha's guard, who had been thus unceremoniously addressed; endeavoring, as he spoke, to assume an expression of unconcern, which, however, sat but awkwardly upon him. "Have you yet to learn that she is the mother of lies, and that she is as likely to hatch one for me as for any other of this goodly company? Mashallah, the wonder is neither a plague nor an earthquake."

"Bakalum—we shall see;" was the laughing rejoinder. "Say your errand boldly, Satira, my soul, for you find that the brave captain defies you."

"Yok, yok—no, no:" persisted the old woman. "The Yuzbashi jests, for he has more discretion than to make the brow of a pretty hanoum wear the tint of the Prophet's banner. Bak, Effendim—see, sir;" she pursued, taking from her girdle a delicate roll of parchment, fastened with a lock of silky hair; "does this deserve no better welcome from the Yuzbashi Aboudahab than foul words, and the shame that is worse than words? Amän—mercy! but I looked for other coin when I ran the risk of the lash, to convey this written violet to his own hands."

"Peace, peace, Satira, jaquir benum—my guardian angel;" exclaimed the young soldier, forgetting his confusion in his eagerness to obtain possession of the billet doux; and drawing forth at the same time his embroidered purse; "I will ransom the prize bravely: would that I could pay every word with a piece of gold, I should not grudge the price!"

And regardless of the merriment around him, the delighted lover thrust a handful of silver coins into the ready palm of the old crone; and hastened to detach the bright tress which bound up the scroll.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

Ildji Reza had been no inattentive spectator of the scene; and when the decrepid messenger of love had transferred the money with a low chuckling laugh to the bag which she carried in her girdle, he disengaged himself from the hands of the Armenian, and proceeded to pour upon his beard the contents of one of the essence-bottles.

"Alhemdullilah—praises be to the Prophet!" muttered Satira, as she marked the reckless profusion of the son of Yezid: "what can he have to ask of me! ekhi kateti—there is something—What a Beyzadeh is this, who empties at one effort as much perfume as he must pay with a broad piece of gold! I shall have to run my old neck into the bowstring for this!"

* It is a common custom in Turkey to send these bouquets as presents to the mothers of new-born infants, who have the most perfect faith in their efficacy.

Chen. affecting not to remark his occupa-, she turned towards one of the groups, demanded: "What can I do for your exeencies? I have charms for all evils—beng hashish* for the sleepless, perfumes for luxurious, and enamelled boudakas† for Harem. Ne apalum—what can I do?"

"You may give *me* some beng, kizem, my aughter;" said Mansoor Aga, the dull-witted ra of the pashalik, as he flung down a iece of money: "'tis the best charm that I now against all the ills of life—better even an the sherbet of the Franks, for it leaves headache behind it."

"Attar-gul for me, mother," said Latif ffendi: "unless, indeed, you have another ve-me-sive to dispose of, and then I am willg to become a purchaser; though, for a restless of Emiran,‡ methinks you are somehat dull in your office."

"Ay, ay, love tokens are the raz kallah—e daily bread, of you gay young Effendis: ou never weary of them. But is it the handme son of Beamrillah, the jeweller, who asks e for such ware? Ai, ai, there is no truth ft within the barrier of El Caf!"

"Wallah! it is well said:" exclaimed the ldji Rezà, as he took up a packet of the pow-er of the sweet-scented violet, and a small ox of the paste of the white lily, a delicate d costly preparation for the hands; "and ow, count up my debt, good mother, and let e cancel it."

"Allah moutèyemmin èilèyè agam—Allah ant that it be of omen to you, my lord;" said e old woman, "for it will cost you some coin. è hey?—what is this? a whole bottle of esnce, of which every drop is worth—"

"Listen, mother;" said Ildji Rezà in a low oice; "I am not yet content with my purhase. I covet all your wares; but I will not urchase them here. Meet me an hour hence the great cemetery; and meanwhile here is hat will supply you with a pillauf at your id-day meal:" and he flung into her basket large gold coin, which she greedily secured.

"Said my lord one hour hence?"

"I did."

"Pek ahi—it is well. I will be there."

This short dialogue did not pass unobserved; and the jests were numerous with which ldji Rezà had to contend ere he quitted the having room of the Armenian barber. But is heart was too deeply engaged for him to eed them; and a gibe was yet upon the lips f the incorrigible Latif when he took leave of he laughing company, and bent his way towards the cemetery of the city.

There, among the tall cypresses, seated upn a grave, and leaning against the turbanrested headstone, he found the old woman lready awaiting him. Her basket and essence-case were beside her, and she was quietly smoking her chibouque; which, however, as soon as he approached, she hastily put away, in order to rearrange her yashmee.

"What is written, is written:" she said as he stopped beside her. "It requires no calam to inscribe the truth on the surface of my understanding—Son of Yezid, you are in love; and you want me to peril life and limb in your cause."

"Min Allah—Heaven forbid! I have not such desperate visions:" exclaimed the young man gaily. "You, Satira, khatoun, have trodden the harem-floor too often with a feather from the bulbul's throat in your keeping, to run much risk of mischief in obliging me. You have been young in your time, mother, and perhaps beautiful; and now—"

"And what now?" hastily broke in the aged woman; "now, you would tell me that I am old, and wrinkled, and palsied; and that such as I am are not numbered among the houri—I know it—I know it—I require no assurance that I am changed from the days when a smile from my lip made the crown of the loved one's head touch the cupola of heaven. Son of Yezid, were it not so, I should not be here and thus. Then the gold of Sumatra was on my neck, and the diamonds of the farthest East upon my brow—the cachemires of Thibet bound a waist as slender as the cypress: and the silks of Bithuania were folded about a form as graceful as that of the simorg—veils of muslin, as fine as the gossamer that flits across the setting sun, shielded my face from the beam that would have marred its beauty—a face that looked like the moon at its full, in the season when the vines are leafless, and the stars hold their place about her silver throne, almost as radiant as herself—now, my yashmee is coarse and heavy, the gold and the gems have passed away: I smile, but it is in bitterness, for no fond eye hangs upon my looks: and I fold my cloak about as lone a heart as any in Damascus. Needed there words, then, Effendim, from the gay and the handsome like yourself, to remind me of the change?"

"Nay, nay, you mistook me!" interposed Ildji Rezà, as the bitter smile passed from the lips of his companion. "I would have said that none better than yourself could feel and act for me. Let us waste no more words; I love Delaïsè Hanoum, the daughter of Kassim Bey——"

"Love who?" exclaimed the essence-merchant. "Bè hèy—What's this? Would none other do for the son of Yezid the merchant than the only child of the fierce Kassim Bey? Think, think, Effendim; you are too young and too gallant to offer your neck to the bow-string; I will dip my hand in no pillauf like this; Allah billir—Allah alone knows how it may end."

* Narcotics. † Pipe-bowls. ‡ Hymen.

"Have you then never heard that she was offered to me in marriage, and that I refused to bring a wife into my harem? You look surprised, mother, but I tell you the truth. It matters not wherefore, but I have changed my humor, and now I would make her love me ere she enters the house of my father, that she may forget my past coldness."

"It will be no heavy task," said the old woman, as she gazed admiringly on the handsome youth; "you have but to gallop past her window, or to saunter beneath it, or, in short, to show yourself by any means in your power, and your object will be accomplished."

"I would do more," said Ildji Rezà. "I cannot be content with the mere eye-worship, that may be won by every handsome eamal in the city; I would penetrate into the harem, and look upon her, and commune with her, and pour out my soul in passionate words, which should fall gently on her ear, as the leaves of the gumcistus on the earth at twilight."

"And what furtherance seek you from me in this wild scheme?" asked the old woman.

"The loan of a disguise. Your cloak, your veil, and your essence-box. Go to the bazàr, mother, and purchase for me toys and gauds such as may fix the eye of a young beauty; teach me the quivering tone, the unsteady step, and the cant and craft of your calling—nay, no denial; I will pay you back in gold enough to enable you to smoke the chibouque of your age in peace."

"But should my share in this mad attempt be discovered——"

"Korkma—fear not," said Ildji Rezà. "I will peril neither your neck nor my own beard. What is written, is written. I have resolved on this venture, and I will not be turned from my purpose."

"Allah buyùk der!" apostrophized the essence-merchant; "the hair grows fast upon young heads, and some one must play the barber! I am ready, Effendim. I will trust both to your prudence and your generosity. And now give me gold, that I may hasten to the bazàr to my friend Mazzouk, the honestest merchant who ever dropped attar-gul into an ivory-box; for I will trade for you, Agam, as for myself. Deovletin istial—may your prosperity increase!" she added, as Ildji Rezà placed a well-filled purse in her ready hand: "I always love to trade with such as you; the women, ay, even the youngest, the handsomest, and the wealthiest, will cavil with me for a dinàr, and blacken my face to obtain a bargain; while the gallants of the city are as ready with their gold as with their jests. To-morrow, then, Effendim, I will return and bring to you on this very spot all that you have asked of me."

"It is well; farewell then till to-morrow;" said the young man, as he turned away.

"Delhibashi—Prince of madmen!" muttered the old woman, while she followed him with her eyes. "He shall pay me all, *all* ere he risks the venture; for, if Sheitan does not aid him, he will not escape in a whole skin from Kassim Bey."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

SLOWLY, and absorbed in thought, Ildji Rezà quitted the cemetery, and turned his steps towards his father's house. The tapestry door of the merchant's chamber was held aside by a slave, for Yezid was about to pass out; and the young man met him on the threshold at a moment when he would gladly have avoided all notice. But this was not to be; for, when a greeting had passed between them, Ildji Rezà found himself invited by a grave and silent gesture to follow the khawaji back into the apartment whence he had but a moment before been about to depart; and, as he entered, a feeling of impatient irritation grew upon him, on perceiving upon the sofa of Yezid a couple of carefully folded parcels covered by finely-wrought bokshas or handkerchiefs, such as are only wrapped about the most valuable merchandise.

"Wallah billah—by the Prophet!" muttered the young man beneath his breath "here has my unhappy feleeh led me into a discussion on the relative value of muslins and tissues, when I would have shut myself into my own chamber to arrange my plans for to-morrow. But patience, Ildji Rezà, thou must fulfil thy destiny."

The philosophy of the son of Yezid seemed indeed about to be put to the test; for the door of the apartment was scarcely closed behind them, and the merchant had barely reached the centre of the floor, when he pointed to the packages on the sofa, and asked in a tone of bitterness and wounded pride: "Ildji Rezà, do you see those bokshas?"

"I do."

"Can you guess what they contain?"

"Perhaps muslins from Hindostan; perhaps silks from Broussa; or, it may be, jewels from—"

"They contain all of these;" interposed Yezid hastily: "and each the most costly of its kind—and yet—listen to me, Ildji Rezà—I swear that they are more loathsome in my sight than if they were the discarded rags of some filthy Jew. They were the bridal gift of the son of Yezid to the daughter of Kassim Bey—from the relenting lover to the neglected mistress—and you see how they have sped. The profligate heir of the poor Khawaji is no longer a fitting suitor for the only child of the

haughty bey. You have played the fool so well, Ildji Rezà, that you have transferred the motley to me, and I shall be pointed at as I walk the city streets."

"Now, by the soul of the prophet!" burst forth the young man.

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly:" said the merchant in the calm accent of concentrated passion; "anger is unavailing, and hot words were made for women. We are no longer held worthy to dip our spoon into the same tchorba (soup) with a noble—we have put our beards into his hand, and we have no right to complain that he has plucked them out. You now know all, Ildji Rezà, and must henceforward be content to seek a wife among the merchants of the city."

As Yezid ceased speaking, he clapped his hands, and a slave reappeared on the threshold with his slippers. Ildji Rezà was aware that the outward show of calmness which his father had maintained during their brief interview, was as deceitful as the stillness of a volcano ere the lava flood bursts forth; and he did not dare to detain him: while a rush of conflicting feelings rooted him for a time to the spot, and kept him motionless.

All was then over, as regarded his recognized marriage with the beautiful Delsaïsè. Should he win her by stratagem, he must fly with her to another land—and it might even be—and in that thought there was madness! that she had been accessory to his insulting dismissal—the novelty of his affection had worn away—the mystery of his love was about to be terminated by a marriage sanctioned by her father, and her woman-fancy, thwarted in its full flow, had degenerated into disappointed indifference. But, no, no; this could not, *could* not be! He remembered a thousand whispered words which had pledged her to him in every change of fortune; and he would not believe that her pride could play the traitor to her peace.

He would trust to her affection—he *must* trust to it, not only his happiness, but his life, or she was lost to him for ever: for he felt assured that his disguise, carefully as it might be adjusted, would soon fail to insure his safety beneath the eyes of suspicion and inquiry.

But what cared Ildji Reza for the risk? What was life to him, if its best principle were wanting? He was content to abide his fate; and, for a while, he abandoned himself to happy dreams of the sweet existence, which far, far from Damascus, and from the frown of a proud father, he would lead with Delsaïsè—with the loved one, whom he would rescue from her cheerless thraldom to be the wife of his bosom, and the idol of his heart—but suddenly a dark shadow crossed the mirror of his mind—he remembered the Toorkoman, and all was again despair and remorse!

Thus did Ildji Rezà pass the night: sometimes wrapped in visions which could have been realized only in the paradise of Mahomet; and at others sunk in unavailing regret, and trembling apprehension. But the morrow came at length: and the young man, rousing himself by a violent effort, prepared to keep his adventurous appointment with the essence-merchant.

When he reached the spot where he had left Satira on the previous day, he found her already at her post; but, as he approached, she moved silently on until she stood amid a cluster of thickly-planted trees, and beside a tomb of unusual size; here she paused, and drawing from beneath her cloak a parcel of considerable bulk, she flung it at the feet of Ildji Rezà.

"You are obeyed, my son:" she said, as she deposited her essence-box on the ground beside her: "and fear not, for though the garments be coarse and worn, they came not from the quarter where the khanzyr (hogs) of Jews nurse the plague that it may scatter the True Believers before its loathsome breath. It is true that I have paid a heavier sum for them, than if I had purchased them of the dogs of Infidels: but I preferred the pillauf of safety to the pomegranate of gold, and heeded not the price. Bak agam—look, my lord:" she continued, as she unfolded the squalid raiment in which the hitherto fastidious Ildji Rezà was about, although not without a disgustful shudder, to envelope himself. "Here are an antery and schalwar which the Effendi, who sold them to me, valued at two purses, though, at length, by dint of cavil, I paid for them both with one—and here is a feridjhe (mantle) of green cloth—you will be for a time descended from our holy Prophet—see that your deeds do no dishonor to the alliance—it is somewhat short for you, of a truth; but these capital boots of yellow morocco (scarcely soiled, by the way, save that they have been slightly discolored by the mud of the city streets) will render that inconvenience of little account. And now, seat yourself, that I may arrange your yashmac; the muslin is rent in places, and it will require some skill to fold it to the best advantage. Pek ahi—very well!" she said exultingly, as she concealed the handsome face of the son of Yezid beneath the tattered veil of coarse white muslin; "But you must remember that your eyes are visible, and that no old merchant-pedler suffers her glances to go roving far and wide, as yours are wont to do; drop your eyelids heavily over them, or you will be betrayed ere the Aga Baba has accepted your bribe, and suffered you to pass into the harem. Bear in mind too, that your feridjhe is something of the shortest; lean, therefore, upon your staff, and bend your knees; sink your head between your shoulders, and give a curve to your back; the years

which can be flung off at will, may be allowed to press hard for a few hours.

Ildji Rezà listened in silence, for his heart was too full for idle colloquy; and when he was fairly invested with his new character, and that his own garments were folded and delivered to the safe keeping of his garrulous companion, he flung to her a purse, which she deemed it expedient to secure without comment, and lifting the essence-box from the earth, and seizing the staff which she held towards him, he took leave of the old woman; and while she seated herself on the tomb, and prepared to recruit her exhausted energies with a chibouque, he quietly passed out of the cemetery.

Not an eye turned on him in inquiry as he traversed the city streets; his disguise and his caution were alike perfect; and he had gained a considerable portion of self-confidence when he at length paused at the harem-door of Kassim Bey.

Well did he know that on the result of the next few hours depended his future welfare—that on the sounding of this particular chord on the mysterious instrument of fate, hung the harmony or discord of his after-life: and he resolved to meet it manfully.

Two sharp strokes with the head of his staff brought a negro slave to the threshold, who, holding the door carefully in his hand, uttered a quick and angry inquiry as to the identity of the stranger.

"It is me, janum—my soul; it is me;" replied the impostor boldly; "surely you have not forgotten me so soon, Effendim, in the fumes of my own gebeli—Bana bak—look at me, I am Satira the essence-merchant; with a fresh cargo of perfumes for the fair Hanoums of the bey's harem, and a stock of the finest Saloriea tobacco for my own friends. Open the door, agam, open the door, and let me pass in, for I am weary."

"You must rest awhile in the hall, mother, until I summon the Aga Baba;" said the slave. "I am but newly arrived and you are a stranger to me. You can unpack the tobacco while you wait."

"Taib—well said:" retorted the visiter: "it is gebeli for a pasha, and you shall taste of the best—and for my lord the Aga Baba (may his power increase!) is not my life and all that I have at his command? for has he not ever turned the light of his countenance upon me, and brightened my soul?"

The concluding portion of this rhapsody was uttered with great emphasis, for the wily Ildji Rezà had remarked the stealthy entrance of the hideous Numidian at the lower end of the hall, whence he was listening to the conversation.

"The wife of Aslan Pasha has quarrelled with the chief of her harem-guard;" pursued the speaker, affecting to lay bare his merchandise to the admiration of the slave by whom he had been admitted: "and she swore to m by the soul of the Prophet, that if her husban loved her, her enemy should never pass an other Bairam in the palace of the pashalik where his duties are light, and his gain heavy; and she is one who will keep he word. 'But where shall we find another t supply his place in Damascus?' she asked 'one worthy to watch over the heaven gifte beauties of Aslan Pasha's harem?' 'Fea not, fairest of the daughters of Peristan:' an swered I boldly; 'the prince of Aga Baba the most renowned of negroes, is within th reach of your excellency's summons—the in imitable Kafoor Effendi, the trusted friend c Kassim Bey—'"

"Kim boo—who is that?" growled a hoars voice, sounding like the roar of a bear fro amid the underwood of a forest, as the redoubt able Kafoor himself came forward, attemptin to appear unconscious of the compliment which had just been lavished on him. "Wh is that? and what does she here?"

Ere Ildji Rezà could frame a reply, th Aga Baba had waddled across the hall, an stood beside him; he was of immense siz and height; his head was disproportionabl large, and flattened as though it had in h youth supported some overpowering weight his eyes were large and bloodshot, and ove hung by long and shaggy brows which m across his broad and bridgeless nose; h nether lip hung low upon his chin; and th belt which supported his scimitar was buri between two ridges of fat which girdled hi with obesity.

But Ildji Rezà wasted no time on the e ternal qualities of the Aga Baba; as, makin a low and respectful obeisance, he besoug that his favor might overshadow him, and h smile bring him happiness.

"Have I done ill, my lord;" he asked "that before I subjected my wares to the ey and fingers of half the city, I have broug them here to pleasure you with their novelty Has the chibouque of sweet savour ceased please? or may I hope again to supply th boudaka of the far-famed Kafoor Effendi fro this fresh bag of the fragrant gebeli of Sal nica? Have I angered my lord, or will h condescend to mix his sherbet from these d licate cakes of preserved sugar? Or to d his fingers into this jar of tchalva, or his ha into this dish of kubeh?"* and the son Yezid, moving between the Aga Baba and t attendant slave, so as quite to impede t view of the latter, extended towards the N midian a china saucer, where, in the midst the dainties he had mentioned, lay a purse gold coins which were distinctly visit through the transparent muslin that contain them.

* Baked force-meat, wrapped in vine-leaves.

"And why not?" again growled the worthy guardian of Kassim Bey's harem, as he clutched with the same grasp the purse and the kubeh. "Is it because our own cooks are crafty, that there should be none other such in Damascus? Min Allah—Allah forbid! the food is good, mother, and well flavored; and if you desire to dispose of your wares to the ladies of the bey, I will myself conduct you to the harem."

Ildji Rezā's breath came quick, for although his errand appeared to speed well, there was a keen malicious expression in the large unsightly eye of the Numidian which made his pulses quiver, and redoubled his caution.

"It is strange that I have forgotten your name, mother:" followed up the formidable Aga Baba, with still increasing scrutiny of look and manner; "for it would seem that you and I should be well acquainted."

"My lord surely jests with his slave;" said Ildji Rezā hurriedly: "for how should such as he remember poor Satira the essence-merchant, save by the excess of his condescension?"

Hai, hai—true, true;" was the reply; as a low chuckling laugh escaped the functionary. "I should have remembered you, for I saw you bastinadoed in the bazār by the wali's officer for carrying love-tokens into the harem of Nazif the Jeweller—Bashustun—on my head be it! but then the cow's thong did its office generously that day, mother."

"And did my lord believe that I was guilty?" asked Ildji Rezā deprecatingly, as he slipped another purse into the palm of the Aga Baba; "could my lord think that I was such a castaway?"

"Nay, nay; I said not that you had done the deed;" was the quick reply, as the hand of the Numidian was hastily plunged amid the folds of his girdle, and then drawn back empty! "That was the wali's affair, not mine—but we waste time: and truly I am not sorry to see you here, mother; for the lady Delsaisè, who has done nothing but weep for the last two days, may perhaps find amusement for a few moments in wasting the bey's money on your toys and trumpery."

Little did the Numidian imagine the effect of his words upon the eager and impatient listener. Delsaisè wept then! and he alone could dry her tears, for it was for him that they were shed. He would have rushed to her presence, have flung himself at her feet, and have poured out his transport like a lava-flood before her; but again the harsh voice of the Aga Baba fell upon his ear, and he felt the necessity of caution.

"You spoke of the harem of the pasha, mother; and of some misunderstanding which had arisen between the chief of the guard and his fair mistress the Buyûk Hanoum—Are you sure of the fact?"

"As sure as that there are stars in heaven during a summer night. Did not the beautiful Gulzara, the rose-garden of delight, tell me the tale with her own coral-tinted lips? And did I not in return—"

"Enough, enough, good mother. I know the rest: but think you that you have influence to procure the post for me? If you can do it, you shall pass to and fro unquestioned, ay, even although you were the high priestess of Anirān herself. I desire to serve the pasha: he is indolent and generous; and so long as he can fold his feet upon the carpet of quiet cares not who counts out the piastres of profit."

"My lord says well, and my face is blackened before his wisdom;" replied Ildji Rezā: "so sure as I am an essence-merchant, shall Kafoor Effendi, if such be his pleasure, become the guardian of the bey's harem."

"You will swear this?"

"And why not?"

"You will swear it by your father's beard?"

"I will."

"Enough—we will talk further of this presently! but you must not breathe a syllable of the compact under this roof."

"I shall be as silent as the dead; Evallah! I have long learned when to be mute, and when to trust myself with words."

"You are discreet and wise;" said this pink of Aga Babas, as he preceded the impostor to the principal apartment of the harem. "Allah buyûk der—Allah is great, Fortune is not always overtaken by the swift; some men gather her up under the roofs of their own dwellings, while others wander the streets, and find nothing."

"Ajaib!—wonderful!" ejaculated Ildji Reza, as if in amazement at the wisdom of his companion.

"Wherefore," continued the Numidian with increased sententiousness: "look not for inordinate and exceeding profit in the vending of your wares: rapaciousness is unseemly: the Prophet favors the right-minded, and the just are always the happy."

The son of Yezid listened, half wondering and half amused, to this tirade from the lips of an individual who had just received a bribe to betray his trust; but chancing to glance around, he discovered that they were watched by a young slave, bound on some errand in the harem; and he at once understood the plot of the comedy.

"Hamiah Delsaisè Hanoum—Where is the lady Delsaisè?" inquired the Aga Baba, affecting suddenly to perceive the maiden. "Here is Satira the essence-merchant, who would fain tempt her with toys and perfumes!"

"Aferin—well done!" was the reply, "you are well met, mother: for we have scarce a pastille left in the palace; and the wife of Timsah the mir akhor (head-groom) is the mother of a fine boy, and we have no spell against the Evil Eye to offer her."

"Leave it all to me, kizem—my daughter;" returned Ildji Rezà, dreading lest the bright-eyed damsel should detain him; "leave it all to me; prettier trinkets, choicer scents, or stronger spells I have never vended than those in my present stock."

As he spoke, the Aga Baba put aside the fringed and embroidered screen which veiled the door of an apartment at the extremity of the inner hall or saloon in which they stood; and, with a lowly prostration, Ildji Rezà paused at the threshold.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

THE low cushioned divan which stretched along three sides of the spacious room was of crimson velvet flowered with gold, and from the seat to the floor a rich fringe of the same costly material fell glittering in the light. The apartment was covered with a bright-colored Persian carpet; gilt cages, containing gaily plumed birds, were hung against the walls, and instruments of music were scattered about in every direction.

On one corner of the sofa sat the beautiful Delsaïse; she was as pale as a lotus under the moonbeams; and about her waist she wore the gorgeous scarf which had been the love-gift of Ildji Rezà. A cluster of tube-roses lay near her, but she appeared to have flung them aside in weariness of spirit. At her feet reclined the faithful Ziba, seeming scarcely less sorrowful than herself; and a pang smote on the heart of Ildji Rezà as he remarked the air of languid indifference with which his lovely mistress turned to note the entrance of the stranger; ever an event of interest in a Turkish harem.

"Here is a visiter, Effendim;" said the Aga Baba: "Satira the peddler, who is come to ease you of your gold, should your humor serve."

"She is welcome;" was the unmoved reply.

"May your days be many, and your beauty never decrease;" commenced the impostor in a less assured tone than he had yet spoken, for the spell of her loveliness was on him; "deovletin istiat—may you increase in prosperity; and may every wind waft to your brow the tint of the lily, and the breath of the violet."

The lady started as the voice met her ear, for, disguised though it was, it awoke an echo in her bosom, and a bright blush mantled upon her cheek, as she bent forward to listen more freely.

"Are you pensive, queen of the peris? I have love-ballads wrought in threads of pure gold, on muslins fine enough to float upon the summer wind. Are you sick? I have perfumes which would recall the fainting spi about to escape the boundary of El Caf. Ha you been smitten by the Evil Eye—thou that can scarcely be, when your cheek is beauty, and your brow all light—I ha charms, and spells, and amulets to overco the visitation."

"Give me those! give me those!" exclai ed the fair girl eagerly. "My heart is sa and I would fain find a spell by which it m be lightened."

"Heaven grant that it be of good omen you!" said the disguised merchant, as he a vanced to the sofa, and spread his wares up the carpet. "For the Evil Eye, spices, s garlic, and beads, and crescents of bone av much when properly prepared; but for a hea heart there are other spells more simple, su as withered flowers, gathered when the sun joy had opened wide their petals, and preserv where no eyed could see them fade. I Effendim—See, lady;" and Ildji Rezà h towards her a spray of withered jasmine, bou about with a long lock of jetty hair.

"La illaha illallah—there is but one Allal murmured the beautiful daughter of the b as she recognized her own offering to I Rezà: and at once, with the natural penet tion of woman, felt assured of his sec "But how, good mother, can these fa blossoms lessen my grief?"

"By teaching you, sultana, that all is t dark when a cloud comes upon the sky: t when it is night in one land, the sun is shin in another; and that when the gloom is most dense, the brightness is oft times t hand."

The lady Delsaïsè hung eagerly upon s words; and even Ziba was roused by a stra suspicion; while the Aga Baba—lost in dre of ambition, and ruling in idea the harem Aslan Pasha with a rod of iron—forcing women to buy his forbearance with brib and wringing from the wretches who sou the favor and protection of the satrap and s satellites, even to their last dinar—the Aga Baba was altogether unconscious of the dan to which his cupidity had afforded such fa ties.

"Nay, you need not retain the charm continued the son of Yezid, as, after gaz earnestly at the faded flowers, the agitat girl was about to deposit them on the cush beside her. "You need only press them f a moment to your lips, and the spell will e complete."

Delsaïsè obeyed, and the withered jasmi was then restored to its owner, who recei it with as much fervor as though it had b a relic from the Prophet's tomb.

"Here is another and a more powe ful charm;" continued Ildji Rezà emphatica "but it can only be wrought at midnight, b side a fountain, and under the shadow of ll

and leafy trees." And he fixed his eyes earnestly on the maiden, to learn if she had read his meaning.

"Pek ahi, dostoum—very well, my friend;" she replied with as much composure as she could assume: "but may I not bring a companion with me?"

"Not one:" said Ildji Rezà decisively. "You must sit beside the fountain with your face turned Mecca-ward, just where the shadows of the boughs are deepest: and dip this mirror three times into the pure water. At the third immersion loosen your hold, and your griefs will sink to the bottom of the basin with the anali: then cast over yourself a dark colored cloak, and remain an hour motionless. Do this, and when next I bask beneath the glory of your smile, it will be as bright as daybreak in the East."

The fair Delsaïsè extended her hand to receive the prize, and, as he resigned it, the son of Yezid pointed to the framework in which it was set; and the delighted girl saw that it was written entirely over in a small and distinct character. Hastily laying it aside, she busied herself among the toys and perfumes; and having selected a few of the most costly, she flung a purse of gold into the box, for the eye of the Aga Baba chanced to be upon her; and bade Ziba carry them to her mother, while she selected a few trifles to distribute among her attendants.

Many a covert hint, and many a passionate pledge veiled in metaphor, passed between the happy lovers, ere Ildji Rezà obeyed the mandate of the Aga Baba, and prepared to quit the harem. He arranged his merchandise with a care which rendered the ceremony most wearisome to the Numidian; and, had it not been that the worthy functionary was yet expecting an offering of tobacco from the pedler, the son of Yezid would assuredly have been ejected with more speed than courtesy. All was, however, at length replaced: the cases were closed, the bokshas folded, and having pressed the hem of the lady's garment to his lips, Ildji Rezà found himself compelled to depart.

But the magic mirror was in her hands—his image was yet in her heart—that very night, if she listened to his prayer, they would meet to part no more—to fly together—to be happy! Ildji Rezà scarcely felt the earth on which he trod—his spirit floated in the pure akash—he was an altered man; and he had stolen to the squalid hovel of Satira, and cast beside the rags in which he had been disguised, ere one memory of the Toorkoman and his own rash oath had marred the brightness of his visions.

When he reached his father's house, he paid no visit to the harem, for he knew that the proud spirit of his mother must be stricken to the earth by the indignity which had been offered to her only and idolized son; but, passing quietly to his own apartment, he closed the door against all intruders, and spent the hours which must intervene until midnight, in endeavoring to picture to himself the result of his appeal to the bey's daughter. Much did he trust to the love she bore him; but alas! as Ildji Reza, in solitude, contemplated the extent of the sacrifice which, in their coming interview, he was about to require of her, he found himself less at ease, and by no means so confident of success as he had been when he first formed the project.

He had asked her to fly with him: to abandon her father's roof, to forego her mother's affection, and to quit her birth-place with all its associations of love and luxury, to share the fortunes of a wanderer, who must carve out his destiny in a distant land and among strangers, with the edge of his weapon: and Ildji Rezà quailed, even in his solitude, when he remembered that this was not all! That, before he could secure to her the mere doubtful benefit of such an existence, a still more terrible trial awaited her! But should he tamely suffer her to incur it? She, in whom he had learned to garner up his soul—whose love was his life, whose presence made his paradise? Never! never! He would leave a heavy sum in the hands of the beetachy, to satisfy the Arab dealer for his accursed horse, and on that very animal would he bear away his bride. The thought delighted him; and he hurriedly counted out a heap of gold, and secured it in a sealed bag, which he superscribed with the name of Ali the Toorkoman: and as soon as the twilight fell, he hastened with it to the tomb where he had on the previous night been secreted by the dervish.

All was silent: and as no voice replied to his cautious whisper, he entered, and groping his way to the spot whence the beetachy had taken the cypress wine, he removed the stone, and deposited the gold beside the almost exhausted liquid: and this done, he left the building with a lighter heart than he had known since his compact with the Toorkoman.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ARAB STEED—CONTINUED.

Scarcely had the Aga Baba quitted the room with the son of Yezid, to secure his portion of the spoil yet to be obtained from the supposed pedler, in the shape of tobacco and sweetmeats; than the fair Delsaïsè, bending over her faithful Ziba, murmured, in a low happy voice, the name of Ildji Rezà.

"What of him Effendimou—my mistress?" she asked; "Mashallah! can it be that my

wild suspicion was indeed true? Has he really desecrated the harem of Kassim Bey by his presence!"

"Not so, not so;" smiled the fond girl, trembling with excitement and delight. "Say, rather, can it be that he has risked his life to gladden the wretched Delsaïsè with the assurance of a love that can survive even insult? Yes, Ziba, yes; it was indeed the son of Yezid who knelt beside me but a moment back—who made the sunbeams of joy penetrate through the latticcs of my bosom—who has raised me from the depths of wretchedness to a bliss worthy of the houris! Guzum —my eyes! the light of my being! Janum —my soul! my sultan! and my lord! Nor am I even yet desolate, although the day-beam has departed, for I have still this precious anali, which shall be to me as a companion until we again meet!"

And flinging herself back among her cushions like one who brooked no further converse; heedless of the piteous "Eh vah! eh vah!—Mercy on us!" of the terrified and conscience-stricken Ziba, the young beauty commenced the perusal of Ildji Rezâ's communication on the frame-work of the hand-mirror.

As she read, her breath came quick, and her cheek crimsoned—to fly with him from her home, without the solace of a mother's parting kiss, and it might be, pursued by a father's curse; it was a fearful prospect! But to fly with him whom she loved—to be his for ever while life warmed her pulses—to see him, hear him, and to devote to him the best energies of her heart—to know that for her, and for her love, he had thus become an exile and a wanderer—there was solace for all her suffering in the thought: and she had many hours yet left to her in which to decide; while she should at least see him once more that very night where they had first met, and hear from his own lips all that he had to urge in favor of a project to which her trusting woman-heart already inclined.

The mirror had wrought its spell; and when the fond girl had pressed again and again to her lips the precious characters which had been inscribed upon it, she plunged it into a vessel of rose-water which stood beside her, and smiled as she saw the writing fade beneath the moisture. And then, how she sighed for the twilight! and when the twilight fell, how earnestly she prayed for the night! The calm, soft, perfume-laden night, with its myriad stars, and its fading moon, on which she guessed not that her young fate was hinged!

And the midnight came at length, and soon the harem of the bey was hushed in sleep. The cheek of beauty rested on the embroidered cushions of luxury—the music of the zebec, and the voices of the singing women were at rest; the soul, freed from the heavy prison of the flesh, in which by day it was pent up, stood in all its splendor on the threshold of the spirit-land; and Fancy, unlocking with a jewelled key the golden barrier of the city of dreams, let loose a troop of iris-habited visions which danced lightly through the realms of slumber; and cheated many a doomed and stricken wretch into a temporary glory that lent new bitterness to his waking.

Midnight! In which prowl forth the outcast sinner, and the beast of prey, the terror of the city and of the forest: the felon, yet unwhipped of justice, whose deeds shun the light; and the wretched, to whom that light is loathsome. But one kept vigil at that still hour who was none of these: one to whom life had hitherto offered more of sunshine than of shade; none of whose thoughts were evil; and she stood listeningly for a while at the garden-portal of her proud father's palace, with her white garments gleaming in the moonlight, and her small hand pressed upon her heart to still its beatings. like the fair spirit of another world, wandering by some strange spell among the denizens of this!

There was not a sound to be heard in the harem; even the watchful Aga Baba slept: no voice came from the slumbering city—she heard only the whispering of the leaves to the summer wind, and the fall of the fountain, as the waters plashed on the large petals of the delicate lilac lotus; and the fair Delsaïsè raised her bright young brow to the blue sky, and smiled as she fled across the open space which intervened between the large basin and the acacia-grove, where she was to meet her lover.

He was already there, awaiting her; and, as he strained her to his heart, and listened to her murmured words of tenderness and trust, he was stricken to the very soul; and could have grovelled in the dust at her feet, as he remembered the fate to which, in his ignorance and vanity, he had madly doomed her. "It may not yet be too late!" he whispered to himself: "I will redeem my honor while I have yet time: I will tell her all; I will lay bare my unworthiness, and leave her for ever! She is so young, so beautiful, so little fitted to a life of struggle—Allah be thanked, it is not yet too late!"

"Delsaïsè!" he said at length, as he led her deeper into the shadow of the trees; "sultana of my soul without whom the sky of life will know no sun! peri, who wert sent on earth to show mankind the fellowship that awaits them in paradise! since I saw thee last—in the few fleeting hours which have elapsed since I talked to thee of love, and flight, and asked of thee the sacrifice of home, and parents, and country; my spirit has sickened at its own selfishness; and now I am here to say that I cannot—that I will not—so wrong thy trust, so ill repay thy tenderness."

"And wherefore?" demanded the fair girl in astonishment. "Did I shrink from the trial? Min Allah—Heaven forbid! That is not love which basks in the sunshine, and cowers under the tempest; that is not love which lives only in the midst of luxury and ease, and expires in the hour of trial and of tears. Talk not thus, janum—my soul! Do you abandon nothing when you ask of *me* the sacrifice of home and friends? Does not our flight entail on you also the loss of both? And shall I murmur where you do not repine?"

"Delsaïsè," faltered Ildji Rezà, as he drew a dagger from his girdle: "plunge this handjar into my breast: it will be less painful than words like these! You know not half my unworthiness—half my crime. But a better feeling is come upon me, and you shall no longer be deceived. Inshallah! I trust in Heaven, that you will pardon, and forget me."

"Forget you!" echoed the fond girl with pale and quivering lips. "What words are these? If you leave me I shall linger for ever about your memory, as a ghoul wanders among the graves of the dead; for me there will be no longer stars in heaven, nor flowers upon earth. Ildji Rezà, you shall not leave me!"

"Ne bilirim—what can I say?" retorted the anguished lover. "At least, ere you abandon yourself to certain hardship, and probable peril, let me tell you all"—and they seated themselves side by side in that leafy solitude, and the son of Yezid poured into the ear of the trembling girl the fatal secret of his mad oath.

"And you would have given me to another?" was the tender reproach which first rose to her woman-lip.

"Alas! I had never then beheld you; never looked upon the brightness of a beauty, compared with which that of other maidens is but as the ray of the fire-fly beside the sunbeam."

"And when said you that this fearful compact was to be kept?"

"Even at the mahâk;" gasped out Ildji Rezà.

The wretched girl glanced at the fading moon; it was her last night; the fatal hour was come.

"Allaha es marladek—Heaven preserve me!" she murmured.

"He will! he will!" exclaimed the son of Yezid, as he started to his feet. "I go, Delsaïsè, with the curse of a broken vow upon me, a perjured man: and I go for ever; the brand is on my brow—the iron in my soul;—but better thus, far better, than if your wretchedness were written there: for I go alone."

"Not so—not so—" said the brave girl, as she stood beside him, and firmly grasped his arm. "Hence you go not, unless we go together; nay, hear me out in my turn; if you persist, I will arouse the harem, and I will cling to you, and fetter your motions, so that every attempt at escape shall be useless. Need I tell you what will be the result?" and she raised her large eyes in horror to his: "death, death—a bitter and a degrading death; but we shall at least die together."

"Delsaïsè, this must not—shall not be—to see you in the power of that fiend would be to me worse than ten thousand deaths."

"But we will escape him."

"I dare not brave the venture."

"Ildji Rezà:" said the bey's daughter; "I am a woman, and yet I say to you, we will dare the danger, and overcome it."

"By what means?" was the gloomy inquiry.

"Inshallah—I trust in Heaven!" answered Delsaïsè, as she clasped her hands together, and bowed her head meekly upon her bosom.

"Yet listen to me—" commenced Ildji Rezà deprecatingly.

The voluntary victim only replied by pointing to the moon, whose sickly light was waxing fainter in the distance; and ere she had withdrawn her hand, both were startled by the loud neighing of a steed close under the wall of the garden. Ildji Rezà smote his brow passionately, and flung himself along the earth.

"We are summoned, my soul:" said Delsaïsè, in a low shrill whisper which made the blood curdle in his veins. "It is our only chance of escape—if we part, we die; and you are lost here and hereafter."

"I dare not—will not—"

But again the maiden pointed towards the moon, and the son of Yezid sprang from the earth like a maniac. "Be it so, then;" he exclaimed frantically: "we will fly—we will escape—we will yet be happy" And he laughed wildly as he lifted the undaunted girl in his arms, and mounting the mouldering wall at the spot which Ziba had formerly indicated, leaped fearlessly from the summit into the road beyond.

Near the tree beside which they stood, the fatal Arabian was made fast to a buttress of the wall, beneath the thick branches of a hanging cedar, by which it was nearly concealed; in an instant its bridle-rein was in the hand of Ildji Rezà, and he in the saddle, with his precious burden in his arms. But in vain did the frantic young man attempt to direct the course of the ill-omened steed. Seemingly affrighted by its unaccustomed load, the animal flew recklessly along, as though driven forward by some invisible spirit; and, heedless alike of bit and stirrup, plunged headlong towards the high precipice indicated by the Toorkoman, beneath which flowed the rapid Barrady.

The brain of Ildji Rezà reeled, and his strength forsook him; he flung the bridle from his hand, and clasped the slender form of Delsaïsè closer to his heart, while she hid her face upon his shoulder, and neither wept nor spoke. On, on they flew, until borne upon the wind came the triumphant shout of the expectant Toorkoman: and then once more the heart of the son of Yezid grew big with the advancing peril: and when they gained the base of the rock, and that the hated form of the Arab merchant emerged from beneath the shadow of the building by which it was crested, he drew his handjar from his girdle, and clutched it like one who holds to his last hope of life.

But the mad animal paused not beneath the precipice: with dilated nostrils, expanded eyes, and outstretched neck, he toiled and scrambled up the frightful ascent, leaping like a wild cat over every cleft and chasm, and dashing fragments of the rock from beneath his feet, which fell rattling and plashing into the stream; until, upon the narrow tableland on which the tower was built, stood the horse and his owner side by side, not many inches from the brink of the precipice.

The pause was brief: for, as the animal halted beside the merchant, a heavy hand was laid upon its rein, and it reared violently to escape the pressure; when it rose on its haunches, Ildji Rezà slackened his grasp of the maiden to strike at the Toorkoman with his handjar; and as it suddenly recovered its position, impelled earthward by the weight of his bending figure, the abruptness of the motion flung the ill-fated girl from the saddle. One wild shriek rang out on the clear air, as a mass of white drapery fell headlong from the summit of the precipice, and was succeeded by a heavy plash, and the dashing of the severed waters against the base of the rock: and them came a yell, scaring the winds of heaven like the uttered agony of a tortured spirit; and the son of Yezid vaulted from the saddle to the earth, and stood face to face with his enemy!—There was no waste of words—nothing to learn, nothing to tell; as Ildji Rezà pointed downwards to the death-freighted waters of the river, and sprang to the throat of the Toorkoman like a maniac!

Scarcely a foot's space was between them and a cruel death, whose horrible presence had been with them but a moment back; and yet they struggled like men who had the wide earth for their arena. The merchant was armed as well as his antagonist with a sharp dagger, but for some seconds their weapons were useless; they grappled like men in the last agony—they wound about each other like serpents—they clung together as though united by some invisible link—it was a wrestling of spirits, where the body bent to the impulses of a mightier influence: but this could not last; ere long there was a deep gasping groan—a heavy fall—and the Toorkoman was standing over his victim, panting with hatred and exertion; his teeth clenched, his turban loosened, and his hand bloody: while the first faint ray of dawn just rested on the shining hilt of the weapon which was buried in the heart of Ildji Rezà, and revealed his severed lips and glittering teeth: the hand which still grasped his dagger hung over the precipice; and as the exulting victor spurned him with his foot, it seemed as though the next touch must hurl him from the brink; but the Toorkoman, after having by that indignity satiated his hate, bent calmly down, and withdrew his handjar from the breast of his victim, wiping it carefully with the hem of his garment, ere he returned it to the scabbard; this done, he gave one long shrill whistle, and forth from beneath the shadow of the building came the bectachy.

"Gidelem—let us go;" said Ali hoarsely; "the kavashlir* will scent the carrion, and some foul chance may put them upon my track—Cursed be the stripling arm that could not keep a firmer hold! I have lost my bride—I am for El Masr—when you next hear of me I shall be snuffing the sea-breeze at Roulac. Meanwhile, there is your gold, and with it this sereed of counsel:—when you would again sell yourself to Sheitan, see that you earn your wages more manfully, or you may chance to be paid in another coin!" and having struck his hand contemptuously on the hilt of his weapon, and flung a purse at the feet of the dervish, the Toorkoman seized the bridle-rein of his horse, and led him to the base of the rock, when, springing lightly to the saddle, he galloped away across the plain.

It was a bectachy who some hours subsequently carried to the house of Yezid the khawaji the dark tidings of his son's murder, and led the agonized father to the spot where lay his child: and who shortly afterwards went on his way rejoicing, for he had earned gold by the discovery, and escaped suspicion.

The Barrady ere sunset gave up its dead; and many were the surmises which were hazarded throughout Damascus, at the extraordinary coincidence which on the same day had plunged two families in tears and lamentations, that were to have been united in bonds of relationship. Dark hints, and mysterious whispers were busy in the bazārs; and even Latif Effendi himself forebore to jest on an occurrence apparently inexplicable; while, as neither the Toorkoman dealer nor the wandering dervish ever again appeared in Damascus, the truth would never have come to light, had not Ali the khawaji told the tale when he was lying on his death-bed at Scanderia, waiting with the lively faith of a True Believer to be wafted on the dark wings of Asraël to the arms of the houri.

* City police.

PART V.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"By the Black Stone at Mecca!* he was a more fitting companion for the ghouls and afrits of Jehanum;" yawned the pasha, as the low voice of Katinka ceased: not altogether conscious whether he had really heard or only dreamed the termination of the merchant's adventures. "Anesseny sikdam!† was he not a dog, and the father of dogs? And was the paradise of the Faithful ever meant to be an abiding-place for the unclean? Wallah billah—by the Prophet! you might as well people it with Franks and giaours! What say you, janum—my soul?" he added, turning to his fair wife, down whose pale cheeks the large tears were coursing each other in streams: "do you believe that Ali the Toorkoman ever bathed in rivers of milk, and drank his sherbet in Paradise?"

"Allah forbid!" murmured Carimfil Hanoum piously: "such as he were strange company for the houri of Corkam."‡

"As to Ildji Rezà:" pursued the satrap, who was inclined to be critical under the gentle approbation of his wife; "the man had no wit in him; he blackened his own face, and deserved his fate: though it was hard that the poor girl should suffer—But what said I? what is written, is written—and she merited her destiny; for had she not desecrated the harem by allowing the foot of a stranger to tread its carpets? By the head of the Emperor! had I been Kassim Bey—"

What the satrap would have added is unknown, as the threat terminated in a volume of smoke which curled down his beard, and left the remainder of the sentence unuttered: but the cheek of the Circassian flushed painfully for an instant, and then became pale as the leaf of the river-lotus: and her heart heaved as though it would have burst the shawl that cinctured her waist.

The Greek, meanwhile, sat apart; deep thought was on her brow, and something like contempt wreathed her lip, as she marked the emotion of her friend, and the obtuse self-complacency of the pasha. To her more wily spirit the victim seemed scarce worthy to be deceived; and yet, even amid that conviction, strange speculations and wild visions grew upon her. The Circassian loved another—*her* brother—the last relative whom she now possessed on earth—When they fled together—and fly together they would, she felt and knew if they again met—she should be alone; they would be everything to each other; and they should have no hold on the great chain of society if she fashioned not the link herself. She glanced at the pasha—he was old; but what availed it to count his years?—he was dull and vain; but these were qualities which insured a wife's supremacy—he might be weighed in the holy wezn* with half the satraps in the pay of the padishah, and not kick the beam; he was in short—a Turk—and the lip of the beautiful Greek curled again into deeper disdain than before.

But the electric spark had been struck; and Katinka, with the quick talent of her nation, possessed also its craft and selfishness; and slowly, by almost imperceptible degrees, her manner towards the pasha changed. Even Carimfil *felt* that it did so; but it was impossible to say in what the change consisted—perhaps the voice was a shade softer than before; the bright eye shadowed; the light step less elastic: but be it what it might, the young wife was satisfied, as it harmonized with her own pensive mood, and dreamy tendencies; for now Katinka sighed where she used to rally, and sympathized where she had formerly chidden.

The satrap himself was the last to perceive the revolution which had taken place in the beautiful Greek; but he was conscious, during his visits to the harem, that the flexible form of the young slave flitted more frequently before him; that the courteous offices which she rendered to him were more graciously and gracefully performed: and, at length, he even detected her eyes resting upon him with an expression of melancholy tenderness and abstraction that he could not fail to remark.

The pasha smoked and wondered; and gazed alternately at his wife and her friend, until the deep and glowing beauty of the Greek grew upon his fancy, and threw the pale loveliness of the Circassian into the shade; and then he pondered within himself whether Katinka indeed loved him, and began to note with increasing interest, every action of the wily slave. He slept no more when she swept the chords of her zebec, though its music had become more subdued and mournful; and when she sang, he listened yet more complacently, for her words told of hopeless passion, and love which fed upon itself, and clung to its own ruin. The sherbet offered by her hand had more sweetness, and the chibouque more perfume; and, in short, the visits of the pasha to the harem became more frequent and more lengthened as he gradually yielded to the conviction that he was beloved. Carimfil, beautiful and indulged as she was, had never loved him: yet here beside her was a young creature to the full as fair, glowing with talent and enthusiasm, graceful as a simorg, and musical as a bulbul, whose looks betrayed to him the secret of her heart!

The idea was fascinating; and the satrap

* The famous stone in the holy sepulchre, which is kissed by every Moslem on his arrival.

† An expression of contempt.

‡ Paradise.

* The balance of the Prophet

dwelt upon it with increased satisfaction from day to day; carefully abstaining from a word or gesture which might awaken the jealousy of his wife; and it was reserved for the breath of song to break the spell, and to afford to Katinka the first assurance that she was understood.

The fair Carimfil was, on one occasion, more melancholy even than her wont, the pasha more silent and more tedious; and the crafty Greek felt her power to chase this gloom, and to render the satrap conscious of the value of her acquirements: without a word, therefore, and regardless of any bidding, she struck a few wild chords upon her instrument, and with bowed head, and eyes bent to the earth, she murmured out her song.

My childhood's home was 'mid the isles
That gem the bright Egean sea;
Where summer in its beauty smiles,
And song-birds hold their jubilee,
Where sunshine with the ocean blent,
And rested on its loving breast;
And every hour, in passing, lent
Some charm to earth to make it blest.

I never dream'd I could forget
That blissful home; but ah! the heart
When its warm flow with love is met
Can make its own bright world apart;
'Tis only when unloved—alone—
And blighted—that I sigh to be
In the dear isle where once I dwelt
Amid the bright Egean sea!

As the song ceased, the dark eyes of Katinka sought those of the pasha, and she read there an assurance that thenceforward her island-home might be forgotten.

"Mail oldum—I have fallen in love!" communed the satrap with himself; but he only gave utterance to a low grunt of approval, and a "Pek ahi, Bèyaz—very well"—as he drew a jewelled ring from his finger, and tendered it to the songstress. "Your voice is pleasant as the south wind, and we owe you some requital for the enjoyment." And as the Greek prostrated herself before him, the pasha held her hand a moment longer than was necessary, while he gave the gem into her possession.

"Where the nightingale harbors, there is no need to welcome the thrush;" said the pasha, when Katinka had made her prostration, and returned to her place; "and where the fair Bèyaz dwells, the awali (singing-women) are needless."

The languid Circassian smiled; her thoughts were with Maniolopolo; and it was a relief to her when the pasha at length quitted the harem, and she could throw herself upon the bosom of her friend, to talk of the lover of her youth, and weep over his absence.

Skilfully did Katinka fan the flame; she called up memories which made the heart of the unhappy wife beat high with tenderness and regret—she speculated on the future until the pale cheek burned, and the slight form quivered with emotion—she mocked at the pasha's blindness, and made merry at the expense of his complacent vanity: and then she digressed to her brother—that brother who had long been every thing to both of them—she reminded the fond Circassian, who required no prompting to do full justice to the memory of his perfections, of all the noble qualities of his nature; and how adversity, like the tile on the acanthus, had at once subdued and beautified his free and haughty spirit.

The twilight stole on them ere the subject was yet half exhausted; and then they wandered forth into the dim gardens, with their white arms wreathed about each other's necks, and whispered of him to the stars, and to the leaves, by the low murmuring of the fountains; and finally they sank to rest, each with her own bright vision ready to melt itself into a dream, and charm the hours of the long summer night.

Maniolopolo had, meanwhile reached the city, but had hitherto failed in every attempt to make his vicinity known to the inmates of the pasha's harem. In vain he traversed the streets, and gazed stealthily at every yashmac that he encountered, he met neither the fair Carimfil nor his sister: and after hours and days spent in haunting the palace of the satrap, he became at length convinced that unless he discovered some expedient by which he might penetrate under his very roof, he was as far distant from the accomplishment of his wishes, as though he had remained in Circassia.

Vexed to the soul, Maniolopolo, on the sixth evening of his unprofitable watching, turned away from the walls which separated him from the bright object of his thoughts; and, careless of his path, sauntered on until he reached the theriaki tcharchi,* whence the sounds of music came floating pleasantly on the still air.

"You are welcome, Effendim;" said a portly personage who was gravely smoking his chibouque on a raised-wooden platform, overarched with vines, without the door of the building. "A caravan had just arrived, on its way to Bassora, and among the travellers are some celebrated almè (dancing-girls,) whom one of the hadjis, who is my friend, has prevailed upon to lodge in my house during their stay in the city; they are about to dance, and again I say that you are welcome."

Maniolopolo hesitated: he was well aware of the scenes of violence which occasionally take place among the opium-eaters during their paroxysms of temporary madness; but ere long, as the master of the tcharchi enlarged upon the grace and beauty of one of the fair band, his reluctance vanished; and he suffered himself to be ushered into the spacious apartment, around which, on low and luxu-

* Resort for opium-eaters.

rious divans, sat about a score of the most dissolute youths of the city; while the centre of the floor was overspread with a Persian carpet, on which stood a group of young and splendidly-habited women, about to commence their performance.

Maniolopolo had never before witnessed a similar exhibition, and he looked on with as much curiosity as amusement; occasionally joining in the low chorus of approbation, which from time to time broke from the other spectators. Never had he seen so much raki and kakabi* swallowed in the same space of time, nor so much khaf, and beng, and hashish, and afiou† devoured; and it was consequently without surprise that, as the hours grew into night, he found the voice of revelry rapidly deepening into discord: nor could he forbear a smile when he heard the rioters reproaching each other with the very vices to which they were themselves addicted. "Theriakee — opium-eater!" shouted one; "dost thou, maddened by the poison that thou hast swallowed, dare to argue with me?"—"Dog of a wine-drinker!" exclaimed a second; "is it when thou art drunk with the liquid fire of the infidels, that thou talkest to a Mahommedan of his duty?"

Blows followed fast on words: and throwing down a coin which offered ample payment for the entertainment of the teharchi, Maniolopolo hastened to escape from the pollution of the scene; leaving half-a-dozen unturbaned heads rolling on the floor, amid a chorus of expletives more energetic than courteous; and the shrill shrieks of the woman, who, huddled together in a corner, were trembling with affright.

But his visit to the theriakee teharchi had not been altogether unprofitable to the young Greek; and he anxiously awaited the morrow in order to carry into effect the plot which he had been contemplating during the performances of the almè.

CHAPTER XL.

"I HAVE dreamed a dream;" said Saïfula Pasha on his next visit to the harem of his wife: "a dream which lasted me the whole night. Bashustun—on my head be it! I will give a purse to whomsoever can read it to me aright."

"I have been said to have some lore on the subject of visions;" said Katinka eagerly; 'my mother read them like a book. Will it please your Excellency to describe it to me?"

"And why not?" was the reply. "Listen, and you shall hear—I was at Stamboul, in the bright 'City of the Three Seas,' but peace was not within her walls: there were flames, and shouts, and sounds of warfare; and the streets ran blood; and then, Ou Allah! I thought that I was deposed from my pashalik, and that all my wealth was swept away, and I was a ruined man; and there came a season of famine; and you, guzum—" and he turned, and looked fondly towards his wife; "you were beside me, and we both hungered; when suddenly the padishah—(may his beard flourish!) sent us a tray of tehalva and a dish of pillauf. But even as we ate, the cry came to us of those who famished; and, Wallah! our repast was bitterly seasoned by the anguish of those whom we could not succour—'T was a dark dream, and I am troubled by it! Speak, Beyaz; can you tell what it signifies?"

"Your highness did well to terminate the fast by a feast;" said the Greek girl with assumed gravity; "your dream bodes you nothing but good; uncertainty for a time, but ultimate success in all your projects. I shall look ere long to see you summoned to Stamboul by the Lord of the Three Seas, and to hear you saluted as Mushir* Saïfula Pasha.'

"Allah bilir—Allah alone knows;" answered the satrap with a complacent smile. "By the soul of my father, should you be a true prophet, you shall find that I am not unmindful of your prophecy—Chok chay—that is much." And the Pasha looked as magnanimous on the faith of his promise, as though he had rewarded the beautiful soothsayer for her vague solution with a hundred purses.

"The dream of my lord has brought to my own mind a memory of the past;" said Katinka, as a veil of sadness fell over her deep eyes. "I have a tale whose grief will teach all visionary sorrow to pass away before it, as the mists of morning disperse before the sun-break—or as the desert-sands are scattered by the simoom—I will tell it now, if my lord listens." And having received an encouraging nod from the pasha, whose chibouque had just been replenished, and whose cushions were arranged with a care to which no luxury could be added, she seated herself at his feet; and shaking back the long hair which fell over her brow and bosom, and assuming as if unconsciously the stern expression, and impressive attitude of a Pythoness, she commenced her recital.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE LAST OF THE JANISSARIES.

THE day of blood that witnessed the destruction of the Janissaries was at an end. The sunlight had faded upon the mountains;

* Ardent spirits. † Intoxicating drugs.

* Pasha of Three Tails.

the stars were multiplied upon the ripple of the sea of Marmora; the fitful wind sighed through the forest-boughs; and, save in the excited city of Stamboul, all was peace, as a tall and shrouded figure emerged from among the tombs in the necropolis of Eyoub. He paused for a moment when he stood upon the crest of the hill above the village, and shook his clenched hand passionately in the direction of the smouldering pile which had so lately been the funeral-pyre of hundreds of his comrades—of scores of his townsmen and associates. His breast heaved—his pulses quivered—it was Yusuf—the far-famed, the formidable Yusuf! When the yesterday's sun had gilded the domes of the golden city, he had been an aga of Janissaries. What was he now? He had seen the strong limbs of his brother—of Omar the fleet-footed—quiver, as he hung suspended from the fatal cord to the "Tree of Groans" in the Atmedan, one of a thousand of the same hour's victims—he had seen it, and he felt that his heart was broken. Omar was the last son of his mother—the pet lamb of the fold—in the pride of his spirit he had left his paternal roof to carry arms beside his brother Yusuf—and he had died the death of blood before that brother's eyes.

The curse was deep and fearful with which, after wading in carnage, and fighting like a demoniac under the shadow of Omar's corpse, the aga was borne away by the stream of fugitives, who, hopeless at length of victory, sought safety in a flight as unpromising as their resistance. The band, fighting as they retreated, grew weaker every instant; long pent-up hate was loosed, and the fury of the inhabitants of the polluted city seconded the more organized attacks of the soldiery. The wretched Janissaries, maddened by their despair, fought furiously to the last; and the streets, along which they passed, were choked with dead.

The scimitar of Yusuf gleamed above his head, and he had just aimed a stroke at a new opponent when the earth gave way beneath his feet, and he fell heavily for a considerable depth, pressed upon in his descent by the body of the man whom he had slain. He heard a shout as he disappeared, but the yell endured only for a moment; the fierce crowd hurried on, and ere long he could distinguish a hoarse murmur which told him that the tide of blood was flowing in a distant part of the city.

The aga's first care was to glare stealthily around, and he was immediately conscious of a faint light streaming through a cavity in the roof of the subterranean into which he had been so opportunely introduced. Not a sound betokened the vicinity of any human companionship; and Yusuf next hurled from him the body of his enemy, which yet lay heavily across his own. This done, he slowly stretched forth limb after limb, to assure himself that he was uninjured by the fall; and, having satisfied himself of the fact, he was not long in ascertaining the nature of his compulsatory retreat.

Yusuf, as he rose from the earth, stood in a spacious vault, surrounded on all sides by stately columns of marble, and dimly lighted by narrow grated windows level with the roof; and at once understood that he tenanted, in company with the dead man at his feet, the immense cistern of Ben-Vebir-Direg—the Vault of the Thousand-and-One Columns. He shuddered as the truth burst upon him; for he remembered that, although, during the hours of daylight, a crowd of miserable wretches congregated there to spin silk, and thus earn amid its noxious vapors a scanty and insufficient existence, it was a place of evil repute by night; and said to be peopled by beings whose demoniac nature shut them out from "the glimpses of the moon."

But Yusuf was brave by nature, nor was this a moment to yield to weak and childish terrors: death was about him every where, and he was ready to bless Allah and the Prophet that he had found even this temporary haven during a night of terror.

The secret of his personal impunity after so great a fall was simple—the watercourses of the cistern having been turned during the erection of St. Sophia, and the vault used as a receptacle for the soil dug out from the foundations—the earth upon which he alighted was sufficiently elastic to secure him from greater injury than a few slight bruises; but the wild legends which now localized their superstitions at Ben-Vebir-Direg rendered the locality any thing but holy in the eyes of the Moslem: a thousand dark and fearful memories of the subterranean rushed across the brain of the fugitive—strange, and wild, and fearful shapes all located by popular rumor in this gloomy spot; and thus, bold as he was although pre-occupied by other and more certain evils, had Yusuf Aga been free to select his hiding-place, he would assuredly not have chosen the haunted subterranean.

The dull but instant echoes of the dreary space repeated every sound; and as the wretched fugitive slowly paced among the columns, searching for some point of escape of which he might avail himself under shelter of the darkness, the hollow reverberations of his own footsteps made his brow burn, and his heart throb, as he mistook them in his terror for the tramp of approaching enemies.

He soon discovered that his only hope of egress was by the very spot of his entrance—a narrow opening, formed by the decay of a mass of masonry, which had partially yielded to the unusual weight of the contending crowd; and for an instant his spirit quailed, as his eye, accustomed to the darkness, betrayed to him the insecure and threatening state of that spot

tion of the roof which touched upon the aperture. Yet to stay in this gloomy vault, to incur the certain penalty of starvation or discovery, was yet more frightful; and Yusuf having resolved upon at least attempting his escape, when night should have fallen upon the city, and examined with care the dangerous accessories by whose means it was to be accomplished, ultimately turned his attention to the dead body which lay near him.

His superstitious tremors were not lessened on discovering, from certain mysterious-looking articles, carefully concealed about the person of the stranger, that he was a karabash, or wise man; a description of person with whom no good Musselmaun ever desires to meddle in a hostile manner. "Y'Allah—in the name of the Prophet! Is this my work?" murmured the aga to himself: "Haremzadeh—ill-born that I am! Was it not enough that I should see my brother hung like a dog, and swinging in the wind—and be hunted through the streets of the city like a wild beast by the yelling cowards who once kissed the dust from my slippers: but I must myself throw dirt upon the grave of my father, and slay a karabash?"

And he rocked himself to and fro for several minutes, as he sat beside the body of his victim, uttering the low "Amân! amân!—alas! alas!" of a stricken spirit; while at intervals he started in affright, as the echoes of the vault flung back the lamentation like the mocking of fiends!

Gradually, however, he recovered from his panic, with the eternal kismet of his faith: and he then proceeded to strip the body of the karabash, and to attire himself in the dead man's garments; after which he carefully dressed the corpse in his own, ere he indulged himself with a more detailed survey of his newly appropriated possessions.

The shawl which had formed the turban of the karabash, was coarse in texture, and uninviting in appearance; but as the aga withdrew it, and began to wind it about his own head, several pieces of large gold coin fell from amid its folds, to the extreme gratification of Yusuf, who saw in them a possible means of escape from the terrors of the blood-drenched city. In a few moments the disguise was perfect; and having squared his beard with a knife which he carried in his girdle, the aga of the Janissaries was conscious that to the eye of a stranger he might pass unsuspected.

A few papers, which Yusuf was unable to decipher, but which, prudently remembering that should he leave them in the vault they might lead to his own detection, he resolved on carrying away; and, save these, a tobacco-purse of the most common description, and a chaplet of cedar-wood, a few paras carefully tied up in a little bag, and a small box of black dye, constituted all the personal effects of the dead man; and piously exclaiming "Allah buyûk der—God is great!" Yusuf had soon emptied the box of dye over his beard and mustaches.

These arrangements made, the aga had no other occupation for the remaining hours of daylight than sitting on the damp earth, and commending the souls of the sultan, his pashas, and his yuzbashis (captains) to the keeping of Satan; spitting upon the graves of their ancestors; and branding themselves and their relatives with all the opprobrious epithets with which his language is rife; until, as time wore on, his bitterness slowly yielded place to gentler and fonder feelings: and his thoughts recurred to Omar—to his brother—and then, burying his face in his hands, the fierce Janissary, the blood-thirsty Aga, the remorseless Moslem, wept!

"Allah! Allah! It is hard to bear:" he murmured; "but who am I that I should rebel against the Prophet of the Faithful? Sen ektiar der—you are the master: Sen bilirsen—you know best. Because I sit down beside the dried-up fountain, shall the spring well out afresh? If I say that my caïque shall travel westward, will the wind blow from Mecca to fill her sails?" And again the strong man wept; but this time it was in a sadder and a calmer spirit.

Other visions grew upon him as he lingered there. His mother had wooed a fair young bride to his home: yet another week and she was to have been his—the light of his eyes, and the day-beam of his existence. Where was she now? and by whom would she be won? A shadow fell upon his brow which danger had never called there, for all was over; he had no longer a home—should he even escape, he must live an exile, and die a stranger to his own land; the "Captain of a Hundred" was a crouching fugitive, for whom the brand and the bowstring were alike ready. The eldest born of his house was proscribed and pursued—Yusuf Aga was no more—there remained only the trembling and torture menaced victim of a new creed.

Not a ray broke across the murky sky of his fortunes; not a hope gleamed upon his future—he was a doomed man; and for a moment the bold aga resolved to remain and abide his fate; but as the deep darkness suddenly fell around him, after that brief and almost imperceptible twilight which in the east endures but for a moment, other thoughts and fears grew upon him—positive danger and superstitious terrors became blended in his imagination; he dreaded discovery, and shrank appalled at every gust of wind which penetrated into the vault: while a moment after, the deep stillness well nigh maddened him, and he peopled the fearful space with shadowless forms, and the tall columns wore to his over-

heated fancy the semblance of gaunt and death-like phantoms.

It was after one of these intervals of intense and solemn terror that he sprang hurriedly from the earth, and resolved to incur any risk, rather than endure a recurrence of such maddening emotions. Even in the darkness he turned away from the spot whereon he knew that the dead karabash was stretched; and following the wall with his hands, he felt the fresh air breathing upon his brow from above, and at once commenced his perilous ascent.

"La illaha illallah—there is but one Allah!" whispered the wretched man between his clenched teeth, as he endeavored to secure a footing in the interstices of the masonry; an object in which he was repeatedly baffled by the darkness.

"Alhemdullilah—Praises be to Allah!" he at length exclaimed, wiping the drops from his brow with the sleeve of his vest, as he balanced himself on the rough edge of a projecting mass. But his pious self-gratulation was only momentary, for, with a crash which was echoed with frightful distinctness from the innermost recesses of the subterranean, the tottering stone gave way, and, in its fall, flung Yusuf violently to the earth.

"Lahnet be Sheitan—curse on the devil!" exclaimed the baffled captive, with that sudden transition of feeling which among the Turks forms so singular a contrast from their placid equanimity of manner: "Allah bela versin—Heaven send it misfortunes! Do the very stones wage war for the bloody-minded Mahmoud? Am I to be balked by a mass of marble?" And, with renewed energy, he rose from the earth, and once more groped his way to the aperture through which he distinguished a solitary star hanging in the heavens like a lamp of silver. The aga hailed it as a good omen; again he put forth all his strength, and, after the struggle of a moment, he secured a safe footing in the chasm whence the last stone had fallen. With his eye fixed steadily upon the friendly star, he put forth his arms in every direction until his hand came in contact with an iron staple, whence a portion of the marble frieze that had once adorned the roof of the vault had been detached by time. A few violent efforts sufficed to convince him of its firm hold upon the stone into which it had been driven; and his next attempt was to swing himself suddenly upward, in order to seize the edge of the masonry projecting over the opening. Twice did he essay this dangerous exploit, and fail; while the blood spouted from his nostrils with the shock, and his hands clung maimed and smarting to the rusted iron; but all the energy of his nature was now aroused, and he did not suffer himself to pause.

"Korkma—fear not, Yusuf;" he almost shouted in a fit of temporary delirium. "Allah wills not that you should die the death of an earth-worm—On! on!—a bright star beckons you—you may yet live to revenge the death of the murdered Omar."

As the words escaped him, a wild blast swept through the vault, and the excited Yusef believing that he heard the voice of the karabash, aroused from the sleep of death by his own menace of revenge, swung himself once more madly upward, and fell on the rude pavement of the deserted street.

For awhile he lay stunned and motionless; but as the night-air swept lovingly across his forehead he slowly revived: and with returning consciousness grew the memory of his jeopardy. Painfully and with difficulty he rose from the earth—bruised alike in body and in spirit; and carefully avoiding the more frequented streets whence the yell of blood yet came to his ear, he stealthily made his way to the sacred cemetery of Eyoub.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LAST OF THE JANISSARIES—CONTINUED.

It was a glorious night as he stood there, on the hill-top, among the quiet graves; but all was riot in the bosom of the disguised Janissary. He was alone: far as his eye could wander in the clear starlight he could distinguish no human being save himself; and he moved slowly downward among the tall tombs, and crossed the wide and deserted street, until he paused by the water's edge—upon the lip of the land-locked port, whose ripple was ruddy with the fitful reflection of the burning pile which had once been to him as a home.

"Allah buyûk der—God is great!" he said passionately: "it must be even as he wills. The clouds are for the wing of the wild bird—the billows for the monsters of the deep—and blood for the great ones of the earth—" and he smiled bitterly as he turned away, and under the shadow of the tall trees which over-canopy the village, stole hastily once more into the street.

The door of a house, about midway of the hamlet, stood partially open; and after the pause of a moment, the disguised aga passed the threshold, and then closed the gate, and secured it by a rude bar on the inside. All was silence throughout the dwelling, and the wanderer moved onward like one to whom the locality was familiar, until he reached a chamber in which a dim light was burning in a lamp upon the floor.

The room had but one tenant; an aged woman, half buried among cushions on a low sofa, and so absorbed in grief as to be unconscious of the intruder's presence.

"Eh · ah! delhi der—they are madmen!" broke at intervals from her lips. "Was it for this that a son was born to me in my old age, and that my first-born became strong in battle, and great in power! Bana bak—look at me—what am I, that I should be childless in my weak years, when the grave is dug for me among the faithful—Eh vah! why did I not die before this sorrow fell on my gray hairs!" And again she buried her face in her spread hands, and the deep "amân" of utter wretchedness burst from her quivering lips.

"All are not gone!" said a deep voice at the threshold of the apartment; and the mourner wildly thrust back the dishevelled hair from her brow, and glanced hurriedly towards the speaker. "The youngest and the fairest has passed away, and his blood is on the head of his murderers; but Yusuf, the spirit-broken—Yusuf, the dishonored, yet lives—his beard is plucked out, and the grave of his father is defiled—He who was an Aga of Janissaries, is now a sakil-siz—a no-beard—but he is still the son of his mother—and lo! he is here."

As the dull eye of the old woman detected under the disguise of the karabash the features of her son, and her ear drank in his accents, she tottered towards him with a faint scream, and in the next moment she was clasped fondly to his breast.

"My son!" she murmured; "my first and fairest; you are restored to me—I am no longer alone—Allah has preserved for me my brave Yusuf, the sun of my evening sky—my aga—"

"Hush, mother;" whispered the fugitive: "call me no longer by a name which is but another term for blood—we are swept from the face of the earth—the strong men of power are no more—"

"Chok chay—that is much;" said the old woman with frightful calmness; "but you are here, and to me bosh der—it is nothing."

"Listen to me, mother;" urged Yusuf, as he released himself from her clasp, and led her gently to the sofa. "If I do not escape from the city before the sun rises over the mountain of Bulgurlhu, I shall never again look upon it—my life is forfeit—Allah es marladek—Allah preserve you! I have come but to say farewell to you for ever ere I depart: I have yet time to fly."

"And whither?" asked his mother earnestly; "are not the blood-hounds abroad? Do you hope to escape from the padishah who has vowed your ruin? Are you maddened by your misery when you forget that the light of his power stretches along the earth from the east even to the west, and that the shadow of his greatness lies upon the deep waters? Sen chok adam—you are much of a man, Yusuf Aga; but there is no safety for you save in the arms of your mother."

The smitten Janissary shook his head bitterly.

"I am old and poor;" pursued the anxious parent · "I am helpless; and therein will lie my strength—who would seek the man of might in the dwelling of the feeble and gray-haired widow of Abdul the shawl-mender?"

"Ne apalum—what can we do?" asked Yusuf despondingly.

"What can we *not* do, if Allah spare us to each other?" retorted the mother, encouraged by his partial acquiescence. "Yusuf, my son, what may yet happen we know not; Allah bilir—God alone knows; but we are taught not to tempt evil. Better to live in darkness than to die the death of blood—better to crouch beneath the wayside briar than to lie unsheltered from the storm. Stay with me, my son: the cloud may pass away from the land—the bash pezevenk—the vile wretch, who has brought this evil upon the children of the Prophet, may yet fall before the fire of vengeance—and then—"

"All is over!" said Yusuf, with a calmness of despair: "the rest is but a dream. Hatf! hatf!—shame! shame! that they who have so long upheld the glory of the faithful, and the banner of the Prophet, should be trodden beneath the feet of dogs in the city streets—a by-word for giaours and infidels!" And as he ceased speaking, his aged mother caught his indignant tone, and echoed back "Hatf! hatf!—Shame! shame!"

The joy of meeting once more her first-born son had for a brief time effaced from the memory of the aged Fatma the loss of the bright-eyed Omar: but when the burst of delight had spent itself, and that she had time to recall the words of Yusuf as he entered, the fear of death grew upon her, and a sickness of the heart bent her even to the earth.

"And the absent one—" she gasped out, "the child of my age—where is he?"

"Gardash! gardash!—Brother! brother!" exclaimed Yusuf, clasping his hands forcibly together; "thou of the fleet foot and the eagle-eye—thou of the kind smile and the soft voice—thy race is run—thy gaze is dimmed—livid is thy lip in death: and thine accents will be no more heard, save by the houris of Paradise."

"La illaha illallah—there is but one Allah!" groaned the bereaved woman. "The great and the mighty of the earth are beyond the vengeance of a mother's arm, but they are not beyond her curse—it will cling! Yusuf, it will cling!—fell and heavy is ever the curse of a broken heart, when the gray head and the dim eye are bowed over the grave of the beautiful and the young, murdered in their beauty and their youth: but feller and heavier still is the malison of a mother poured out upon the fierce heart and the bloody hand

which have bereft her of her fond ones. Eh vah! I will sit down beside the grave of my brave boy, and the bitterness of my spirit shall have way."

"By the grave of Omar, of your last-born, will you never sit, my mother?" was the slow reply: "the dead of to-day have not passed from earth upon their cushions:—the brand and the cord have done their work—Omar is among those whose grave no man shall ever find." And as he ceased speaking, Yusuf cast himself upon the earth, and covered his face with his robe.

"Is it so?" said Fatma, while a fierce gleam lit up her dull eye. "Then will I only think of him when my heart melts at the grief of another, that I may steel myself against that merey which has been withheld from me and mine—and for he who has wrought this ruin —may the evil Eye smite him on the threshold of the mosque, and blight his prayers; —may he never know slumber by night, nor peace by day—may every breath of air which fans his brow be polluting as the plauge-wind —and may his children wither, and expire before his eyes at the moment when they are most dear to him!"

And the stricken man who lay at her feet raised his head from the earth for a moment, and responded to her malison with a hoarse "Amen!"

It was again the old woman whose voice broke upon this second and frightful silence; as from mourning for her lost son, she turned to fears for the one who was yet left to her: "Swear to me, my child, my brave and noble boy;" she said with startling suddenness, as her thoughts painted in colors too terrible for her to bear the probable consequences of his discovery. "Swear to me—you who are now my only tie to earth—that you will not attempt to escape—that you will remain here beneath the roof of your dead father—that you will never again venture forth into the streets of this accursed city, whose minarets point to heaven as if to direct the vengeance which will not fail.—The men of blood are ever abroad; let me not have to weep over my last child."

"Mother;" said Yusuf as he rose from the earth, and seated himself at her feet; "Ne bilirim—what can I say? You ask for water during a drought when no rain falls; and for pomegranates when the world is wrapt in snow. Ne apalum—what can I do? I am yet young, and my years may be many; can I pass them in darkness, and with a chain upon my spirit? You are old and feeble; and since Allah took my father to himself, I filled your dish with pillauf, and your cup with sherbet—how am I to buy rice, or to earn bread to support you and myself, save by escaping to a far province where I am unknown, and selling my sword to the pasha? Allah buyûk der—God is great! I have yet some gold which I can leave with you until I may summon you hence, and offer you a roof in my place of exile."

"And what will be gold to me," asked Fatma, "when I am bereft of both my children? Can gold dry the tears of anguish, or buy a light heart when grief has bowed down the spirit?—Will gold give me back the days when my sons sat at my feet, and I blessed them in the fulness of my joy, as I saw them tall and stately as two cedar trees, and beautiful as the light of morning? One is gone—gone with all his glory about him, to the grave —and when the other leaves me to brave the death his brother died, he talks to me of gold! Bana Bak—look at me! am I not too feeble to outlive the loss of my last hope?"

"Hai, hai—true, true—it is indeed hard that in your old age and your bitter anguish you should be called upon to suffer another grief;" said Yusuf soothingly: "but, alas: my mother, there is no alternative. Inshallah!—I trust in Allah!—I am disguised; and under the shadow of the darkness, if I am prompt and cautious, I may escape. Hinder me not, then; but let me go forth with your blessing upon me; the world is wide, and a strong arm and a bold heart will never lack a weapon. Bashustun—on my head be it! I will yet make the name of Yusuf ring in the ears of the men of strength."

"Chok chay—that is much;" replied the old woman, catching a portion of his momentary enthusiasm; "you are a man, and you have the heart of a man; as for your enemies, haivan der—they are animals—dogs and the fathers of dogs, and I spit upon their beards—"

"I will go forth then, mother;" said the aga, attempting to rise.

"What shall I say?" exclaimed the agonized old woman: "my son! my son! shall I not die as you pass the threshold? and yet, no—not so—I have no right to hold you back—why should you live in darkness and in dread when you might be foot-free upon the mountains, and bathing your brow in the clear waters of the valley? Go then—since it is better so—go—oghour ola—God speed you! Better that I should pine in my solitude than that I should see your bold heart breaking from day to day—Sen ektiar der—you are the master: I am but a woman, and yours must be the words of wisdom: but linger not long, my son, ere you send me tidings of your existence or I shall be as a fountain that is dried up and as a cypress that is withered."

Anxious to avail himself of the remaining darkness, and rejoiced to find his mother in resigned a frame of mind, Yusuf hastily poured into her lap the gold which he had found in the turban of the karabash; and then, folding her to his heart, and breathing above her

devout prayer to Allah that they might once more meet in happiness, he laid her gently back upon her cushions, and rushed out of the house.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE LAST OF THE JANISSARIES—CONTINUED.

Not an hour after the wretched Yusuf quitted the roof of his mother, a loud outcry arose in one of the most squalid streets of the city, abutting on an obscure quay frequented principally by fishermen. There were sounds of pursuit—shouts of fierce threatening, mingled with curses of baffled hate; and as the trembling tenants of the neighboring houses rose on their sofas to listen, they could distinguish at intervals the name of Yusuf. The disguised fugitive had been detected; and he was now trusting to his good speed to escape once more from his enemies. The darkness favored him, for the chase was long continued, and still the cries were heard: "Lahnet be sheitan—curse on the devil—It is Yusuf the Janissary! It is the bloody-minded aga!—kinpek!—kelb!—dog!—cur! Bash pezevenk—headsman!" every opprobrious epithet was in turn applied to the miserable man, as he fled before his pursuers; saving the breath which they were exhausting in invective, for the mighty effort at self-preservation to which his instinct rather than his reason impelled him.

Again Yusuf escaped—again he stood beside his mother, and her hot tears fell on his anguished brow—and this time, in his agony of heart he vowed on the Korân that he would never leave her more.

It was a fearful vow! The young strong man voluntarily resigning himself to a long life of imprisonment, and the never-sleeping dread of detection; coupled with the certainty of poverty, and the probability of actual want. But Yusuf was heart-broken; he had fallen suddenly from a post of responsibility and power to a position the most cruel: he could no longer lift his head among his fellow-men, for he had been hunted like a noxious animal by his kind—he stood alone—fatherless—brotherless—his very name must no longer exist—his presence beneath the squalid roof of his mother he must suspect, lest the ruin which had overtaken him should be drawn down on her head also! He had been a Janissary, and the name had suddenly become a death-warrant; it availed him nothing that there was no blood upon his hand; the popular hatred had been seconded by the power and will of the sultan, enforced by his new myrmidons, and the cry of destruction was on the wind.

Nothing remained to him save his mother—the widowed woman who smiled amid the bitterness of the hour as she received his vow, and felt that she was never again to part from him.

They were yet sitting side by side in silence, wrapped in gloomy imaginings, when a violent knocking upon the outer door of the dwelling aroused them from their lethargy of grief.

"So soon!" exclaimed Yusuf fiercely. "Have they tracked the wolf to his lair so soon! But the bold Aga of the Janissaries will not die the death of a vile animal without revenge!" And he drew from beneath his vest a gleaming yataghan, and sprang towards the door of the apartment.

"Yusuf Aga," said the old woman in an accent of sudden calmness: "what would you do? Can you war against a score? or would you pollute your mother's floor with blood—Sen chok adam—you are much of a man; but you cannot do battle against a host."

"I can at least sell my life dearly!" was the reply. "Mother, mother, you feel as a woman; but my heart is the heart of a desperate man. Loose me; and let me at least die the death of a brave soldier!"

"Yusuf Aga, once more I tell you that you are mad!" urged the aged Fatma, whose nerves had become suddenly strung by the great peril of her son. "Are you not taught by the Korân to love and to obey the mother of your youth? Do you love me, Yusuf? do you obey me, when you give yourself up to the bloodhounds, and sacrifice my gray hairs to foster your own pride? Think you that they will spare the aged woman, when the strong man is beaten down? If you can bear to give up the bosom upon which you lay in your infancy to the knives of the butchers, go on, Yusuf Aga; and we shall die the death of blood and shame together."

"Allah buyûk der—God is great!" was the reply of the crushed and miserable man, as he extended his hand to his mother, and followed her bidding as passively as an infant. "Do with me as you will."

The anxious Fatma awaited not a second bidding; and in the next moment Yusuf was skilfully, and without further resistance, concealed beneath the cushions upon which she had been sitting.

The uproar without had meanwhile become louder and more violent; and authoritative cries of "Aleh! Aleh!—open! open!" mingling with hoarser shouts of "Vour! Vour!—strike! break!—help! that we may force this crazy door, and make our own entrance to the den of the blood-hound!" rang through the desolate dwelling; and the trembling Fatma had scarcely time, after she had secreted her son, to fling a shawl over her head, before her chamber was crowded with strange men.

"Y'Allah—in the name of the Prophet,"

she shrieked out, without rising from the cushions upon which she had flung herself on their approach, at once to screen her child, and to deceive his pursuers; "What is this? Who am I that men should break in upon me and fill my house, without leaving me time to cover my face? Am I a Frank woman, that I am to be seen unveiled by every dog who wishes to eat dirt, and to show his prowess by wronging the widow and the afflicted! What seek ye here? Bana bak—look at me—what find ye to repay you for the shame of committing violence on a woman whose hair is gray, and whose step is feeble."

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly, mother;" said one of the party, as by the dim light of the solitary and untrimmed lamp, his companions were hurriedly searching every nook of the wretched habitation. "We mean you no harm. What could your blood profit us? though we might in truth put the bowstring about your neck, were it only to silence your howling. But we have seen that bash pezevenk—that wretch, Yusuf Aga the iron-handed Janissary, enter a dwelling hereabout, and it may chance to be yours: so tell the truth, mother, and we will not only leave you in peace, but we will pay the service in piastres."

Hoarsely did the old woman laugh: "The Prophet has not so favored me;" she said quietly; "or gladly would I earn so easily that which I need so much. But no—no—no Janissary will ever enter here—What have I to do with the men of blood? Kiupek der—they are dogs—Delhi der—they are madmen—their faces are blackened—Yok, yok, dostoum—no, no, my friends—you do but waste the time which you may need for your pursuit—stay here as long as you will—affiet ollah—much good may it do you—but you will find nothing more bloody-minded than yourselves under the roof of old Abdul's widow."

"Aferin—well done!" laughed her auditor in his turn. "You at least take your revenge on us in words: but we shall soon leave you, mother, for I hear the tread of feet upon your crazy stairs—my comrades are returning from their search. Before I go, however, this much by way of warning—when next there is an outcry at your door, open more quickly, if you would avoid suspicion—"

"Ne bilirim!—what can I say!" returned Fatma: "you scarce allow me time to waken from my sleep, and to wrap a shawl about my head, before you burst into my house. Mashallah! you are ill provided if you have not more wit than patience; and will be balked of your errand if you judge not more surely when you have left my house than when you entered it."

The search had of course proved fruitless; for the intruders, conscious that in the eagerness of their pursuit, they had violated one of the most sacred laws of their religion, which enjoins all good Musselmauns to respect the privacy of their women; and anxious, if possible, to recover traces of the fugitive; were satisfied with the scrutiny which they had bestowed on the narrow dwelling of Fatma, and did not attempt to push their investigation further, and to rouse the indignant woman to any loud and public expostulation or complaint.

In a few minutes, consequently, the house was cleared; but it was not until after a much longer interval that Fatma rose, and taking the lamp in her hand, jealously searched every recess throughout the whole building in order to assure herself that no spy yet lingered beneath her roof; ere she flung back the coverings from the face of Yusuf, and removed the cushions among which he had been buried.

"Shekiur Allah—praised be His name;" she said devoutly; "my son is yet beside me—the Prophet has heard my prayer. But you look not upon me, Yusuf, my well-beloved—my Aga!—my heart beats quick, and my breath is troubled—I am choked with joy even amid my misery—and will you not pay me with one smile for the life that I have saved?"

"Mother, you know that I love you:" was the cold and despairing answer. "It was my duty to obey you, and it is done—but all is now over—I am no longer Yusuf Aga—a brave man, and the associate of warriors—I am disgraced. With a weapon in my hand, I have crouched like a dog before my enemies; and owed my safety to the sheltering garments of a woman. While I live, I must hide my head that my shame may not be read upon my brow—and when I die, the houris of Paradise will turn aside, that they may not welcome a craven to their arms."

"Ouf! Ouf!" exclaimed the mother: "guzum—my eyes! talk not in a tone that breaks your mother's heart; if the Prophet waits at the door of the seventh heaven to welcome the souls of the brave and the beautiful, shall the good son be shut out? And now, to our task, my Aga; we may again be visited; we must make for you a readier and a surer place of refuge, where you may defy the pursuit of the fierce-minded and the revengeful."

"Even as you will, my mother," said Yusuf, as he pressed the hand of the old woman to his lips and forehead; "henceforward all shall be even as you list."

And Fatma was worthy of this trustfulness; for months wore on, and although more than once her home was invaded by the feet of strangers searching for her son, he escaped detection: and ultimately, if his existence were not forgotten, he was at least suffered to live in peace in his place of concealment. Often did he yearn for liberty, and suggest to Fatma his desire to attempt once more to escape into

the mountains, but she ever discountenanced the risk; and when he at length found himself unable to gain her concurrence, he made a second vow that until his fortunes changed—a circumstance that could only be achieved by a new revolution in the empire, and which was consequently almost beyond hope; or that he was carried away to his dishonored grave, he would never again trim his beard nor shave his head. Fatma heard the vow with thankfulness, for she felt that he had at least bent his heart wholly to his fortunes; and a gleam of joy passed over her wasted features as she remembered that she might yet possess the power of making those fortunes a shade less gloomy.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE LAST OF THE JANISSARIES—CONTINUED.

It was an hour before noon, three months subsequently to the fatal day which had ruined her son, that Fatma Hanoum having occasion to visit the bazăr in order to buy bread, and to collect the news with which she was wont to lighten the tedious hours of Yusuf's captivity, turned the key in the door of her dwelling; and with a slow and measured step moved aside from the direct road which led to Stamboul, and followed a narrow street of some length, stretching steeply up the side of one of the seven hills on which the city is built.

Arrived before a house of small but cleanly and comfortable appearance, she paused for a mŏment; and had she not been closely veiled, traces of great and violent agitation would have been discernable on her countenance. It was indeed a terrible moment for the heart of Fatma, which owned no idol but Yusuf, for in it she might perhaps be sealing his ruin; and she painfully felt that she was at all events weaning its best affections from herself. But the mother hesitated not from selfish motive—if she could shed a ray of light over the prison-chamber of her child, it was cheaply purchased at the price of her own regret: sterner and more terrible misgivings assailed her, when she found herself actually on the point of executing a purpose on which she had pondered from the first week of Yusuf's domestication beneath her roof.

"Inshallah—I trust in Heaven!" she murmured to herself when she at length raised the knocker and beat upon the door: "Allah will have mercy on a broken-hearted mother—I will not fear."

The door fell back, and as she crossed the threshold, she was greeted with the courteous "bonroûm" of the slave who opened it.

Fatma was a well-known and a welcome guest beneath the roof of Haïdè Hanoum; and the dark eyes of her pretty daughter ever turned lovingly upon the widow of Abdul. It was long since they had looked upon her; for, during the last few weeks, the women of Stamboul had feared to traverse the streets; and it was moreover known to the friends of Fatma that she had lost her two brave boys on the day of the massacre. On this occasion therefore she was doubly welcome; and she had scarcely reached the door of the harem, when its inmates uttered the kindly "Khosh geldin—you are welcome"—to which she as promptly replied "Khosh buldûk—well found—"

Room was immediately made for her upon the sofa beside her hostess, while the fair Saïryn seated herself at their feet, with her melancholy gaze fixed anxiously on the visiter.

In the next instant the elder lady clapped her hands, and as the attendant entered, she said softly—"Chibouque cahveh getir—Bring pipes and coffee." And when her guests had partaken of the sweet-scented mocha from the fair hands of the young Saïryn, and that she had applied her own lips to the ivory mouth-piece of the chibouque, and presented it to her guest, the slave withdrew, and the three friends were left alone.

"Alhemdullilah—praises be to Allah! the wife of Abdul is once more under my roof, and upon my sofa:" commenced the hostess. "Evil days have fallen upon us, Effendim; the sun has been hidden beneath a cloud; but Allah buyûk der—God is great—it may again shine out."

"For me it can gleam only on graves;" said Fatma sadly: "the days that are gone cannot be recalled; who shall give back the dead?"

And her two listeners bowed their heads upon their hands, and echoed: "Who shall give them back?"

"My youngest was as the gazelle upon the mountain;" continued the widow; "fleet of foot, and graceful as the blossom that bends to the south wind: he was a beyzadeh, the son of a lord. Stamboul held not one of nobler bearing; he has died the death of blood, and there are none to avenge him." And again her companions bent down, and murmured "Chok chay—it is hard to bear!"

"For my first-born:—" pursued Fatma Hanoum, encouraged by the voice of sympathy: "But why should I talk of him? Was he not as a star during tempest, a light at midnight, a spring in the desert? Was not his name mighty, and his arm strong?"

"Amăn! amăn! alas! alas!" sighed forth her auditors.

"He was fair to look upon, and they who knew him listened to his words, for they were the words of wisdom;" again burst forth the old woman; "to her whom he loved he would

have been as the wild vine that clings even to the death. Think, Saïryn;" she said suddenly, as she turned towards the fair girl, who sat at her feet; "think how dear the Hanoum your mother must have been to me, and how my aged eyes must have joyed to look upon your own beauty, when I sought you for his wife, the wife of my best and bravest—of my son Yusuf."

A smothered sob burst from the gentle girl as she listened. "Haif, haif! shame, shame!" she whispered, "that he too should be taken from you."

"And yet, better so;" said Fatma; "better that he should die in the pride of his beauty and of his strength, when he felt that his kismet, his fate, was bright, and that he was beloved; than linger in disgrace and poverty to be a by-word and a scoff; the rejected of those to whom his love was once a triumph and a boast."

"Can there live one so vile?" exclaimed Saïryn in an accent of generous indignation, as she raised her head proudly, and swept back the long tresses from her brow. "Lives there one whom Yusuf Aga could once have loved, who would desert him now? Ajaib! wonderful! Did Allah people the world with reptiles?"

"Guzel, guzel—good, good:" said Fatma Hanoum: "you speak like one who has never known falsehood, and never suffered wrong: your heart is pure, kizem, my daughter; and your words are pleasant. Oh, that Yusuf, that my son, could rise from his grave to hear them!"

"Listen to me, my mother;" said the fair girl; "I was taught to love the aga: I looked upon him when he knew not that my eye was at the lattice: and I needed thenceforth no further teaching. I am worthy to be your daughter, for I shall never love another."

The glance was keen and searching that Fatma Hanoum turned on the young beauty as she ceased speaking; but the bethrothed of Yusuf did not shrink beneath her eye. "Shekiur Allah! praise be to Heaven;" she said at length as she averted her gaze; "I am then not alone in my grief: my aga has not fallen unwept."

A burst of tears from the melancholy Saïryn was her only answer: and it was a relief to both when Haïdè Hanoum was summoned from the apartment on some household business, and they were left together.

"Come hither, Saïryn, come hither, my sultana;" said the old woman, as the tapestry curtain fell behind her hostess, and the echo of her slippered feet died away in the gallery beyond; "You are wise with the wisdom of riper age, and your heart is as the heart of a peri; I would share with you my joys and my sorrows, for the sake of him who should have

"Speak!" exclaimed the fair girl; "torture me not with caution; speak, Ekhi kateti, there is something! Tell me all, as you hope for a place in paradise."

"You are young as a spring blossom," pursued the cautious mother, regardless of the emotion of her listener; "and beautiful as an houri; your felech, your constellation may be a proud one. Who shall foretell your fate?"

"Could any cunning give me back my aga, the light of my eyes, the pulse of my heart, I would laugh all other grief to scorn," broke in Saïryn; "my heart is in his grave, and the sky of my youth is clouded. Talk not to me of my own beauty, but tell me of your son; though the tale drown me in tears it will be welcome, for it will be of him."

"Listen, then, child of my hope, and star of my evening sky;" said Fatma Hanoun, in a shrill whisper, bending as she spoke toward her listener. "Utter no cry, tell it not to any, not even to the mother who gave you birth, lest the wind of heaven bear away the tale to those who thirst for the blood of the mighty; Yusuf Aga lives!"

The warning was unnecessary; for, as the startling truth broke upon her, the gentle Saïryn fell back senseless upon her cushions. Yet did not Fatma Hanoum yield to the terror which seized upon her as she witnessed the effect of her intelligence; she rather hailed it as a proof of the deep and undying affection which she coveted for her son; and with her accustomed self-possession she bathed the lips and brow of the unhappy girl with water, and soon saw her recover from her swoon.

"Ne bilirim—what can I say?" were the first words that she gasped out; "I am his, heart and soul, as when I was first vowed to him—But we must not whisper this, Effendimou—let us be jealous of our secret; say but that you will take me to your bosom, and I will fly to share his griefs. Nay, deny me not"—she added passionately, as the aged woman was about to speak: "I can understand all that you would tell me—Yusuf is a prisoner—shut out from all commerce with his kind—debarred from the light of day—wasting away his strength in tears and darkness. Is it not so, my mother? I am prepared for all this—only say that you have room for me in your heart, and I will escape hence, and dwell beneath the same roof as my promised lord—I will be the light to cheer his darkness, and the comfort that shall dry his tears. If my own heart does not deceive me, love can overmaster destiny; and Yusuf Aga may yet be happy. Only tell me that he will not reject me, mother; only promise that he will not spurn my affection; and, from the hour that I enter your dwelling, he shall be my world, and I will never nurse a wish of which he is not the object."

self at the feet of her companion, listening for the permission to blight her youth and her loveliness, with a wild eagerness that had in it something almost sublime.

"Allah buyûk der—Allah is great!" said the old woman, as the tears streamed from her dim eyes: "it shall be even as you will, my daughter: but think well ere you determine on so desperate an act. We are poor, very poor—day by day misery and want are creeping on us, and we know not how to stay their steps—Yet, if you will share our poverty—if your love for Yusuf, and the power of your felech indeed urge you to the sacrifice, come to me, and be to me as a daughter: for none save Yusuf can love you as I shall do—"And she folded her arms about the generous girl, and they mingled their tears together.

A week elapsed from the visit of Fatma to the harem of Haïdè Hanoum, when, as she sat one evening in the apartment which touched upon the prison-chamber of Yusuf, her eager eyes glancing at intervals toward the casement, and her head bent forward in the attitude of listening, a low signal, for which she had evidently been prepared, sounded from below, and she hurriedly rose from her sofa to obey it. Not a word was spoken until she returned to her accustomed station: and then a low burst of passionate joy escaped her, as she threw herself on the neck of a shrouded figure by which she had been followed.

"Is all well, mother?" asked a sweet and tremulous voice; "does the Aga Effendi know of my coming? and may I meet him without fear? Tell me truly, lest I die of shame beneath his frown—"

"He knows not of your resolve;" answered the mother; "how could I dare to make his heart leap with joy ere I was assured that you would not repent? But Shekiur Allah—praise be to Allah, you are here: and he will share the joy of paradise when he learns the greatness of your love."

The trembling girl heard no more. She sank upon the floor with her face buried in her cloak, and her breath came thick and fast as she sobbed out: "Eh vah! was this well done? Shall I not be less than nothing in his sight when he first looks upon me?"

"Allaha es marladek—Heaven preserve you, my daughter;" was the soothing reply; "the earth holds nothing so dear as you will be to Yusuf. Have you not resigned every thing for his sake?" and, as she spoke, she withdrew the mantle of the weeping girl, and seated her gently upon the sofa.

"Khosh geldin, you are welcome; a thousand times welcome! and were this poor hovel the serail of a sultan, still should you be its mistress. And now, hearken, my daughter—Yusuf is not far distant; he can even hear the murmur of our voices; and I will speak to him—" and approaching the wall of the apartment she said in a louder tone: "Korkma, fear not, my son, although I am not alone: for the first time it is the voice of a friend which comes to you in your prison; even of one who loves you."

"Kim boo—who is that?" was the bitter and incredulous rejoinder; who is there on earth save yourself who now wastes a thought on the wretched Yusuf?"

"Whom would you that it should be?" asked the old woman, as calmly as her joy would permit her to put the question.

"Alas! I know not:" said the despairing prisoner. "Those whom I loved have fallen from me, or have been murdered before my eyes; there lives not one on earth whom I now desire to see: save, indeed, the maiden who should have been my bride, and that can never be—"

"Tchabouk, tchabouk—quick, quick—let me fly to your feet, Agamon—my Aga—" almost shrieked the excited Sairyn, as the words reached her ear; "say not that it can never be, for I am here!"

CHAPTER XLV.

THE LAST OF THE JANISSARIES—CONTINUED.

Two years passed slowly by: and a wretched group sat together on the floor of a narrow room, divested of every sign and appliance of comfort. The ragged sofa which was its only furniture, stretched along three sides of the apartment, and revealed no longer the original pattern of its covering; a battered and discolored brazier contained a few smoldering ashes, totally inadequate to their purpose; and a coarse earthen pitcher and cup stood a few paces distant, the only visible mean of refreshment for its melancholy occupants.

The most remarkable individual of the party was a man in the prime of life, but wasted by famine; and with a thick and tangled beard falling to his girdle, which had evidently once been of the deepest black, but which now, like the elf-locks that escaped from beneath his dingy and well-worn turban, was chequered with gray. Beside him sat a woman on whom time and sorrow had alike wrought their bitter will. Her brow was deeply furrowed, and her long sharp features gave indication of a craving which had been often unappeased; while the cloud that dulled her large dim eye spoke a despair in which words would have been less eloquent.

But there was yet another in this miserable company; the strong man and the aged woman had not paid the penalty of famine and misery alone. There was yet another, whose unearthly and transparent beauty might well have charmed the gaunt demon from his prey! It

was a young fair woman—so young, and so fair, that she seemed rather like a dream-born vision than a denizen of earth. Her dress was scanty and squalid; and on her knee she pillowed a dead infant—a miniature of her own loveliness; for whom the fountains of life had been dried up by the gnawing want of the mother. Her dark wild eyes, flashing with a fierce and unnatural light, glanced rapidly from her cold burthen to the face of her wretched husband, and thence back again upon her child; but only by that quick and frenzied look did she venture to ask if all were indeed over; for she feared the answer that his quivering lips would utter. Suddenly a thought—a memory—a dream of past days, flashed across the mind of Yusuf—for it was indeed Yusuf who sat beside his childless wife—and a sickly smile gleamed for a moment over his pallid face.

"Mother;" he said in a low hollow voice: "the Prophet has given me a glimpse of the past—we may yet save my wife—my beloved one—a while longer. Well do I know that it is not for yourself that you mourn, but for her—for the self-sacrificing woman, who has blessed me at the expense of her own misery. In the years when I was free, and a brave man among the warriors, a boy of the palace came to me one day for gold; I lent him all that I had: they were but two purses, but they availed him much; and he swore by his beard that he would repay them when I claimed the debt. How say you? Will you go to the house of Tasin Bey, and say to him—'My lord, I am the mother of Yusuf Aga, whom, while he lived, you loved; I am old and poor—I lack bread, and can find none—my son lent you two purses—will you not pay them back to her for whom he had hoarded them?'"

"Yusuf janum—my soul;" faltered out the old woman; "it is so long since you have had dealings with the great ones of the earth, that you have forgotten of what clay the Prophet made them. Listen to me: to-morrow I will enter beneath the roof of Tasin Bey, and I will tell him that I am the mother of the aga, who was his friend: if he welcome me to his home, and put bread before me, then will I remind him of the debt; but, if his brow be cold, and his words few, I will not peril your pride when the avowal would avail nothing. The debtor wears his conscience upon his face; and even as you read there, so will it be."

"You are wise, and I am as nothing before you;" conceded the heart-worn Yusuf. "Be it as you have said."

"He may perchance greet me kindly;" assumed Fatma, her hope growing more strong, as she recalled the friendship which once existed between the young noble and her son; "And should he do so, the rest will be sure; and we may yet have rice wherewith to make the pillauf of plenty for our precious Saïryn. For the babe;" she added more sadly, "it is already a spirit sporting in the garden of Paradise, and sleeping in the hearts of the ever-blooming roses watered by the houris.'

"Speak you of my child?" murmured out a low voice. "He is a hungered, and I have no food—bring him bread, and all will yet be well."

The wretched man buried his face in his hands, and groaned aloud.

"Weep not, Agamou—my Aga;" said the fair young mother, laying her dead child softly on the floor beside her, and approaching her husband: "I have no hunger, and he has now ceased to pine; why, then, do you grieve? We have suffered much, but, for me, I shall soon fall asleep, for I feel my eyelids heavy; and you will not awaken me, save to still the wailings of my babe if he should seek for me."

And as Yusuf folded her to his heart, she sank into the deep dreamless slumber which so often precedes the death of famine.

"Allah buyûk der—God is great;" said Yusuf: "but this is almost more than I can bear. Years have passed over me in pain and terror, and for myself I would not murmur, even now: but to see her thus! What can be done, my mother?—think for me; for my brain wanders, and I am as a child, not knowing how to guide my steps."

"Bear up yet this night;" urged the aged woman in reply; "to-morrow the sun may rise unclouded. Who shall say?"

And he did bear it—and early on the ensuing morning Fatma Hanoum folded her tattered cloak about her, and sped to the dwelling of Tasin Bey; and, despite the jests of the idle attendants who thronged the entrance-hall, and who jeered alike at her age and at her raiment, she waited patiently until the bey passed through the apartment, on his way to the caïque which was waiting to convey him to the palace of the sultan.

"Ne istersiniz—what do you want, woman?" he asked impatiently, as she placed herself upon his path. "Do you not see that I am in haste?"

"And do you not see on your side that I am in want?" sternly demanded the old woman in her turn: "I shall hold my lord back but an instant in his errand of pride. By the memory of Yusuf Aga, whom you once loved, I come to conjure you to look upon my misery."

"Yusuf Aga died the death of a traitor;" said the bey with a dark frown. "and I will not that my dwelling be polluted by his name; but you are old and needy, and his treason should not be visited upon your gray hairs by one who loved him ere he fell. Step aside, Effendim; I have yet a moment to spare: and you shall tell me the story of your grief."

The indignant Fatma had well nigh vented her disappointed wrath in reproaches when the bey commenced his address; but, as she raised her eye to his, she did not read there

the same stern expression which sat upon his brow: and she restrained her anger. Obeying the motion of his hand, she passed silently from the hall to an inner room; and was shortly followed by the young courtier, who cast down the tapestry curtain of the door behind him as he entered, ere he said hurriedly—

"What is this? Are you indeed the mother of Yusuf Aga, my friend? Why do I see you in the garb of utter want, when he must have told you that I owe him gold? Did you fear that I should deny the debt?"

"Y'Allah—in the name of the Prophet, no, my lord;" replied the delighted Fatma: "but the ear of the rich is heavy, and the heart of the happy, shut. You ask me why I have been dumb so long; I have no other answer—na to ne—there it is."

"You have done me wrong," pursued the bey: "nor have you judged more wisely in betraying your errand to my slaves. Know you not that the name of Yusuf Aga is to be blotted from the memory of men? I may doubt, in my turn, if you be indeed his mother."

"Inshallah!—the debt is two purses," was the laconic reply of the old woman.

"Hai, hai—true, true," said the bey readily—"and first I will deliver to you the piastres:" and taking an embroidered purse from his girdle, he counted the coin into the trembling hand of the overjoyed Fatma.

"And now," he continued, as she hid the treasure among her rags, "tell me of your gallant son. Often have I wept over his memory; but, Inshallah—I trust in Allah, I shall yet meet him in Paradise."

"May the houris be long in pouring forth the sherbet of my lord," said the aged woman. "May his days on earth be many, and his sorrows few, for Yusuf loved him as a brother: and nobler heart bled not on that day of murder than that of my noble boy!"

"Did you look on him in death?" demanded the bey; "or was he lost among the many who were seen no more?"

"I watched over him beneath my own poor roof," replied the mother. "I saw his bright eye dim, and his bold heart weak—and yet I live."

Her listener paused for a moment, and a strange expression swept across his brow. "Lingered he long in misery?" he asked in a shrill whisper.

"Long, long—look at this withered arm—it upheld him till it failed."

Again there was a momentary silence, which was broken by the low tones of the courtier: "Mother," he said, "you are poor, and need gold—a wild fancy has come upon me—I could almost dream that your son yet lives; if it be so, deceive me not; for thus he must, like yourself, be in want and misery. What do you fear? Did I not love him well? and is not my hand open? Why should you cheat me with false words, as though I had been one of those who wrought him evil. Nay," he added, more peremptorily, "it is too late to throw the mantle of falsehood over the garb of truth; you tremble, and your limbs fail you—Otour, otour—sit, sit, mother; my friend Yusuf lives!"

"What shall I say?" exclaimed Fatma; "my lord is as one who has stood behind the curtain of knowledge, and read the characters of the wise men; it is even as he has said, Yusuf Aga lives."

"And where?" eagerly inquired the young noble. "Tell me where I may once more look upon, and listen to him; my heart yearns to my friend."

"La illaha illallah, there is but one Allah," murmured the mother beneath her breath. "Yusuf is saved, Saïryn is saved, and I may go down to the place of tombs in peace. Amân, amân—alas, alas—why came not this help from heaven in time to turn aside the hand of the destroying angel from their precious babe!"

"Tell me, mother," repeated the bey earnestly; "tell me only the retreat of Yusuf, that I may hasten to mingle my tears with his"

"Nay, not so, agam, my lord," said Fatma gravely, as a chill crept over her heart: "I have already betrayed to you a secret which was scarce mine own: more I dare not do; but I will pour into the ear of my wretched son the glad story of your kindness, and it shall be then even as he wills."

"To-morrow, then," said the noble, as he moved towards the door; "I will urge you no further now: the heart of Yusuf shall decide the rest. I am high in favor with the padishah, and who shall say that the pardon of your son may not be won by his early friend?"

"Allah es marladek—Heaven take you into its holy keeping," sobbed out the transported mother: "there is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet."

"Farewell, Effendim:" smiled the bey; "I can delay my departure no longer: but I pray you leave not my house until you have dipped your spoon into my pillauf." And clapping his hands, he summoned a slave, and bade him lead the aged Fatma to the door of the harem, and commend her to the care of the women, that she might not depart from beneath his roof fasting. "Tell not your errand to any," he added, as he turned to depart: "there is yet much to be done ere the talo be bruited in the city streets." And he hurried to his boat, followed by a blessing such as few have ever breathed.

Fatma Hanoum feasted—withstood the thousand questions which assailed her on all sides from the women of the Bey; and finally set

forth on her return to her own wretched dwelling, laden with food, and bright with hope. Once more there was joy in the prison-chamber of the wasted Aga—once more—and how cruel a proof was this of the utterness of their previous despair—they talked to each other of *the future*—hitherto they had not dared to do it! With such a friend—by whom, even amid prosperity and happiness, he had been unforgotten, for what might Yusuf not hope? Even the childless mother, imbibing a portion of the delight which beamed upon the brow of her husband, pressed her stiffened infant to her breast, and smiled a sickly smile. Alas! none could give her back her dead!

"Mother;" said Yusuf earnestly: "can it indeed be true that I shall again look upon one of the friends of my happy days? It as a promised light from heaven! It is so long since I have listened to the voice of sympathy, save from the lips of those who were suffering for my sake. that I know not if I shall outlive the joy! Delay him not, my mother, lest my heart burst with the suspense: lead him here to-morrow, that I may commence a new existence, and feel that I have yet a tie to the bright world on which I have not looked for long and weary years."

"Have you no fear, my son?" ventured the old woman. "It is a mighty trust!"

"Does he not deserve it at my hands?" asked Yusuf in reply; "I were base, vile, if I could doubt him. No, my mother; the Prophet is weary of our tears, and we shall yet be happy. And you, my Saïryn, my beautiful betrothed, who have lavished on the captive and dishonored Yusuf all the love that you had vowed only to the bold and favored Aga, you shall be as the light of my eyes, and as the pulse of my heart, when the beam of heaven once more shines upon my brow, and the blessing of Allah is upon my fortunes. Tell me, sultana of my soul, shall it not be thus?"

And the beautiful girl hid her face upon his shoulder, and murmured out. "So shall it be, if the Prophet hear my prayer!"

The eyes of Yusuf did not close in sleep during that long, long night: but he lay upon his rude cushions, buried in sweet and retrospective thought. All the proudest days of his strong youth passed in array before him, and he remembered the high aspirings and ambitious hopes with which he had been used to color his existence. Hastily he reviewed the hour which prostrated his fortunes—he could not bear the memory—and with a smile, mingled with a tear which would not be suppressed, the picture terminated with the fair creature who was pillowed on his bosom—the victim of her holy and earnest love!

The morning dawned at length—the blessed day was come which was to restore to the hood; and the hour was yet early at which the aged Fatma started on her anxious expedition. She tarried long—or it seemed long to the weary watcher whom she had left: but when she came, the tale she had to tell repaid him for all his suffering.

Kindly and courteously had the Bey received her: again she had eaten of his pillauf, and drank of his cup: he had listened to all the story of Yusuf's sufferings; and vowed on the Korân to terminate them. Already had he asked a boon of the Sultan, who had smiled upon his suit; and Fatma felt that the boon could be no other than the pardon of his friend. Affairs of state detained him; but, his duty done, he would hasten to the presence of the captive, soon to be so no longer; and meanwhile a slave had followed the footsteps of the old woman, and then returned to his master, to serve him as his guide.

Again and again did the happy Fatma tell her tale; and the theme was still unchanged when a heavy stroke on the door of the house summoned her to receive the expected guest: and, hastily snatching a shawl from the sofa, and folding it about her face, she descended to draw the bolt.

There was the silence of a moment: and the heart of Yusuf beat high as he sprang from the floor to meet his friend. "He is here, Saïryn; janum—my soul, he is here!" he exclaimed with a burst of his former joyousness—but his transport was short-lived. A piercing shriek rang from below—it was the voice of Fatma; and in another moment the tramp of many feet sounded upon the stairs!

In an instant the yataghan of Yusuf was in his hand, and he stood glaring like a roused tiger in the direction of the sound. "Too late!"—he shouted in his despair: "Oh, that you had not tarried, my friend! my friend! Had you speeded, you might yet have saved me!"

But as the agonized cry escaped from the lips of the doomed man, the generous dream was at an end; for on the threshold of the chamber stood Tasin Bey, surrounded by a band of armed attendants. For a moment the arch-traitor paused, in doubt that the wretched object before him could indeed be Yusuf Aga. For a moment he remained paralyzed with horror as he gazed upon the gaunt and haggard wretch, who, with elf-locks hanging matted upon his shoulders, and a tangled and loathsome beard depending to his girdle, his cheeks sunk and hollow, and his eyes bright with fierce and blinding light, met him midway of the apartment; his weapon raised over his head, and his blue and livid lips parted above his fast-clenched teeth!

Ere he had recovered his horror, Yusuf struck. With a yell like that of a hunted savage his weapon was buried to the hilt in the

a step in front of his comrades: and it seemed as though the blow had loosed the spell which had bound the senses of their leader; fore ere the desperate aga could withdraw his weapon, the bey had pronounced the fatal word, and instantly a score of his followers rushed upon their victim. But the soul of Yusuf appeared to have called back its strength in his last moment of trial, and he struggled like a demoniac. Suddenly there was a frightful gushing groan—a heavy fall and he lay senseless at the feet of his persecutors—yet no steel had touched—no cord had polluted him—he lay bathed in blood, but it had gushed from his mouth and nostrils. Nature, so long neglected, had been overtaxed in this hour of passion, and he had burst an artery.

When they raised him up, he was beyond their power. Allah, in his own good time, had taken to himself the Last of the Janissaries!

CHAPTER XLVI.

Immediately after the mid-day prayer, when the intense heat tempted a great portion of the inhabitants of the city to spend an hour in sleep, Maniolopolo, on the morrow of his visit to the theriaki tcharchi, again bent his steps thitherward, to seek an interview with the almè.

As he was rich and generous, he met with no opposition from the master of the tavern, who conducted him without comment to the door of an apartment which was veiled by a screen of dark-colored baize; and here, having called loudly on the name of Nevreste, he left Maniolopolo standing while he shuffled back to his rug in the public room.

A shrill and peevish voice was soon heard in reply; and the slippers of a woman, hastily assumed, sounded upon the floor behind the screen, which was snatched aside, and the young Greek found himself confronted by an aged and wrinkled woman, whose mass of fiery hair chequered with gray had escaped from the confinement of a bright yellow handkerchief, painted in gaudy masses of color, and bowed upon her shoulders, her dress was of huge-patterned furniture chintz, girt round her waist with a well-worn cachemire, which had once been costly enough to emeture the loins of a pasha; her trowsers were of blue muslin, to which a few patches of tarnished gold yet adhered as it in mockery; her legs were bare, and her whole appearance so compounded of meretriciousness and squalor, that Maniolopolo had some difficulty in subduing the sensation of disgust with which he looked on her.

"Be hey—what's this?" she asked sharply. Had we not enough of your loud brawling last night to bring down the cadi and his gang upon us, and to keep us waking, that you return at mid-day? Go, go, effendim, the almè sleep; and they have need to do so, for they dance to-night in the harem of the tchorbadji."

"I do not seek the almè;" replied Maniolopolo, gently: "it was yourself of whom I came in search."

The crone laughed. "Evallah—to be sure! so says every young haramzadeh whom I find upon my threshold; 'mother, it is you I want;' but I have lived among the mountains, young sir, and can see beyond the flight of an arrow."

"May your eyes never fail!" whispered the Greek, as he pressed a gold coin against her open palm. "I come to seek that of you, in which, if they be not keen and quick, you will lack the power to serve me."

"And what wills my lord?" asked Nevreste more courteously, as she twisted her long hair once more beneath her head-kerchief, and tighted the shawl about her waist; "some rose-bud of a sheltered tree to which he would fain be the sunshine, to be told of his passion; or—"

"Ajaib—wonderful!" interposed Maniolopolo, affecting surprise at her discernment.

"You have indeed guessed my meaning, mother. How say you? will you undertake so sweet a mission?"

The hag replied by grasping her throat with her skinny fingers, and nodding her head significantly.

"Min Allah—Heaven forbid!" said the Greek; "you are too keen and quick-witted to incur so direful a penalty. Listen to me," and he enforced his request with a second piece of gold, which at once secured the attention of the old woman; "I have a sister, a slave in the pasha's harem—"

"The pasha's harem!" broke in Nevreste in affright, "and who am I that I should venture into the secret apartments of a satrap, and carry a blight to his roses?"

"Nay, nay; you talk idly," said Maniolopolo, impatiently; "do I not tell you that I only seek to inform my sister of my vicinity; my young and innocent sister; the playmate of my infancy; the delight of my boyhood; my bitterly-wept and regretted sister; my only one!"

"Humph! there is some reason in that, to be sure," muttered the old crone, while a shade of something which almost looked like feeling flitted over her brow, and then as suddenly disappeared; and left it cold and rigid, and stony as before, like the marble across which a struggling sunbeam has flickered for an instant; "I too had a brother once, an only one, as you say, but he died—he was cut down by an Egyptian scimitar (may the arm be withered that wielded it!) and it was years ago, before I had forgotten how to weep; and

by the soul of your father, I shed tears enough: but all that is gone by now, and I am the mother of a troop of almè, without a home, or a kinsman; living among gibes and blows, and curses, with a scanty pillauf, and a tattered veil—but ey vah—mercy on us! what dirt am I eating to talk thus? The seal is set upon every man's forehead at his birth, and as it was written, it will be. Bana bak—look at me, young, sir; do I not seem like one who can bear a heavy burden yet without falling under it?" And the bitter laugh with which she directed the attention of Maniolopolo to her squalid wretchedness rang painfully on his ear, as he attempted to murmur out some commonplace about better days and a brighter fate.

"Tush, tush;" interposed the old woman, with a wild smile; "string no fine sentences together to hang upon my rags: foucaralk chanumdr—poverty is my glory. You young beyzadehs know nothing of the gay immunity of poverty. It is your great men who are slaves; while we, the refuse of the city, the wanderers of the land, the outcasts of society, we are the free; no codgea-bashi lifts the latch of our dwellings to collect tribute; no latticed and bolted harem fetters our will; no saraf ever runs away with our hoarded gold; we come and go as we list; our teskara (passport) needs no signature but our own; and every hedge-side or empty tomb is a menzil khaneh (post-house) equal to our wants. So no more sugared words to Nevrestè, who is as much beyond the pity of every stranger with whom she comes in contact during her roving life, as she is indisposed to accept it. Gold! young sir; let your consolation be offered in gold—that is a universal language, never misunderstood. And now to business: what would you ask of me?"

"My request is simple: I would see my sister, and I seek from you the opportunity of doing so."

"Mashallah! is that all? You would lift the screen, and tread the carpets of a pasha's harem! You are mad, stark mad, the veriest delhibashi—prince of madmen, in the province. Have you no desire to wear a gray beard, that you give the measure of your throat so early? I will not work for your ruin, you are too young and too handsome for the bowstring."

"Allah kerim—He is merciful!" said Maniolopolo: "I trust in him."

"Allah! Allah! yes, yes;" replied the old crone peevishly; "but let your words and your actions be alike reasonable; throw the mantle from your head, and see clearly for once; and then I shall hear no more of the pasha's harem."

"I am resolved;" said the young Greek moodily.

"And will you swear to this story of the sister?"

"I will."

"And her name is——?"

"Katinka;" replied Maniolopolo: "by birth a Sciote, but long dwelling in Circassia."

"What do you tell me!" exclaimed Nevrestè hastily: "are you indeed the brother of the young Greek slave of whom I have heard so much—Ajaib—wonderful! They say that she reads the Koran like a Moullah, writes verses which would not disgrace a Hafiz, sings like a bulbul, and dances like one of my own almè. Young sir, by the grave of your mother, is all this true?"

"All;" said Maniolopolo; "and she has moreover the warmest heart and the quickest wit in all Roum:* and the brightest eye, and the lightest foot. How say you? Will you not assist me in looking on her once more?"

"Ne apalum—what can I do? I have received no summons from the pasha: and how may I present myself unbidden at the palace?"

"Nay! now you laugh at my beard;" said the young Greek: "have you not in your banc one of the loveliest houri out of paradise; and would not a hint to the Aga Baba—"

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly. Effendim;" interposed Nevrestè; "I wish to draw the eye of no aga baba in the country on the beautiful Mherpirwir;† she is to me as the purple lily a rare and precious thing; and I love her like a mother; there is no maiden in the brigh band so dear to me as Mherpirwir."

"Did you call me, mother?" asked a swee voice, as the coarse screen was drawn aside and a face as fresh and fair as a May mornin suddenly appeared behind it; "I am here."

"Nay, nay;" said the old woman, hastil but not unkindly; "I want you not, kizen my daughter; I called you not: is it ever thu with you, while the others sleep, you watch while the others idle, you toil for all. Go in Mherpirwir, go in; I have business with th Effendi, and shall be with you presently."

The fair girl bent her head in token of obe dience, but ere she retired, cast one hurrie glance at the stranger; their eyes met, an those of the young beauty fell before the ea nest look of the Greek. With the instinctiv tact of a woman she at once perceived ho deeply Maniolopolo was impressed by her e celling loveliness, and she may well be pa doned if she lingered in her retreat.

The almè was about sixteen years of age, all the glow and glory of a beauty such as seldom looked upon. Her long dark hair fa tastically braided with beads and ribands, an intermixed with bright-colored ribands, fell a most to her feet, and was swept back from brow of dazzling whiteness, surmounting ey of intense light and lustre. Her figure w slight and graceful, and her expression so and somewhat melancholy. To discover s

* Turkey. † Nurse of Love.

his, one glance sufficed ; and had Maniolopolo been less preoccupied, and had the fair creature before him been other than she was, an almè, an outcast, a wanderer among men, to whom her beauty was a jest, and her youth a snare —he felt as though he could have sought a haven in her love, and a paradise in her smiles.

The dark screen fell from her hand ; and as she disappeared, it seemed to the young Greek as though the light had suddenly failed. For a moment he stood silently gazing on the veiled portal through which she had passed, but only for a moment, for the voice of Nevrestè soon recalled him from his revery.

"Ay, ay, look your fill, her beauty may well fix the eye of a young gallant, whose heart, like the blossom of the rose-tree, opens to the first sunshine that flashes on it : but you came not for this ; nor can you linger here all day to set the tongues of the whole city wagging in old Nevrestè and her troop of almè ; Wallah ! You have seen her, and do you still talk to me of the pasha and his aga baba ?"

"Nay, chide me not mother :" said Maniopolo deprecatingly ; "the pasha has a fair young wife, as fair as Mherpirwir : and it is said that he loves her as the men of this land seldom love a woman : he will look upon your houri only as a bright shape whose gracefulness can charm the eye of his young bride, and will pour gold into her lap, and forget her."

The aged woman stood for a moment buried in thought, and then abruptly and steadily lifting her eyes to the excited countenance of her companion, she said slowly : "Na to ne—here it is—at length I have read the dream. And the truth is in the hollow of my hand. Effendim, you love the pasha's wife !"

The address was so sudden and so unlooked for that Maniolopolo was totally unprepared with a reply, and his confusion confirmed the wily and shrewd old woman in her suspicions.

"My son ;" she pursued gravely : "I know not why I feel thus interested in your fortunes —I thought that my heart had long been seared, but now I see that it can yet beat even for a stranger. What are you about to dare ? Even were it the mere idle caprice of a young wild spirit which prompted you to put your head under the pasha's foot, you might well be prepared never again to lift it from the earth : but if it be as I suspect—and I am one who has read for years the sable page of passion—that you are hurried on to ruin by a vision which never can be realized, ponder well your purpose ; for be assured that cunningly as you may hope to weave your web of wiles, that ruin will come at last."

"Hiqsi birdir—so be it. It will be welcome, if the price must be paid ;" said Maniolopolo almost sternly.

"And yet, you are young—and the grove shelters many birds of soft note and bright plumage, even if the bulbul be not there ;" urged Nevrestè.

The Greek smiled bitterly.

"Pek ahi, dostoum—it is well, my friend ;" replied the old woman, who required no words to read his meaning. "And now, tell me ; wherefore should I risk the same ruin ?—you are a stranger ; until last night I never looked upon you—and last night, how did we meet ? amid broil, and brawl, and intemperance, and riot : you will reply that my days are numbered, and that their remnant can be of little value, and I can pardon you the taunt, for you do not know, you cannot know, in your bright years of strength and pride, how decaying nature clings to her ruined shrine, and hugs the fragments of her own beauty as they fall from her. It is strange that I waste so many words upon you—strange !—but let us part now, and if you have parents in your own land who would weep over their lost son, go in peace, and forget the madness that has sprung up in your spirit."

"I have none to mourn me—none to weep for me ;" said the young man.

"Away, then, away—and be just to yourself—the bird that has no mate spreads a wider wing, and takes a bolder flight."

"You counsel me in vain ;" said Maniolopolo, "the die is cast — derdumden oldum beigoud—my torment makes me mad ; forget your suspicions, mother ; and remember that they are but suspicions—recall the days when you had a brother whom you loved : and help me once more to look upon a sister who has been long lost to me."

"Delhibashi !" exclaimed Nevrestè impatiently ; what would you ask of me ?"

"Even to join your troop—I will wear any disguise—I will obey any behest—I will pay every effort which you make for me with gold. Nay, look not so scared, mother : I am young, and your skill will surely suffice to make an almè of a sakal-siz."*

The old woman stood lost in thought for a time, but at length she broke forth in an earnest : "No, no—I cannot, I dare not—you know not what you ask ; are not the almè trained from childhood to their graceful trade ; and would you cast dirt upon my head by betraying your madness to every looker-on ? Did you not see Mherpirwir but a moment back ? Would you stand beside her on the carpet of the Pasha, and hope to escape ?"

"Not so, mother ; I would be the massaldgluf of your troop ; give me a veil and a turban, an Arab drum, a heavy mantle ; dye my hands with henna, and veil my shoulders with the flowing tresses of a young beauty ; and while the almè repose between their dances, I will win the ear of the Pasha's

* Youth, literally "no-beard."
† Professional story-teller.

harem with wild tales, and earn gold for you with a cunning tongue. Wallah billah! you shall carry a heavy purse when you leave the city. And here, jaguir benum—my guardian angel—here is wherewithal to provide for me such garments as you may deem fitting."

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly, young man;" said Nevrestè; "I am not a lover, and I cannot travel so swiftly: but we will see what can be done;" and she deposited her new gains with the first offering of her companion in the folds of her tattered girdle; "Mherpirwir shall decide if we may venture our necks so near the grasp of the capidjibashi; enter this room on the right, and I will come to you in a moment. I have already told you that we go to-night to the harem of the Tchorbadji; and when the almè awaken they will find plenty of employment in preparing for this visit."

Maniolopolo obeyed, and instantly found himself in a gloomy apartment, overstrewn with the paraphernalia of the Terpsichorean troop. There were bouquets of artificial flowers, most inartificially wrought, small citerns, and guitars, and a sort of rude castanet of rosewood; gaily-coloured veils of gauze, girdles of cachemire, and slippers of velvet worked with gold and beads. A tambourine, fantastically ornamented with pendant ribbons, lay on the divan near the window; and Maniolpolo amused himself during the absence of the old woman with this toy-like instrument, which was familiar to his hand; and as he did so, his thoughts flew back to the happy time, when to its rattle, he had led the graceful romaïka, and taught the beautiful Carimfil to dream bright dreams of his lost and regretted land.

He was still absorbed in his occupation, when an astonished "Mashallah!" sounded close beside him, and he perceived that Nevrestè and the young beauty had entered the apartment unobserved, and were gazing on him with unfeigned gratification.

"Why this is well, khatoun—my darling;" said the old woman; "you handle the tambourine like a high-priest of Anirân at the bridal of a sultana! How say you, Mherpirwir, my pearl? If the veil and the antery become him like the instrument, may we not venture something to pleasure him?"

"The effendi is master;" said the almè, in a low, sweet tone; "If he seeks my aid, I am ready."

"May your beauty never decrease, janum—my soul!" exclaimed Maniolopolo; for which wish he was recompensed by a deep blush, and a faint smile; "under your auspices I am sure of success—look you—should you need a minstrel to vary the charm of your gracefulness, I am your slave;" and he seized one of the guitars, and sang in a sweet subdued voice a well-known fable, in the musical words of Hafiz:—

There was a bright and a sunny sky
Spread over a laughing land,
But one small vapor was floating by,
Where the wild wave kiss'd the strand
And as it pass'd o'er the ocean-swell,
A rain-drop from the dark cloud fell.

"Alas!" the limpid moisture sigh'd,
As it clave the yielding air;
"And must I perish in that salt tide,
And die unregarded there?
Hard is my fate to be thus riven
From my glorious place 'mid the blue of Heaven!"

Down, down it fell: but ere the tide
Touch'd the bright sand of the shore,
An oyster that thirsted, open'd wide
Its pearl encrusted door;
And by the soft breathing of the air,
The limpid drop was wafted there.

Time pass'd—and then a fisher came,
And from that oyster drew
A precious prize, whose wondrous fame
Through many a region flew;
The rain-drop had become a gem,
To deck a monarch's diadem!

"Or, should you not love the monotony of——"

"Nay, say not so," interposed the almè eagerly: "say not so; there is no maiden in the band with such a voice; I will answer for you with my head. Is it not so, mother?"

"Bakalum—we shall see," answered Nevrestè, quietly; "put your veil upon the beyzazadeh, and let us see if he can teach those dark eyes of his as much softness as he has taught his tones. Hand hither those long tresses that Gubeïde has flung down so heedlessly in yonder corner; and bid Giadilla lend you her robe: she is the tallest of the band. There, go, and be speedy in your return. And you, young sir," she added, as the girl disappeared across the threshold, "look towards me, unless you are anxious to make a mirror of the screen, and thus delay your purpose by gazing after a vision that has vanished."

With a silent smile Maniolopolo obeyed; and on the return of the almè, the last touch was given to his costume, and the disguise declared to be perfect. Mherpirwir clasped her little hands in wonder, and whispered that he was a subject for the sunny foreground of a Benuzzeer: but all the skill and patience of the fair girl failed to make the handsome young Greek move like an almè, and ultimately the attempt was abandoned in despair, and it was decided that his guitar must be his dependence, coupled with his talents as a massaldjhi, of which they were content to accept his assurance.

The lovely Mherpirwir was zealous in her services; she taught the new pupil a thousand little coquettish graces; showed him the exact shade of the henna which must decorate his fingers, and the precise curve that he must give to his eyebrows: laughed heartily at the

languishments by which he endeavored to subdue the flashing of his dark eyes, and the mincing step, and unaccustomed slide of the embroidered slipper; but occasionally she checked her mirth to bestow on him an encouraging smile, and a murmured word of approbation.

"Mashallah! you do credit, Effendim, to your Kaftandji ousta!* Fling your veil a little more lightly from your brow, and do not entangle the fringe of your sleeve in the buttons of your antery. It would be well too if you did not carry your head quite so high; remember that you are but an awâli,† and that you must be humble and modest when you tread the carpets of the great. Look you, mother, how well the beyzadeh comprehends my meaning; and how thoroughly he reads his lesson."

"Allemdullilah! the risk can be but slight," replied the old woman, "if he will promise to be prudent; and he will do well to join us to-night when we visit the ladies of the Tchorbadji, in order that his task may sit more easy when he has more at stake."

After a moment's hesitation, Maniolopolo consented to this arrangement: and then flinging off the disguise in which he had been enveloped, he bade adieu to Nevrestè, and her pretty companion until twilight, and slowly sauntered back to the Fendûk,‡ in which he had established himself.

As he moved along, he could not repress the misgivings which intruded themselves on his imagination, and made his pulses quicken and his heart grow sick. He well knew that for the Greek who invades the harem of the Moslem, and who fails in his disguise, there is no mercy; and although he felt that, in his interview with his adored Carimfil, the bliss of beholding one so dearly loved and so long lost, would uphold him, he dreaded the trial which awaited him in the harem of the Tchorbadji. The die was, however, cast; and he resolved to abandon himself to the guidance of his new friends.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE day slowly passed away; for to the anxious, time ever seems to move with folded wings, and to slumber on his scythe; but at length the hours waned, and he returned to the Theriaki Tcharchi to fulfil his destiny.

As he entered, he was met on the threshold by the old woman, who silently beckoned him inward, and conducted him to an apartment whence the sounds of laughter, mingled with the voice of song, and the rattling of castanets, came joyously to his ear. The screen was flung aside, the portal passed, and he stood among the almè, who were already adorned for their evening's task. One fair girl occupied the centre of the floor, her arms were raised above her head, and in her right hand she held a tambourine, whence the long streaming ribands fell, iris-tinted, in bright confusion, and mingled with the soft tresses of her raven hair; her little feet were bare, and her slight willow-like figure appeared to bend beneath the weight of the fairy instrument, while her eyes rested fondly on a young beauty who was treading a graceful measure to the clashing of her castanets. All were diversely employed, save one; and that one was Mherpirwir, who, reclining on her cushions, her fair cheek pillowed on her hand, and her gaze turned anxiously towards the entrance of the apartment, was aroused from her revery by the arrival of Maniolopolo, whom she welcomed with a blush which dyed her brow to the same tint as the glowing roses that rested on it.

In a moment all was confusion; every almè of the troop insisted on lending her aid towards the completion of a masquerade so novel and so exciting; and had Maniolopolo been a Moslem, he might well have imagined that he had been transported to the Paradise of the Prophet, and was tended by the houri, without the preliminary ceremony of dissolution.

"And by what name shall we call our new sister?" asked Mherpirwir, as she gave the last graceful fold to the cachemire girdle of the young Greek. "We might name her Kamil,* but that those dark eyes which go wandering hither and thither like hadjis† bewildered in the desert, are not quite sober enough to suit such a title. Ey vah! who has a head for names? You, Lèbè, who are the best poet of the troop, have you no suggestion to make?"

"I would call him Sedâka,"‡ said the laughing girl who had been thus summoned to the council; "for does he not risk his life to look upon his mistress?"

"Taib!—well said!" exclaimed the old woman; and "Taib! Taib!" was murmured by all the young beauties by whom she was surrounded.

At length the moment came when the fair troop were to transport themselves to the harem of the Tchorbadji; and Maniolopolo was soon shrouded like the rest in a long and ample feridjhè or mantle of dark cloth, while his face was concealed by a shawl, and in this guise he followed Nevrestè with his instrument in his hand, and a wild beating at his heart.

The Tchorbadji resided beyond the walls of the town, in a spacious house on the edge of

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Mistress of the Wardrobe. † Singing woman. ‡ Inn.

* Modest. † Pilgrims. ‡ Faithful.

the plain; his gardens were traversed by a bright river, and a gilded boat danced on the ripple beneath the leafy screen of old and majestic trees. An avenue of maples, whose gnarled and twisted branches had resisted the storms of a century, led up to the house nearly from the city gates, and threw a gloom around which fell heavily on the spirit of the young Greek. But the almè were less impressible; and as they moved along, they gaily bandied jests, and ventured inferences and speculations on the liberality of the Tchorbadji, which extorted an occasional smile from Maniolopolo, anxious as he was. Snatches of wild songs, and wilder stories escaped them also, as it seemed involuntarily: their wandering and uncertain life had taught them the philosophy of present enjoyment, and the futility of foreboding; and they lived, and jested, and laughed as though time had no morrow, or that they could furl his wings at their own giddy will.

Mherpirwir alone was staid and silent; she walked slowly with bent head, like one who indulges in deep and pensive thought; and occasionally her dark eyes flashed out from behind their jealous screen as she glanced hastily and anxiously towards Maniolopolo. But ere long her abstraction drew down upon her the laughter of her companions, and she aroused herself, and mingled in the idle conversation of the party, or held a whispered and momentary communion with Nevrestè, until they stood before the gate of the Tchorbadji's harem.

Loud and earnest was their welcome as they sprang over the threshold into a spacious hall paved with various colored marbles, where the plashing of water and the song of birds made the air vocal. A richly gilded door at the upper end was flung back, and through the opening they caught a delicious glimpse in the moonlight of trees, and flowers, and fountains, spreading far away into the distance. Groups of slaves, many of them young and beautiful, were hurrying to and fro; and each as she passed had a gay word and a gayer smile for the almè. The sounds of music came soothingly from an inner apartment; and a soft stream of moonshine played along the marble floor, and dyed it with the rich tints which it pilfered as it passed from the crimson hangings of the numerous casements. Altogether it was a scene of enchantment; and it was not without regret that Maniolopolo followed the example of his companions, and obeyed the summons of a smiling slave who waited to conduct them to the presence of her mistress.

"Khosh geldin—you are welcome," uttered in a low sweet voice which fell softly on the ear of the young Greek, were the first sounds that greeted him as he found himself in an apartment flashing with gold fringe and embroidery, and immediately opposite to a lovely woman who reposed on a splendid divan of velvet, surrounded by her attendants, while two fair children were sporting on a cushion at her feet; and earnest was the tone in which he joined in the "Khosh buldûk—well found" of the almè, as they bent before her in homage.

Ere long the tchorbadji arrived. He was a man with whose beard time had toyed until it had withered in his grasp; his brow was deeply interlined, and from the corners of his keen and fierce black eyes, a puckered mass of minute wrinkles spread even to his temples. His nose was high and salient, and his upper lip was hidden by the thick and grizzled mustache which adorned it. He was of middle height, but of great muscular power; and Maniolopolo at the first glance felt doubly desirous to preserve his disguise unsuspected.

Two by two the almè moved forward and performed their graceful evolutions, which won for them many a "Mashallah!" and "Aferin!"* from the tchorbadji, and a murmur of commendation from his fair young wife; but when at last, and alone, Mherpirwir flung off her veil, and bounded into the centre of the floor, where she stood for an instant like a startled fawn listening for a coming footstep, the tchorbadji half rose from his sofa, and withdrew the chibouque from his lips to gaze on her. The tapers by which the apartment was illuminated threw their full blaze upon her as she rested for a moment without stirring either eye or limb, and then suddenly springing back a pace or two, twirled her tambourine above her head, as though the joyousness of her young spirit could ring out through its silver bells.

It was now that Maniolopolo aroused himself to play his part in the pageant; and suffering the shawl in which he had been shrouded to fall from his head, but without rising from the carpet on which he was reclining, he watched the moment when the fair Mherpirwir changed the measure of her movements to a slower and more melancholy chant, and catching up the cadence where she had suffered it to die away, accompanied her last guid and exquisite performance with the wild ballad whose action it was intended to portray:

Cobah! Cobah!† where art thou now?
We have sought thee in vain on the mountain's brow
We have look'd for thee, love, where the stream runs clear
Cobah! Cobah! thou art not here—
The wind sighs its grief through the cypress bough,
Cobah! beloved one! where art thou?

She is gone! she is gone! but where?
Go ask the earth's starry flowers—
Where the sunbeams of yesterday rest, she's there,
She can never again be ours—
Life's sweetest and brightest things,
The joys we have loved and lost,
Exist in the land where the spirit's wings
Catch Heaven's bright beam the most—

Why did she pass away,
Before her sweet youth was o'er,

* Well done. † Morning star.

Like the flower which drinks in the sunbeam to-day,
And to-morrow exists no more!
She loved till she lived in that light alone
That her own pure soul had made—
And she wither'd because the cherish'd one
Who had been to her both breath and sun
Left her to pine and fade—
Summer days pass—earth's blossom's die—
Heaven's stars fall from the azure sky—
Our joys all wither one by one—
Cobah is gone! Cobah is gone!

As he commenced his task, Maniolopolo breathed quickly, for the keen eye of the Tchorbadji was on him: but as the dance proceeded, he became thralled by the consummate skill of the dancer, and involuntarily flung his whole soul into his voice, while a continuous murmur of admiration and applause escaped the spectators. As the song ceased, the almè seemed to die away with the strain, her head drooped, her arms hung listlessly at her side, the tambourine fell from her hand, and she stood the very picture of despair.

In the enthusiasm of the moment the wife of the Tchorbadji drew a ring from her finger, and placed it in the hand of a slave, who presented it to Mherpirwir; while the host himself flung a purse into the lap of Maniolopolo, which he instantly transferred to the keeping of Nevrestè. Never was success more perfect: and as the fair girls stood in groups upon the bright-colored carpets, the young Greek thought he never had beheld a spectacle so lovely. The gorgeously attired beauty on the divan was radiant with youth, and bright with jewels; the graceful almè stood before her like attendant peris; the Tchorbadji was the one shadow which relieved the bright lights of the picture; and the children who nestled in each other's arms, and gazed in wondering admiration on the strangers with their bright stag-like eyes, seemed to the excited imagination of the adventurer like beings of another world, where care, and crime, and withering had never come.

Dance succeeded to dance, and song to song; and the Tchorbadji appeared to divide his enthusiasm between Mherpirwir and the disguised Sëidika, whose large deep eyes and exquisite voice had made no slight impression on the fancy of the worthy Janissary.

"Allah buyûk der!—My selictar aga* told me, mother, that one of your almè was as beautiful as a houri, and as graceful as a fawn: and his face is whitened, for he said only the truth; but he made no mention of the fair awali whose voice is to me as melodious as the Allah hu!† of the followers of the Prophet. By the soul of your father! you shall show your young beauties to his highness the pasha—he will fill their mouths with gold, and spread the carpets of liberality under the feet of merit—I have said it."

"May the words of my lord be written on the soul of his slave with the calam* of gratitude!" said Nevrestè as she prostrated herself, until her brow touched the floor before the Tchorbadji; "who am I, that my lord should lift my soul into the akash of felicity? What can I do to remove from my head the ashes of unworthiness, and from the skirt of my garment the defilement of reproach?"

"Ne bilirim—what can I say?" replied the Tchorbadji courteously. "Wallah billah. I am satisfied."

"Sëidika, to whose music my lord has designed to listen, is no indifferent massaldjhe:" said the old woman. "She has tales which may charm his ear, and wean his thoughts for awhile from the cares of his exalted station, if such be his good pleasure. How says my lord?"

The stately Effendi glanced towards his fair young wife, and reading in her bright eyes an intense anxiety which there was no need of words to interpret, he signalled his acquiescence in the suggestion of Nevrestè; and the almè having grouped themselves on either side of Maniolopolo in attitudes whose grace would have thralled the spirit of a painter, he took from the hands of Mherpirwir, who reclined near him, a richly inlaid zebec, whence he drew tones of sweetness that hushed at once the under-current of whispered delight which came like incense to the ears of the almè; and then, laying aside the instrument, he turned the full beam of his dark eyes on the Thorbadji, and in a voice at once subdued and musical, thus told his tale.

* Sword-bearer. † Battle cry.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MICE.

A wise man will never despise a weak enemy. Fools only scoff at a danger of which they know not the probable extent; and those in power would do well to recollect that the deepest cavern of the rock is frequently betrayed by a rift scarcely wide enough to admit the hand of a woman.

I am about to tell your highness a tale of a mouse: and I pray you to let your fancy travel with me, that so we may go on our way together in good understanding. And even like the wise man to whom I have just made allusion, my lord must not despise the little animal because of the minuteness of his proportions; and the rather that he was the emperor of all the mice in Turkey, whom he ruled in peace, the beloved of his subjects, with every prospect of a long and prosperous reign.

The subterranean palace was of vast ex-

* Rod [illegible]

tent; and well and warmly furnished with the spoils of many a midnight visit to the upper earth. The granaries were well stored with corn: peas, beans, and lupins abounded; dried grapes, figs, and other fruits calculated for tardy consumption, were neatly and compactly housed for winter use; and, in short, the padishah of the long-tails nibbled his favourite roots in calm and philosophic dignity: never troubling his head with the feuds which he well knew were continually going on above it.

But who can control it? Who can number the stars, count the notes of the bulbul, or postpone the decay of the rose? Great was the consternation throughout the metropolis of Mouseland, when it was discovered that an old fox, well known to many of them as a notoriously bad character, a marauder, and a common thief, who swept away enough to supply their whole community for a month, at a single visit to the overgrown granaries of the frightful bipeds who infested the province; and of whom the mice had never been able to discover the utility, unless indeed when they were reluctantly compelled to admit, that by housing their corn and roots and other eatables, they saved them (the mice) the trouble of collecting their own supplies. I repeat, that great was the consternation when it was discovered that this unprincipled old fox had thought proper, they could not imagine wherefore, to establish himself in the immediate neighbourhood of their capital; where he kept up a constant and most unpleasant sensation, by daily and nightly incursions into the surrounding country, and by devouring every unhappy straggler who chanced to cross his path; a circumstance that filled all the orderly and well-conducted citizens with a trepidation, which, if it did not redound to the credit of their courage, at least spoke volumes for their principles.

Nor was this all: for if any fault could be found with the domestic legislation of Mouseland, it must be admitted that the error lay in the same weakness which has at times operated unpleasantly in other nations. His majesty the emperor had a strong predilection in favor of personal beauty. His prime minister was the prime dandy of the court, who had won the imperial smile by the graceful curl of his exquisitely pointed whiskers; the secretary of state was remarkable for the fine fall in his back, when, poised on his hind legs, he presented to the monarch any of the public documents, which important missives were neatly scratched by the thorn of the mimosa plant on the bark of the orange-tree—a tablet, which however unwelcome the contents of the scroll might prove to the padishah, at least prevented their ever being offensive: while the commander-in-chief was equally celebrated for the beautiful glossiness of his skin, which, luckily for his fortunes, was full three shades lighter than any other in the nation.

But the peculiar vanity of the monarch lay in the length of his subjects' tails; and this fact kept the court, the city, and the whole population of the under-ground empire in a perpetual state of excitement. Machines were invented for stretching the joints—pulleys were arranged by which the most ambitious suspended themselves heads downwards, until their eyes became bloodshot, and their respiration impeded—and there was not a mouseling throughout the empire who did not imitate his natural enemy the kitten, by running round and round in giddy circles with his tail between his teeth!

And now—here was an ill-favored and burly beast, established under their very noses, whose tail was so long and bushy, that with one determined sweep it could brush away the whole palace-guard, and lay bare the private apartments of the monarch to the gaze of the entire city. It was enough to breed a rebellion! and the court favorite, a sleek young mouse of quality, whose tail was the thirty-sixth part of an inch longer than any other near the person of his majesty, and who was, moreover, about to receive the paw of one of the princesses in marriage, actually committed suicide in the first moment of despair, by drowning himself in the skin of a gourd filled with rain water. Being good-looking, and in favor at court, he was generally regretted by all those who had any thing to hope through his interest—and the kind and considerate sovereign, in order to console his daughter for her unexpected loss, buried the deceased with military honors, to which—as he had always worn very magnificent mustaches, he was undeniably entitled.

This commotion among the mice led, however, to one result extremely distressing to the padishah, who had never contemplated any disturbance in his dominions, and whose leisure was now invaded at all moments, while his digestion suffered severely from the continual alarms to which he was subjected; he found that a conviction of his incapacity to protect them from their dreaded enemy, was weakening his authority over his subjects.

One of the most abject and fawning of his counsellors, who had never hitherto dared to move eye or limb in the presence of his imperial master, until he had received his gracious sanction to do so, had absolutely brushed his whiskers within a foot of the tip of those of his majesty, without proffering the slightest apology; while several of his bravest generals had begged leave to retire upon their laurels, and to leave the field open to younger men, whose interests they suddenly discovered to have been greatly injured by their own tenacity of office.

All this was extremely perplexing and vexatious to a monarch who wished for nothing

beyond peace and enjoyment, and who had not the slightest taste for difficulty and danger; and he therefore deemed it expedient to summon a council before these incipient symptoms broadened into downright rebellion; justly considering, that should he find it expedient to do so, he had as good a right to abdicate the throne, and to provide for his own safety, as his generals had to run away, and leave the army to provide for itself.

It was a solemn sight to witness the assembling of the gray-bearded ministers of Mouseland; each with his tail dragging along the earth, extended to its extremest length, and his round black eyes cast mournfully to the ground. The inhabitants of the city stood aside to let the procession pass; and they looked upon it with as much interest as though they thought that the idle words of a score of trembling old mice were likely to dislodge the offending-fox, and to banish him the country: nor was it until the last joint of the last ministerial tail had slowly disappeared through the portal of the palace, that the crowd dispersed, and the various avocations of the citizens were resumed.

The council chamber was crowded. The monarch was seated on a pile of nuts, most luxuriously arranged, and covered with the white tufts of the wild cotton-tree; while the councillors took their places in two lines, one on his right hand, and the other on his left, and made a most imposing appearance: each having assumed his most dignified bearing, as best suited to the emergency of the crisis.

The war of words was long, and at times bitter; for, with an imminent danger staring them in the face, the ministers were less cautious than usual; and several, who had never before exchanged aught save courtesies, now bandied sarcasms, and hints, which enlightened the monarch more profitably than pleasantly on many points on which he had hitherto been most comfortably ignorant. Peculation was brought home to the Keeper of the Privy Purse; the Secretary for Foreign Affairs was taxed with being in correspondence with their enemies the Jerhuahs, or Leaping Mice, a colony of adventurers from Egypt, who had established themselves, no one knew from what impulse, near at hand; the Commander-in-Chief was twitted with a defeat, which, it was insinuated, had filled his storehouses, while it exhausted his army; and the Prime Minister was flatly taxed with having recanted the principles he had professed on accepting office; and misleading the monarch in a score of instances, not one of which bore the slightest analogy to the subject-matter that they were assembled to discuss.

At length the Fox was mentioned: and then all individual animosities were merged in the common interest. What was to be done! The answer was simple. The intruder must be dislodged—ignominiously, with contempt and loathing. This resolution was adopted without a dissentient voice; but when the next question was propounded, the perplexity became great. *How* was this very desirable measure to be effected? Not a Mouse among them could point out the method. All the wisdom, or, at least, all the longest tails in the Empire (and hitherto that had answered the same purpose,) collected together in council were unable to decide on the *how*? and, at length, it was hinted by a shrewd and ready-witted Lord Chamberlain, that as there appeared to be some difficulty in removing the Fox, it might be expedient for the Mice themselves to migrate to some distant territory, far from the pollution of his presence; carrying with them the monarch they revered, the wives they cherished, and the little ones who were growing up about them.

The idea was instantly seized by an oratorical Field-Marshal, who favored the council with several well-turned periods and flourishes of sentiment; talked of their household gods, their hearths and homes; and finally, concluded by seconding the proposition of his noble friend, and strongly recommending change of air to the whole population.

The monarch leaned his head upon his paw, and remained buried in deep and painful thought; when an aged Mouse of reverend aspect who had not yet spoken, arose, and respectfully bowing towards the throne, thus addressed the illustrious Padishah by whom it was occupied.

"Most noble and most powerful Emperor, in whose smile the earth flourishes; throughout whose realms the sun shines not, he being himself the light in which his subjects live; Lord of the Long Tails, whose joints are strengthened and made supple by the oil of thy countenance. Let the royal gates of attention be unfolded, that the chariots of my argument may enter into thy mind, and linger there. I have suffered all these noble and learned Mice to speak before me; they have flung back the bright page of the volume of their wisdom, and I have read every line, that I might see with their eyes, and comprehend with their understanding. But he who follows the councils of others when his heart is not in them, is a traitor to his country, and unworthy the confidence of his sovereign; thus then, having perused the writings of the intelligent, and bowed before the argument of the eloquent, I again lift my head to declare that the precipitate advice of this counsel is contrary to reason, and likely to lead to incalculable mischief. Great as we are as a people; brave in war; learned in peace; upright in judgment; and governed by a prince whose scepire sways the destinies of the world, we must not disdain to learn the lesson of wisdom, in whatever tongue it may be taught.

"Prudence is the step-sister of valor—policy

is the good right hand of strength—and wit is the master spirit of fortune. The spider may be crushed by a touch, yet in its wiliness it weaves a net of subtlety by which it grows into a giant, and feeds upon creatures more powerful than itself. The ant, still weaker of its nature, builds itself in with clay where the fruits are richest, and robs the bird that would devour both—shall *we* then—We—on whom depend the destinies of Mouseland. Shall *we* desert ourselves in such an hour as this, when by firmness we may regain our threatened security? Forbid it honor, courage, and patriotism. If we fly, what ensues? Our city will be laid waste, our palace prostrated, our possessions become the spoil of our enemies; while we shall be hunted like robbers from place to place: pilgrims without a shrine; wanderers without a home; a nation without a name!

"Is it for this that we have toiled and fought; eaten the bread of carefulness, and reared aloft the banner of our ancestors? No, no; we must be less than Mice to fall so tamely! One effort more must be made, or the bones of our forefathers will not rest quietly in their dishonored graves."

And then, having secured the ear of attention, the hoary councillor laid before the assembly the stratagem by which he hoped to deliver the groaning people from their common enemy. All listened anxiously, and one universal squeak of approbation hailed the communication.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MICE—CONTINUED.

Bright rose the moon, and shed her veil of silver over the blushing landscape. The odor of the orange-blossom, and the wild thyme, floated like a cloud of incense on the air. The song of the bird of love wove a spell about it, beneath which the soul dissolved away in sadness; and the leaves whispered to the winds a tale to which no mortal words might give utterance; when the great Emperor of Mice mustered his forces on the upper earth; and witnessed with a noble enthusiasm, worthy of his exalted station, the gathering of his armed hordes.

Like a lake gently agitated by the breeze, he led them over an extensive plain, and with prompt valor, and an energy incident to the great emergency in which he was involved, headed the host until it halted near a well-stored granary, already familiar to many of the number. The place was undefended, and he at once abandoned it to pillage; while every individual mouse, zealous in so good a cause, carried off his own portion of the spoil, with which he made the best of his way home and there, having abandoned it to the care of the aged and the young, who were unable to encounter the fatigue and danger of a predatory excursion, by whom it was housed, and secured from the attacks of noxious reptiles; returned for a fresh booty, until litle remained in the building which had lately groaned beneath the weight of grain.

When things had progressed thus far, the hoary sage who had devised the stratagem, commanded the obedient army to collect the remainder of the spoil, and strew it plentifully along the path which led to the dwelling of the Fox; taking care that not one scattered grain should betray the road to their own city; and having seen his order scrupulously fulfilled, he joined the monarch, and they at once returned in silence to the capital.

The horror of the husbandmen, when on the morrow they discovered that the fruits of their industry had disappeared during the night, it would require the eloquence of a moullah to describe; and with bitter vows of vengeance they soon traced the track that had been taken by the supposed thief, for the scattered grain lay thick upon the ground to the very burrow of the Fox. Wonder succeeded to annoyance, and they communed among themselves what dishonest inhabitant had there established himself; a fact which they resolved to ascertain, while they also satisfied their vengeance. A strong snare was accordingly prepared; and that very evening the poor innocent Fox, who was returning supperless to bed, after a very unsuccessful foray, was caught in the trap that had been laid for him.

Many an honest man unwittingly thrusts his neck into the noose meant for a rascal, but what is written, is written: and it is useless to contend with fate.

In less than an hour the Emperor of Mouseland learnt the defeat of his enemy; when a general rejoicing was proclaimed throughout the city, as for a victory. And in this the wise monarch discovered to his loving people the profundity of his intelligence; for it is so rare that a sovereign owes success to the wit of his councillors, that he does well to make the occasion serve as a national jubilee.

As he ruminated on the glorious news, he swelled with pride and importance, until he felt as though the palace could not hold him, and that he must breathe the upper air, or burst with his own greatness; and accordingly, ordering his travelling throne, he caused himself to be carried in state on a dried maple leaf, at the head of a formidable army, to triumph over his prostrate enemy.

"Khosh buldûk—well found, most mighty Fox;" broke forth the exulting padishah; "How do you propose to cook those of my subjects on whom you sup to-night?"

The captive felt the delicate irony, but he

was to wily to bandy sentences with a crowned head; and with admirable judgment he felt that this was not exactly the moment to retort: he therefore bent humbly before the monarch, and with a penitential demeanor thus addressed him:—

"Most mighty conqueror! whose armies are countless as the locusts, and formidable as the panther of the desert; whose voice is as the thunders of the tempest, and whose eye mocks the lightning by which it is accompanied. I bow before your resentment, and own that it is just. I mocked at your power, because in your mercy you had spared me its exercise; but now, when by my enormities I have provoked my punishment, I am compelled to admit it, because I am prostrated beneath its immensity. I deserve no forbearance, but I ask it as a boon; and if a life of devotion to your interests can atone for a brief season of folly, I put my head into your hand, and devote myself henceforward to your service. Try me, dread sovereign! and I will soon convince your imperial reason that my future exertions for your welfare shall more than compensate for my past enormities."

The Padishah, struck by the humble bearing of his lately formidable enemy, and quite alive to the additional consequence which must accrue to him from the possession of so powerful and crafty a subject, hastily called his counsellors aside, and desired them to give their utmost attention to the question that he was about to lay before them; viz, whether the good faith of the Fox should be trusted, and his services secured to the Empire by the strong chain of gratitude; or whether, placing no faith in his protestations of amendment, they should laugh his promises to scorn, and abandon him to the inevitable destruction which awaited him at the hands of his captors.

Many opinions were given; for there is nothing of which either men or mice are so lavish as of their advice. It is indeed often given, not only unasked, but uncared for; and in this instance, the only sound opinion advanced was by the same old mouse who had been the cause of the capture: for the young vain mouselings of the Imperial household were delighted at the prospect of having so large and strong a companion; and they already began twisting their whiskers with additional importance at the bare idea. But the hoary sage was not to be misled by such childish chimeras; and he soberly represented in the humblest but most earnest manner to the Padishah that a natural enemy could never be converted into a sincere and trustworthy friend; for that however he might be compelled from distress, necessity, or ambition, to hide his real lineaments under the mask of good fellowship, the antipathies of his nature could never be entirely conquered or eradicated. As well might the tiger be tamed while he possessed his claws—in short, he strongly advised that the ensnared Fox should immediately be put to death: and the Empire thus delivered altogether from any relapse of its late danger.

The young and impetuous voted this reasoning a bore, and the reasoner unseasonably prosy: while the elders insisted with some plausibility that it was politic in a weak state to form powerful alliances; and that an admirable opportunity now presented itself of securing an ally, who, having felt the consequences of their indignation, would not again be tempted to brave it.

It would be well, nevertheless, if all diplomatists who are inclined to start a similar theory, were to reflect, that bringing a dangerous enemy into the camp, to learn at once the secret of its weakness, and the fact that his overthrow was the more fortunate issue of an adventurous stratagem, is a very probable method of making their own necks the stepping-stones to his advancement and revenge.

The vain monarch, however, at once resolved to act upon the latter argument; the Fox was accordingly sworn to allegiance with all due ceremony, and in proper form; and he was then freed from the snare by the teeth of his new allies; the Padishah finally returning to the city in triumph, followed by the Fox as far as the entrance of the capital, where the Imperial suite was deprived of his presence by the unpleasant fact that either he was too large for the gates, or the gates were too small for him. To reconcile him to this compulsatory exclusion, the monarch, therefore, in the exuberance of his exulting vanity, created him Vèzir, with the Imperial permission to reside beyond the walls.

It is dangerous policy to put authority into the hands of one with whose power you have not strength to contend; but as empty bladders float on the surface of the stream, and gather only the scum of the waters, while solid substances seek the bottom of the channel, and form receptacles for the gold-dust; so vain and thoughtless men, puffed up by their own imaginary consequence, disregard the sage counsels of the wary and the wise, to pollute themselves with the frothy vaporings of the shallow and the selfish. And if such be the case with men, little marvel is it that the same weakness should exist among mice.

The Fox, fond of power, and finding at the moment no more legitimate field for his ambition, resolved to infuse into the mind of the Emperor of the Mice some of his own wild schemes of aggrandizement; and he accordingly began by assuring his majesty at the next divan, that, with his Imperial permission, he would soon make him master of the whole province.

The Padishah was enchanted. Every sovereign loves power, and conquest, and authority; and it is extraordinary how greedily

they imbibe the prospect of securing them. The Vèzir explained his theories, and they carried conviction with them; so the new Prime Minister snapped up the old counsellor on the first favorable opportunity; delivered a funeral oration over his mangled remains, remarkable for its eloquence and its no-meaning; and then assumed the reins of government without opposition, and commenced his political career.

CHAPTER L.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MICE—CONTINUED.

THERE was a kingdom close beside that of Mouseland, which was peculiarly obnoxious to the Fox; for its inhabitants, although comely and specious when all went well for their interests, were especially irritable and pugnacious in the event of any opposition: and as they could not be prevailed upon to enter into the views of the new Vèzir, he naturally felt the necessity of laying the axe to the root of their existence.

Brave as they were, the mice had some difficulty in contending with the cats, who held their nocturnal assemblies under the roof of a dilapidated dwelling not a hundred roods distant from the Imperial palace of the Padishah; and accompanied their counsels with an outcry and uproar very annoying and unsatisfactory to the Empire of the long-tails.

The dissonance was dreadful: and the favorite wife of the Emperor, a pied mouse of extraordinary beauty, and celebrated (unhappily enough on this occasion) for the length of her ears, was actually thrown into convulsions on the breaking-up one of their orgies; a circumstance which deprived the Padishah of an heir, and the people of a Crown-Prince—a great acquisition when there is no prospect of either a siege or a famine.

The army, also, suffered greatly from their vicinity, as they threw out detachments from their main body, who laid in ambush for the foraging parties of the Fox; and not only destroyed many of his most efficient troops, but moreover threatened to occasion a famine in his camp.

It is remarkably unpleasant for a general to have his men picked off by twos, and threes, and made away with he knows not how; for the cats were adepts at the business, and never left a trace of their victims, nor a sufficient fragment of their remains, to admit of any pretext on the part of a grateful nation to erect a monument over their ashes.

Things were in this uncomfortable state, when one morning as the Vezir of Mouseland was out reconnoitring, he reached the banks of a river, where a fishing party of Storks were busily employed in the capture of their finny prey. The usual compliments passed between them; and the Fox with infinite tact eulogized their skill, envied them their capabilities for so exciting an amusement, and finally accepted a fish which was cordially offered to him by one of the party; after which he digressed to the beauty of the weather, the loveliness of the landscape, and the invigorating freshness of the morning air; and when he made his parting bow, he left the whole long-necked society deeply impressed by his good breeding and judgment.

This point gained, he trotted leisurely along until he reached the head-quarters of the cats, when he sat down before the door, as if from weariness, with the fish between his feet. The aromatic odor of his precious charge soon began to affect the olfactory organs of the feline community, who flocked from every part of the building with desire in their eyes, and water in their mouth; and gradually advancing nearer and nearer to the fox, they began to be very inquisitive about the fish.

Reynard, having a point to carry, of course affected the most supreme indifference, and turned the fish over and over with his paw in a manner at once careless and graceful, exhibiting it in all its beauty to the longing cats. This was natural enough, for it is what is done every day in the world; the possession of an object is little, unless that possession is coveted by others; and its decided enjoyment consists in the envy which it excites.

As they continued to urge him, even beyond the limits of politeness, the fox at length condescended to inform the expectant cats that their curiosity was as unavailing as it was oppressive; for that fish could only be obtained by ready wit, and good policy, by stratagem, and craft; qualities in which their people were peculiarly deficient; and that even were he to tell them where they abounded, they would never have the address to catch them.

This announcement occasioned universal indignation among the cats. To be told that you are a rogue is not agreeable, yet the accusation is borne with philosophy by many a haughty spirit—but to be told that you have not wit enough to be a rogue, is enough to try the temper of any animal; and accordingly the whole feline population was in a tumult.

Order being at length restored by the energetic exertions of a respectable old tabby, whose talent for ratting had given him great influence over the minds of the mob, he lost no time in explaining to them that resenting a few light words evidently uttered in mere playfulness by the fox, was not at all the way to come at the fish; a cogent species of reasoning which penetrated at once to the stomachs of the assembly; and when he found that he had secured the public ear, he gently hinted that those fire-eating mousers who did not feel

their honor satisfied by this policy, might take an early opportunity after the fish were secured, of resenting the insult which had been offered to them as a nation; a suggestion that proved the profound diplomacy of the old ratter, and showed that he knew more of the world and its wisdom than the fox felt inclined to give him credit for.

Under the influence of this sound advice, the cats drew in their claws, lowered their backs, which had each been arched like the moon when her course is but half run; and began to tread on velvet, and to purr as melodiously as though the fish which they hoped to obtain were already in their possession. One or two indeed turned away their heads, and spat upon the ground in disgust; but they passed unheeded in the crowd; and quite satisfied with having thus magnificently testified their disapprobation, remained on the spot to ascertain whether they were likely to benefit by the piscatorial inquiry then pending.

At the urgent entreaty of the ancient tabby, the Fox, thinking he had carried matters far enough, at length consented to point out to the Cats the place where the fish were to be procured; although he still assured them that the gratification of their curiosity was the only advantage likely to accrue to them from the information. Placing himself therefore in an easy attitude, and occasionally whisking away a pertinacious fly, which persisted in buzzing about his nose, with his handsome tail, he thus addressed them:—

"People of Catland! However useless the secret may prove to you which you are anxious to possess, I will humor your weakness, because it is common to all nations to seek information which can never avail them, or rather, of which they seldom learn how to avail themselves. Know then that one day, when I was suffering from a languor which I trusted might be dispelled by the fresh air, I wandered along by the river bank, where I encountered a number of Storks feasting upon a profusion of the daintiest fish; and being thoroughly satiated with mice, I inquired of one of them where this desirable luxury could be procured.

"For a time he resisted my importunity, but at length he informed me that on the other side of the river there was an exhausted lake, in which thousands of fish were expiring; and that, for his own part, he had become not only difficult and fastidious in his selection, but absolutely quite tired of them. Such being the case, I entered into an arrangement with the Stork to exchange mice for fish, which enables us to vary our repasts, and proves perfectly satisfactory to both of us."

The Cats were overjoyed at this intelligence, and thanked the Fox warmly for his generosity; at which he laughed in his sleeve, as is customary on such occasions: and then, presenting the fish which had led to the discussion, to a graceful little green-eyed vivacious-looking kitten, nearly related to the royal family, he took his leave, followed by one universal purring of admiration.

A council of cats was speedily assembled, the available troops reviewed and harangued by a fierce old black general who had lost one eye, two inches of tail, and half an ear in some previous engagement; and a resolution was formed to attack the camp of the mice that very night. The army were in high spirits: the citizens volunteered by scores; and the head-quarters were all commotion. There is nothing which more excites the valor of an attacking force than the known weakness of the enemy.

Lapped in delicious and most savory dreams lay the august emperor of the mice. His visions had carried him into the palace of the pasha, and buried him in the midst of a pillauf of chicken; where he was enjoying himself discreetly, when one sharp shrill squeak of anguish rang through the city streets, and penetrated even to the imperial apartment. Up sprang the padishah; the pillauf vanished; and in its place he saw scores of ill-omened cats pouncing upon his defenceless subjects, and bearing them off in their insatiate jaws.

His majesty stood for one instant aghast—but only one—Like all great personages, he possessed the most beautiful decision of character; and accordingly, when he had drawn a long breath, and taken in at the same time a perfect view of the proceedings, he prudently turned tail, and held himself under the roots of a tree near at hand. In this he acted, as he ever did, on principle: for, as he justly argued, while he lay snugly ensconced in his hole, and the work of carnage went on above his head, the life of the sovereign was every thing to the subject; his generals were paid for fighting, just as he was paid for reigning; and he could not, therefore, without indelicacy, interfere with their privileges.

The fox, meanwhile, had not been idle; he had an extraordinary talent for diplomacy, like most of his race; and he had so thoroughly ingratiated himself with the storks, who, though long-necked, were by no means long-headed, that they readily entered into his views. He obtained a private audience of the chief of the tribe, in which he very ably set forth his own disinterestedness—for he had not considered it necessary to inform his new allies that he held an official appointment under the emperor of Mouseland, for whose person and people he was well aware that the storks entertained as much contempt as they did for the nation of the frogs, devouring them, whenever they fell in their way, in precisely the same unceremonious manner—while he earnestly and emphatically represented that the

storks were a mighty and a numerous tribe, requiring much sustenance; and, like the Arabs of the bipeds, accustomed to secure it by their talents for the chase: while the cats were an insidious, beggarly, poaching community, exhausting by their treacherous and wily arts, the prey which was the legitimate right of their more generous enemies.

The inference was clear; in the extirpation of the cats, the storks were ridding themselves of an obnoxious race; while the fox could derive no advantage whatever from their destruction, save the calm and placid conviction of having done his duty, and benefited a most important portion of the creation.

There is nothing either so rare or so beautiful as self-sacrifice in a good cause. It is the germ whence spring all patriots!

When the generous fox had departed, the aga of the storks marshalled his forces, and laid before them the stratagem of their friendly counsellor, which met with unanimous approval, and was immediately resolved upon; nor was its exercise long delayed, for morning had scarcely dawned when the cats were seen entering their territory; and as the vanguard of the two parties met, the old tabby of whom mention has been already made, advanced in front of his fellows, and was immediately conf onted by the chief of the storks in person.

When the necessary ceremonies had terminated, the cats announced their pacific intentions, explained the treaty into which they desired to enter, and proposed the preliminaries for the deliberation of the other party.

The storks listened with a gravity worthy of the occasion—the exports and imports were curiously discussed; and many propositions advanced likely to accelerate the contemplated exchange; when an old stork, renowned for shrewdness, and that minute talent for calculation which is so essential to the financial interest of a community, stood up; and poising himself steadily on one leg, with an aplomb strikingly demonstrative of the complete and nice equilibrium of his arguments, remarked, that with all due consideration and respect for the talent exhibited by their visiters, he considered that in all tribes and nations supporting themselves by their own exertions, time was property, and consequently not to be lightly or inconsiderately squandered: and that, however convenient it might be for one party to await the result of the other's foray, it would save a great deal of time, and be infinitely more advisable, that in the event of the completion of the treaty, the cats should be ferried across the river at once, where they might revel on fish, binding themselves on their return to supply the camp of the storks with mice enough for their immediate consumption.

The cats, delighted at the suggestion, concluded the treaty at once; and laying the mice which they had brought with them before the aga, had the satisfaction of seeing them swallowed by the storks; after which ceremony each committed himself to the care of one of their new allies, who instantly spread their wings, and left the sordid earth and all its creeping things far beneath them.

The cats, unaccustomed to this mode of travelling were variously affected; the timid shut their eyes, and twisted their tails round the necks of their obliging friends; the more ambitious swelled with delight, and almost taught themselves to believe that they were flying on their own wings; the bilious grew sick and dizzy; and the more delicate absolutely fainted.

But all delusions ceased as the storks hovered for an instant just above the centre of the rapid stream; and then with a loud shriek of triumphant hatred, loosened their hold, and hurled their victims to a watery grave. Black, white, or tabby, not a cat escaped; and thus the fox, at the expense of a score or two of mice, freed the empire for ever from their dangerous vicinage, and provided for the general safety; and he retired to his burrow that night with the happy consciousness of superior desert, which must ever brighten the dreams of a minister, who, while he is receiving the grateful acknowledgments of his sovereign, and the plauditory acclamations of a whole people, is deeply impressed by the delicious conviction that, like the cuckoo which lays its egg in the nest of another bird, he is quietly providing for his own interests.

CHAPTER LI.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MICE—CONTINUED.

Ambition, unlike jealousy, will not submit to be dieted on trifles; and, accordingly the little triumphs of the Fox merely stimulated his taste for power; and led him to wilder and bolder schemes which were bounded only by universal monarchy.

We are told that ambition peopled Eblis, and that it is the favorite vice of Sheitan; it will, therefore, be readily believed that an occasion was soon afforded to the Fox for the indulgence of his peculiar passion.

A caravan passing through the province, arrived within a few stadia of the metropolis of Mouseland, and created intense alarm among the foraging parties, who came scampering homeward from all quarters, with a paucity of provisions exceedingly unsatisfactory to the sedentary portion of the community; and with tremendous accounts of the monsters who composed it, that plunged the whole city into convulsions of terror; only allayed by the recollection of the quantity of good things likely

to be scattered by the reckless travellers, should they chance to halt sufficiently near to the territories of his imperial majesty, to enable his subjects to secure a part of the spoil.

Their hopes were fulfilled, and their fears amply compensated; for, in their immediate vicinity, close on the borders of a thick wood, a poor camel fell under his load, and it was found impossible to raise him from the earth; his burden was accordingly divided among the rest of the string;* and as the travellers possessed no means of transporting the exhausted animal, he was necessarily left to his fate.

Rest, and the means of indulging his hunger, soon restored the sick camel to health; and when the foraging parties once more ventured forth from their subterranean city, to profit by the halt of the caravan, the Fox espied the camel at a distance, calmly browsing on the young shoots of a stately tulip-tree. His resolution was instantly formed, and, without the delay of a moment he turned tail, and pausing at the gate of the capital, demanded an immediate audience of the emperor. His hurried manner and imperious tone greatly agitated the city-guard, a party of whom scampered to the palace; and in a few moments the imperial procession was seen issuing forth with as much haste as decorum would permit.

Having made his obeisance, the Fox entered at once on the subject of his anxiety, and acquainted the august Majesty of Mouseland with the fact, that, an insolent Camel, a mere beast of burden, a vile slave, bred to toil and obedience—in short, it were endless to repeat the opprobrious epithets lavished upon the intruder—was ravaging the forest at pleasure, polluting the fountain at which the Imperial thirst was often quenched, and devouring the fruits destined for the Imperial treasury.

The monarch trembled for his throne, for he had once seen a Camel, and he had never forgotten his terror on that occasion; he was, therefore, unprepared with any suitable comment on the alarming intelligence; and the surprise of the monarch may be imagined, when finding him dumb, the Grand Vèzir thus continued:—

"This must not be, most puissant Padishah. Shall an empire like that of Mouseland—a free people, under a free sovereign, whose linked tails would encompass El Caf, and whose tribes fill the whole earth, bow before an insolent caitiff whose only virtue is obedience? Shall a nation, accustomed to live on the labor of others, yield to a poor spiritless wretch, whose very existence is toil? Forbid it the Majesty of Mouseland! Lord of the Long-Tails, I prostrate myself before you; I pray you to be just to yourself; and not to suffer the shadow of your greatness to diminish. Were not the Cats a mighty and a warlike people, and have we not destroyed them? Are not the Storks the natural enemies of your subjects, and have we not sharpened our wits upon their dullness; and made them serve us by throwing a veil over their heads? The Camel must be subjected to the same illustrious sway—he must bow before the carpet of your Imperial majesty, and acknowledge your supremacy: or he must die the death of a traitor, and perish miserably for his presumption."

A general squeak of enthusiastic approbation burst from the assembled courtiers; and it was with some difficulty that the Fox could make himself heard, as he approached the climax of his speech. A flourish of the monarch's tail, however, at length commanded attention, and the Vèzir hastened to add that he should strongly counsel his majesty to enforce immediate obedience from the baseborn intruder; as should vigorous measures be long delayed, they might prove altogether abortive; a circumstance which would tend to throw a doubt on the power and greatness of his Majesty, and diminish the lustre of his reign. The beard of rebellion should be plucked out by the roots before it grew into strength and dignity; and he, therefore, called upon the Light of the Empire, and the Glory of the Earth, to subdue at once the insolence of the Camel, and compel him to his allegiance.

The padishah swelled with conscious greatness as he listened to the oration of his minister; and, with a look of supreme command, he ordered the immediate attendance of the camel: when it became a question, how, in the event of the summons being disregarded, obedience could be enforced. Gradually, as the difficulties of the case presented themselves, the dignity of the monarch dwindled away; and, at length, he was fairly compelled to confess—though he did it with a reluctant majesty of manner, much commented on by the court—that he really did not see how such an event could be brought to pass.

The fox, with a confident and pleasant air, immediately volunteered to undertake the embassy, and pledged his veracity on its success; and the whole population of Mouseland, proud of such an ambassador, embraced the offer with avidity. It is always agreeable to find a back willing to bear our burdens, and broad enough to support them; and thus the mice were delighted to leave a mission, of which they were to reap the benefit, in the hands of their crafty ally.

The fox, thus duly authorized and empowered to be impertinent, journeyed on with the self-complacency usual to plenipotentiaries under such favorable circumstances; and having reached the spot where the camel, wearied with wandering through the forest, and sa-

* Camels travel in strings in the East, and the train is usually led by a donkey.

tiated with leaves and fruits, was gravely chewing the cud under the shadowing branches of an odoriferous cedar; he accosted him in haughty language, at once declared his mission, and so magnified the power and prowess of his master, that the camel, who, like many other animals in the creation who carry their heads high, was low enough in heart; rose humbly from the earth, and assuring the ambassador that he had transgressed ignorantly, besought of him as an especial favor to intercede for him to the emperor; and was at once given to understand that he must forthwith wait upon the padishah in person, as no minor submission would be received.

The camel, trembling with anxiety and terror, declared his readiness to compensate, by any means in his power, for his involuntary trespass on the territories of so high and powerful a prince; and he at once volunteered to accompany the fox to court; when, having desired his timid companion to halt on the edge of the wood, about a furlong from the city gates, until the emperor should consent to give him an audience, the vèzir of Mouseland hastened to report his success to his imperial master, and to conduct him to the presence of this new ally.

Greatness is merely comparative; and it is measured by so many different standards, that it is often very difficult to determine on its actual limits. Thus, as the camel stood buried in thought, with his head drooping, and his heart quailing, he scarcely heeded the crowd of busy mice who were darting about immediately at his feet; nor had he an idea that among them were some of the high officers of the household, and personages of distinction about the court of the very nation to which he had come there to swear allegiance. Had he been asked his opinion of the locality, little dreaming that he was in close vicinity of a great city, he would have simply answered that the spot was cool, quiet, and shady, but terribly infested with vermin!

Such is life. The greatness of one is the scorn of another—the pride which fills one bosom is fed by what appears disgrace to its neighbor; and thus the world rolls on, peopled with delusion, and deception, and self-value.

At length the camel was roused from his revery by a disagreeable chorus of squeaking, and a great commotion among the mice; whose numbers continued to increase so rapidly, and to approach him so nearly, that he was just about to crush a score of the boldest under his heavy foot, when the reappearance of the fox diverted his attention, and saved the lives of a few individuals of rank and fashion who would otherwise have been victimized.

Under these circumstances the rage of the indignant camel may be readily imagined, when on demanding of the ambassador whether he should succeed in obtaining an audience of the offended monarch, he was informed that he was already in the presence; and that a somewhat spare, lean-looking mouse with gray whiskers, seated upon a morsel of red rag, was the mighty sovereign, whose nod was to decide his fate.

For a moment the camel bent down his long neck, and gazed steadily and deridingly on the wretched little animal who sat swelling with pride, surrounded by his court; and then, flinging up his heels, he gave one tremendous kick which sent a dozen courtiers flying into the air, and deliberately trotted back to the forest.

Pride, unsustained by circumstance and power is as untenable as the wind; and they who endeavor to cover their insignificance by big words, labor as idly as boys who throw stones at the sun, or dogs who bay the moon when it is at full.

Abashed by the indignity which he had just sustained under the very walls of his capital, and in the presence of the pillars of the state, the padishah sat for a while with his head buried in his tail, as though he had yielded up the spirit; but at length his great soul asserted itself even in this painful emergency; and calling the fox aside, he thus reproachfully addressed him.

"Vézir! whom I have long regarded less as my slave than as the brother of my adoption; upon whose neck I have flung the reins of power, and in whose hands I have placed the beard of wisdom; what disgraceful ashes have not your blind counsels heaped upon my dishonored head? The graves of my ancestors are defiled; and the faces of my people are blackened. The wise men have said that kings are as compasses in the midst of the nations, to sweep the great circle of wisdom; but you have made me the pole of folly, and the index of disgrace. Till measures are well pondered in the mind, madmen alone venture to risk their exercise; but double is his delusion who crushes others in his own defeat. When the sun rose to-day above the earth which was created for my pleasure, my spear was as a ray of the morning, my sword a bright beam flashing death and terror, and my helmet a star of light; princes caught the fire of glory from my glance; and my smile made heroes—and now, I am a dishonored sovereign, abashed by the gaze of my own subjects."

"Great sanctuary of the world!" replied the Fox, bowing meekly before the irritated monarch; "Refuge of the distressed! whose fame is echoed from hill to hill, and with whose praise the valleys of the earth are vocal; I, the humblest slave of the Majesty of Mouseland, beseech your highness to be no longer possessed by grief, but to raise your eyes to glory, and to regild the crown of courage. I hold to the nostrils of power the pleasing perfume of success; and while I wear away my

forehead on the humble sands of prostration, I promise on the faith of my allegiance, that ere long, the insolent slave who has dared to brave your anger shall be trodden down in his pride."

Somewhat appeased by these assurances, the monarch once more consented to be guided by his wily minister; and then, adroitly dismissing his court, he returned *incog* to the city, much to the disappointment of the sight-loving inhabitants, who had promised themselves a pageant, of which the untoward event that had occurred beyond the walls had altogether deprived them; for no monarch can be disposed to show himself to his people, just as he has been kicked.

CHAPTER LII.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MICE—CONTINUED.

The Fox, at one moment swearing vengeance on the insolent Camel who had dared to thwart him in his wishes; and at the next, laughing until he was obliged to wipe the tears from his eyes with his paw, as he remembered the ridiculous overthrow of dandy Lords of the Bedchamber, and conceited Officers of State; travelled on until he reached a sugar plantation with which he was well acquainted; moralizing as he went in a strain more curious than edifying; and not at all calculated to have raised him in the esteem of the pigmy Emperor of Mouseland if it had unfortunately come to his knowledge.

Having entered the plantation, he selected one of the finest and most luscious sugar-canes he could find; and then sauntered to a grove in the neighborhood, the favorite haunt of an aged Monkey, gray in the arts of mischief.

Affecting not to observe the hoary tenant of the wood, the Fox seated himself under a tree, and began fanning himself with his tail, as though overcome with heat and fatigue; while he leered out at the ends of his eyes from time to time, and was overjoyed to perceive the Monkey intent upon the sugar-cane, licking his wishful jaws, and leaping from branch to branch in all the restlessness of desire. At length the water began to flow from his parted lips; and then the Fox, believing that the proper moment was come, affected suddenly to perceive him, and with extreme courtesy greeted him, and begged to make his acquaintance.

The monkey grinned and chattered, and maintained a respectful distance: having an unpleasant consciousness that Foxes sometimes devoured Monkeys, and deeming it most prudent to keep out of the reach of a paw; though he returned the compliment of his new acquaintance with considerable urbanity, influenced in no slight degree by the sight of the sugar-cane.

The prospect of advantage always smooths the temper: it is the oil of selfishness flung on the waters of passion.

Gradually, therefore, but without lessening the distance between them, the two ill-assorted companions fell into conversation, until the Fox had confided just as much of his intentions to the Monkey as he judged expedient; and had hinted to him, that if he would pledge himself to assist his designs, he would not only bestow upon him the tempting luxury which he appeared so much to covet, but would direct him where to find a thousand such.

The Monkey first listened and doubted; then looked and believed; and finally, requesting the Fox to retire a little apart, promised his coöperation as soon as he should have devoured the sugar-cane. The crafty designer smiled and complied; and when the Monkey had completed his delicious repast, he led the way to the forest, where the unsuspicious Camel was browsing on the branches of the tall trees.

Never take an ally into the field fasting. Hunger sours the temper, and quenches the enthusiasm. A man never loves his neighbor so well as when he has just plunged his finger into his pillauf.

Having pointed out the Camel to his new friend, the Fox sauntered away, and left the whole affair in the hands of the Monkey; who immediately scrambled into the tree on which the intended victim was feeding, and seizing the broken halter that had been left in his nose, fastened his head to the branches.

It is dangerous to leave even a trace of your former insignificance when you are bent on affecting greatness. Many a proud man is led by the broken halter of some low habit, which puts his beard into the hand of his enemy, and defiles it with the unsavory oil of ridicule.

The Fox, who had kept a watchful eye on his new friend, speedily perceived his success, and hastened to congratulate him on his dexterity and address: and then, when he found that the vanity of the Monkey was touched, he made him ample promises of reward, if he would oblige him by his valuable co-operation in another undertaking which he had much at heart.

The hoary pug, who had been linked to the will of the Fox by the chain of sweet words, directly consented; and, leaving the unfortunate Camel tied to the tree, the two confederates journeyed through the forest until they came to a piece of timber which some woodsman had been employed in sawing asunder.

Here the Fox paused, and pointing to a wedge which had been inserted in the wood, informed the Monkey, who had not yet ventured to approach him too nearly, that he had particular occasion for the wedge, but that he had striven in vain to possess himself of it, and now relied solely upon the sagacity of the same master-spirit that had captured the Camel.

Pug smiled, almost in scorn, at the helplessness of his companion; and forthwith began to work away with his teeth and paws with an energy which greatly diverted the Fox, who was laughing heartily in his own quiet peculiar way, when suddenly a mightier effort than usual dislodged the wedge, and the tail of the Monkey was caught, and held fast by the closing timber.

"Ajaib — wonderful!" shouted Reynard giving loose to a peal of merriment that echoed through the forest; "Had your beard grown gray in ignorance, that you had yet to learn, oh! Monkey! that they who toil to gratify their sensual appetites, and labor under the impetus of idle vanity, are fitting tools for craftier spirits, and ever fall into a trap of their own setting? You have breakfasted heartily at my expense; and I do not deny that you have earned the meal; but it is ever ill-policy to consume the wages before the work is done. I owed you the courtesy of telling you these truths, that you might not die as unprofitably as you have lived; but I will not weary you with words."

And, so saying, he fell upon the ill-fated monkey, and devoured him without mercy.

They who, to prosper themselves, consent to further the evil designs of the unworthy, fail not to reap the reward of their mean self-love.

In an audience of the padishah, which he obtained immediately on reaching the city, the fox at once explained the situation of the camel, at which the monarch and all the court laughed themselves almost into convulsions; and many witticisms were ventured, that extremely delighted the younger members of the court; while the vèzir, in a fine imaginative strain of eloquence, was explaining the stratagem by which he had secured the helpless camel; wherein it was remarkable that the monkey was never once mentioned.

The ingratitude of the great was written in letters of crimson upon the first scroll of knowledge. It is easier to number the stars, than to be remembered by the mighty whom you have served. A favor conferred upon the haughty is as a chain about their necks, of which they often break the links with a scimitar.

A general rejoicing was ordered throughout the metropolis of Mouseland; for former defeat always doubles the triumph of subsequent success; compliments were lavished on the vèzir, which he received with characteristic modesty. He was designated the Savior of the Empire, and he placed his paw upon his heart, and swore that he had done nothing, absolutely nothing. He was declared with acclamation to be the great hero of the age, the master-spirit of victory, the Conqueror of the Cats; and he only smiled a grateful smile, and assured the excited populace that he had but done his duty.

They who feel their power can afford to ape humility—it is throwing gold dust into the eyes which should not be too clearsighted: and the great do well at once to dazzle and to blind; for it is a compound policy beyond the reach of the vulgar.

While the citizens of Mouseland were enjoying themselves in preparations for the rejoicing, the padishah, anxious to secure his share of the general gratification, and unable, from his exalted station, to join in the amusements of his subjects, determined on proceeding to the forest in order to gratify his revenge by exulting over the arrogant captive; and accordingly, commanding his retinue to be prepared, he hastened to the field of triumph, and climbing the tree to which the camel was attached, he seated himself upon a branch directly above his head, and poured forth upon him the whole volume of his angry satire.

"Welcome, thrice welcome, you of the straight back!" he said scoffingly; "happy are you, who can feed upon the young leaves of the forest, and drink water from the clouds; who can wander hither and thither over the earth—and yet, what say I? It would seem that you are less free than your stature would imply; for, had not your neck been longer than your head, you would never presumptuously have dared to kick up the dust of contempt in the eyes of an assembled court, and a free people, until you had learned how far it might be safe to brave their resentment. How like you now the lesson? Does it not depend upon my sovereign will whether you become once more a wanderer over the green plains, and a quaffer of the bright rivers, or remain here to die the death which your vain glorious self-appreciation has drawn down upon you? Truly it does so; that your blanched bones as they glimmer in the moonlight may remind all future upstarts of the danger of over-looking through their own vanity the probable power of others; and of attempting to despise and to subdue animals eminently their superiors."

As he felt that he had here uttered a most impressive sentiment, the padishah paused for applause; and the assembled mice, seeing at once the singular appositeness with which such a remark fell from his imperial lips, were not niggardly in their demonstrations of approbation.

There are few things so admirable upon earth as consistency; and as the fox listened the tears of suppressed merriment trembled in his eyes.

Meanwhile the camel, conscious that despite the insignificance of his enemy, he was nevertheless completely at his mercy, felt the necessity of conforming to any proposal, and of submitting to any indignity in order to save his life; and, accordingly, making no comment on the absurdity of the monarch's address,

laid his heart on the ashes of humility, and thus replied :—

"Mirror of mightiness, and sun of strength! My crime against your greatness has grown out of my ignorance of its extent. I came from a far land, a helpless stranger, unknowing and unknown. No dream of your power had fallen upon my soul, nor had the light of your presence beamed upon my eyes—I sinned, because I deceived myself, and judged of your strength by your size. I am already sufficiently punished by the knowledge that I have incurred your displeasure. Pardon me, therefore, dread sovereign, lest I expire of grief: and suffer me, by a life of devotion to your imperial will, to expiate my transgression. Put the ring of obedience into my ears, and let me swear eternal allegiance, and be counted among those who have the happiness to be your subjects."

As the camel ceased speaking the fox stepped forward, and eloquently and humanely interceded for the captive: he represented to the padishah how frequently animals really fell into error unconsciously; and made a delicate allusion to his own career—reminded his hearers, with a most sonorous sigh, of the days when he himself not only despised, but fed on mice; and ultimately asked, with a noble consciousness of high desert, whether he had given the emperor or the empire reasons to repent their mercy.

A universal and eager squeak of dissent rose on all sides; and as the fox bowed gracefully in acknowledgment, the padishah ordered the oath to be administered to the camel, and the halter gnawed asunder, which was immediately done; and the emancipated prisoner followed his new master from the forest, a good deal impressed by the oration of the fox, and reconciled by the presence of a companion in disgrace.

The troubles of others always assist in consoling us for our own.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MICE—CONTINUED.

The subjugation of the Camel caused an immense commotion in the forest, and the mysterious prowess of the Mouse was canvassed on all sides, until the most extraordinary and magical tales became current: and animals of various kinds, not wishing to brave an influence which they could not comprehend, and anxious to continue a peaceable existence, voluntarily tendered their allegiance to the mice.

Shadows frequently frighten the crowd; and we always dread that evil the most of which we cannot define the limits.

The Fox revelled in power, and increased in popularity. He was never idle an hour; for when the state affairs of Mouseland were arranged, he was busied in ingratiating himself with their new allies who gladly returned civilities by which they were likely to benefit. Presents poured in upon him: and if occasionally in their desire to gratify his well known fondness for poultry, some of the beasts brought him a Stork or two, he only smiled at the mistake, and did not consider it expedient to inform them that they were destroying the saviours of the Mice!

But there was still a thorn in his heart. The lion was unsubdued! The king of the forest was unconquered! And the Fox had registered a vow that every beast of the earth should own the power of his guile. With this resolution he therefore again presented himself at the carpet of the padishah, and reported the contumacity of the Lion; but the monarch of Mouseland appeared anxious to evade the subject; and even stated to the excited Vèzir that he deemed it no dishonor to share the sovereignty of the earth with so noble an animal;—and that indeed, he would rather live on terms of amity with him, than by provoking his anger run the risk of arousing a wrath which might be dangerous.

The Fox, with all respect, scouted this argument; and represented to the timid monarch that while the Lion continued to be lord of the forest, there was no safety for the Empire of the Mice, which he could destroy in one paroxysm of rage; and he begged to be permitted to remind the padishah that the animal in question was celebrated for the irritability of his disposition, and his total disregard of the feelings of others, when he was inclined to gratify either his anger or his appetite; a fact which was too notorious to need comment.

The Emperor listened, and at length wearied by the arguments, and moved by the entreaties of his enterprising Vèzir, he consented to summon the Lion to his presence; and deputed the Fox Ambassador Extraordinary on the occasion.

Great was the indignation of the Lion when the Fox declared his mission: he lashed the sounding forest with his tail, he flung lightnings from his large eyes, bristled his wiry mane like a column of lances, and moistened the dust of the earth with the crimson drops which fell from his yawning jaws: his roar shook the young cedars to their roots; and he would instantly have devoured the Ambassador had he not already breakfasted, and despised him too much to run the risk of a surfeit in the indulgence of his revenge.

A veil fell over the heart of the majesty of Mouseland at this new defeat: he had grown out of himself by his extraordinary successes; and every passenger who picks up ninety-nine piastres in his path, naturally feels aggrieved

if he does not find the hundredth. Since the Fox had urged him to subjugate the Lion, the Lion had become to him the hundredth piastre; and he resented the failure accordingly.

"We had done better, oh Vèzir;" he said sharply, "had we buried our displeasure in the hollow of our hearts, and closed our eyes to an evil which was beyond remedy, than thus to have laid it on our open palm, and lifted it to the light, on a hand which had no power to strike it down. When a monarch threatens without the means of vengeance, the escape of his enemy is his own defeat—and thus, oh, short-sighted minister! you have scattered the ashes of confusion on the head of your master!"

The Fox listened respectfully; nor did he attempt to justify himself, nor to remind the padishah of the few trifling services which he had rendered him; though he might have done so in the full assurance of their being forgotten, as in such cases all benefits are certain to be by the great; but simply declaring to the irritated monarch that the Lion should yet be compelled to wear his yoke, he hastily quitted the presence.

Hunting with the Lion is but hungry work, and fighting with him is especially dangerous; of this the Fox was well aware: and he therefore determined to eschew his present acquaintance either as friend or foe, and to find some go-between simple enough to run all risks for the mere honor of being employed.

There are many such brainless busy-bodies to be found everywhere, and the crafty Vèzir was an adept in the choice of his tools. He hesitated only a moment, and his resolution was taken. He had remarked in one of his rambles a neighboring Jackall; a poor, spiritless, cowardly, cringing animal, who satisfied himself with the offal of the very game he had run down, for the weak gratification of keeping company with a Lion.

What a vast number of Jackalls there are in the world!

The Fox curled his tail in contemptuous satisfaction as he remembered the narrow-hearted slave, and trotted away to his lair without a moment's misgiving as to the result of his undertaking.

"He will whiten my face once more in the eyes of all Mouseland;" he murmured to himself as he went; "A base-spirited beast, who would barter his mother for a comfortable meal! Creatures of this description are readily worked upon; so now for my new friend!"

The negotiation was short, and the result perfectly satisfactory to both parties. The Fox caught two or three rabbits by the sly, and presented them to the Jackall, suffering him to devour the whole of them himself; a liberal and delicate proceeding, which was extremely agreeable to that animal, who was delighted for once to play the Lion's part, and who had never experienced the same attention before: his *great* friend having a remarkably fine appetite, and seldom rejecting anything but garbage. An eternal regard was sworn between the new acquaintance in consequence; and the Jackall licking his lips after his savory repast, whispered his regret that the liberal, gentlemanly Fox, was not a Lion; at which Reynard only laughed, assuring him that ere long, if he proved faithful to his pledge, he would convince him that in a war of wits one Fox was equal to two Lions.

Having given this very satisfactory assurance, and dropped a few more hints for the guidance of his grovelling and beggarly ally, the Vèzir retired quietly to his burrow, and left the matter entirely to the exertions of the Jackall; who, an hour or two after this pleasant interview, rushed breathlessly into the presence of the contumacious Lion, and fell at his feet as if in the last agony.

"How now, haramzadeh—base-born slave!" roared the monarch of the wood; commencing, as from his superior strength and station, he had every right to do, by abuse of his caitiff-follower; "What dirt have you been eating, and what ass was your father, that you thus break in upon the slumber which has just succeeded to my repast? Speak, recreant! Who has threatened your ill-fed carcase with violence, that you come to play the craven in my very den?"

"Dread lord and master!" faltered out the traitor; "forgive me if I tremble, and hear my tale before you chide my fears. I knew that my lord must dine; and I was roaming the country in search of prey for the Mighty One before whom I bow, when suddenly there came forth of the thicket a Lion well nigh as lordly as yourself, who, seeing me in pursuit of game, asked me for whom I hunted—Alas! I could reply but by the truth, and I told him humbly but firmly, that I served the lord of the forest; "Be hey?—what's this?" he foamed, as he ground his strong teeth with rage; "Who is he who would be lord when my foot ranges and my roar is heard? Go, wretch, to the paltry animal whose slave you are, and bid him hide himself in the deepest den of the mountain, or the thickest underwood of the forest, lest I encounter him in my wanderings, and rend him piecemeal!" Need I tell the Light of the Earth that I refused to be the bearer of such a message? With what mitkal should I have measured out my lord's bounty, had I undertaken an errand like this? No! I sought rather to remove all abomination from the beard of majesty, and answered in as high a tone; and truly, most puissant padishah of the forests, I had well nigh paid the karatch* as the penalty of my rashness for the imperious stranger sprang on me, an

* Capitation-tax, levied on raiahs, or vassals.

would have devoured me, had I not raised the dust of flight, and hastened to apprise my lord of his new enemy."

Loud roared the Lion when he ceased to listen. He had long dwelt in solitary majesty, the acknowledged monarch of the forest; and he resolved at once neither to abdicate his power, nor to dilute it by admitting a rival. Accordingly, with mane erect, eyeballs of fire, and a heart swelling with indignation, he bade the cowering Jackall guide him instantly to the spot where he had encountered his haughty enemy.

He was obeyed. The false craven trotted on before with alacrity, and the mighty Lion followed, lashing the earth with his tail, and moistening the brushwood through which he made his way with the foam that fell in flakes from his parted lips. Their walk terminated near the mouth of a well, towards which the Jackall pointed as the den of the usurper; and then, declining to advance further, crouched away, leaving the noble and betrayed Lion to terminate the adventure.

With all the impetuosity of rage, indignation, and jealousy, the infuriated animal sprang to the margin of the well, where, reflected in the clear water, he beheld his own image, and thought that he was face to face with his enemy; his hoarse and appalling roar of defiance was echoed by the deep murmurs of the tank; and like many another hero, he leapt at a shadow, and plunged head over ears into a bath for which he had been perfectly unprepared.

Away sped the Fox, who had been contemplating from a distance the success of his stratagem, with his tail erect, and a roguish twinkle in his eye which betrayed his self-gratulation; and affecting not to remark the coldness of his reception, he forthwith laid his paw upon his head, and informed the Majesty of Mouseland of the capture of the rebel Lion.

The intelligence acted like beng on the spirits of the monarch and his court, who sprang from side to side of the palace, squeaking with delight: indeed, the popular commotion was so great that it was not for a considerable time that the Vèzir could command the royal ear sufficiently to suggest the expediency of an early visit to the prison of the captive. When, however, he had succeeded in so doing, the justice of the hint was at once admitted; and, in the pride of his little heart, the Padishah of the Long-tails summoned the vassal-camel, who bending meekly on his knees, received the royal mouse upon his hump, where he enthroned himself to the great admiration of the whole city.

"Thrice-honored animal!" said the exulting Monarch to the patient beast, who with half-closed eyes, and drooping head, stood quietly awaiting the signal to depart; "Your's is no common lot: see that you sink not beneath the responsibility of your office, but look well to your path; for remember that you bear the weight of sovereignty, and the hope of an entire Empire!"

"Powerful Padishah!" replied the stupid animal, with a fulness of truth and a want of tact, which at once demonstrated to the Fox the little probability there existed of his ever rising into favor at Court; "My path is easy, and my burden is light. Were it not, indeed, that I felt your Majesty mount, and that as you ran up my side, I experienced the same tickling sensation as that caused by those amasseny sikdam—those poor pitiful insects, the forest-flies, when they sometimes alight upon me, I should not have been aware that I bore any burthen at all. Be tranquil, therefore, oh, Lord of the Long-tails, for I could carry you round El Caf without feeling your weight."

As the Camel ceased speaking, the royal Mouse was seized with a violent fit of sneezing; and the Fox took the opportunity of this fit of sternutation to wipe away the tears of suppressed laughter from his brimming eyes.

What a beautiful thing is truth! How it always advances a man's interests!

When the party reached the well, the pigmy Monarch descended from his elevated position, and established himself on its margin, whence he looked down with infinite complacency on the drenched and despondng Lion.

"Boöroum Seid!*—You are welcome," he said smilingly; "both to our territories and to our tanks. Had you been more courteous, we should have received you in a less inconvenient hall of audience: but as it is, we have deemed it expedient to steep the bread of disobedience in the waters of defeat, and you must swallow the meagre meal as you can."

There was admirable policy in this speech of the Padishah's, as your Highness cannot fail to remark; for, as the Mouse saw no means of delivering his formidable captive, he resolved to make necessity appear design, and to seem to abandon him through displeasure to a fate from which in point of fact he had no possible hope or prospect of setting him free.

But ere the humbled and exhausted Lion could reply, the Fox approached the well, and, seizing the royal ear, whispered to the monarch, that friendship of so powerful and respectable an animal would greatly tend to exalt his glory; and that, if his majesty could induce the prisoner to swear allegiance to the throne of Mouseland, he would undertake to secure his liberation.

"But, Vèzir of quick wit and sound knowledge, whose head, under the shadows of our greatness, is raising itself to the clouds," said the Padishah, with that becoming modesty and caution for which he was deservedly re-

*Lion

nowned; "Suppose that when once on dry land, the mighty Seid should laugh at our beards, how could we contend against his furious revenge?"

"Bashustun—on my head be it!" was the reply of the councillor: "The Lion is an honorable beast; he will disdain a lie: brave to a fault, he will do battle for his new master against all comers; generous and high-hearted, he will never look back upon the past, for he knows that what is written is written; and we shall thus secure an ally who will be as a footstool to the throne and as an eye to the state."

"Wallah billah! it is well said," squeaked the willing Mouse; and then once more addressing the Lion, he exclaimed majestically, "Said we not well that we would leave you here to perish and to die the death of a dog? Have you aught to urge in denial? Does it not depend on us and on our pleasure, whether you live or expire miserably amid the suffocating waters? And yet we would fain be mereiful, and not see your strength wither, and your eye grow dim. How say you, vanquished Seid, will you become our willing vassal, our loving ally, one of the pillars of our state?"

The Lion opened his ponderous jaws to their extremest width, to give utteranee to the bitter contempt he felt for the wretched little animal who thus addressed him; but, alas! when the words should have eome forth, the water rushed down his throat, and he was nearly choked; and faint, exhausted, and powerless as he was, he felt that in order to preserve his wretched existence, he had no alternative but to swallow an oath, which, however, at the moment, was even more suffocating than the water. When he had done so, the Camel was once more freighted with the load of royalty; and the train of courtiers having taken the way back to the subterranean city, the Fox at once proceeded to effect the liberation of his new associate.

Not far distant from the well which had snared the Lion to his ruin, was a lake of some extent, whence, in times of drought, the husbandmen of the province irrigated their lands by means of engines, which threw the water into small canals that interseeted the plain, and increased the vigorous vegetation. One of the channels was in the immediate neighborhood; and the Fox lost no time in breaking down the clay aqueduct, and suffering the stream to pour into the treacherous tank, until it overflowed, and the Lion was enabled to walk forth, shake his dripping mane, and warm his trembling limbs in the bright sunshine.

When he had recovered his breath, the first impulse of the generous beast was to make his acknowledgments to his deliver for so signal a piece of service; and the modesty of the Fox was so conspicuous in his reply, that the Lion frankly apologised for the contempt in which he had hitherto held all his race, and vowed to him an earnest and eternal friendship.

"Good deeds, oh Reynard," he said gently "ever secure their own reward. Be not disgusted by so trite an apothegm, but ever let it urge you to kind and generous actions like that of this day."

The Fox could have laughed at the Lion's beard, but he scarcely thought it prudent to do so; and, perhaps, when the singular inappositiveness of the remark is considered, he had some cause for mirth; but, unconscious of the feeling with which his words had been received, the royal animal, as they pursued their way to the palace of the Mouse, related to his companion the treachery of the false and cowardly Jackall; and uttered many a bitter apostrophe on his ingratitude, which, had the reereant overheard them, would have sufficed to kill him with sheer fright.

It is perhaps needless to say that the Fox joined heartily in the anathema, and exasperated still more the anger of the Lion; until having wrought him up to the last pitch of rage, he bade him be calm, for that so black a traitor was not fit to live, and assured him that die he should. He hinted, however, that it would be as well to say nothing on the subject at Court, as the raee of Jackalls were under the protection of the Padishah of the Long-Tails, and that consequently justice must be done silently.

The Lion aequiesced at onee; and the ceremony of his presentation having taken place, greatly to the delight of Mouseland, and his own disgust, he was permitted to retire to his den; an arrangement highly honorable and considerate on the part of the Padishah, who felt his inability to detain him a moment longer than he choose to stay for the amusement of his new masters.

That very night the Fox supped from the hind quarter of a very lean Jackall; and the Lion never again encountered the treacherous slave by whom he had been betrayed.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE KINGDOM OF THE MICE—CONTINUED.

Did your Highness ever experience the shock of an earthquake? Of one of those mysterious convulsions of nature which defy alike the power and the policy of man—when the whole world appears to be crumbling into dust and to be insufficient to fill up the yawning chasm, dark and insatiate, which gapes to receive the universal ruin! When the voice of the human race is but one common shriek of agony, and the great globe seems to be on-

common grave? When not even the prospect of the sherbets of Paradise can quench the hot thirst of terror: nor the vision of its houri destroy the bitterness of death? Nay, then, if you have not, my lord has been more favored than was the Padishah of Mouseland when his subterranean kingdom was shaken to its base—his palace prostrated, his cities laid waste, and his subjects destroyed by thousands, and cumbering the streets with their maimed and mangled bodies!

All was consternation among the miserable survivors. an universal squeak of mourning rent the air: and fathers, sons, and lovers, mothers, and maidens, collected about the victims of rage upon their dead. In despair at such [illegible] a visitation, the monarch of Mouseland summoned the Fox, the Camel, and the Lion to his presence; and they came only to find him steeped in sorrow to the very whiskers:—What was to be done? The noble Seid offered battle on the instant, but against whom was he to fight? The Camel suggested the erection of a new palace, and the founding of a new city, but where were the architects to plan, and the workmen to build it! The Fox only advised patience: and promised to trace the evil to its origin, and to prevent its recurrence.

As all the population of Mouseland had great faith in the power of their Vezir to fulfil his pledges, they were in some degree consoled: and many hours were passed in burying the dead, and digging a few underground apartments for the accommodation of the wounded: when suddenly another mighty crash at a little distance once more overwhelmed them with terror, and they ran off in every direction to avert the new destruction by which they were threatened.

But on this occasion they were subjected only to alarm: for the evil had fallen on the colony of their enemies the Jerhuahs; and they were slowly recovering from their panic, when the Fox appeared at their ruined walls, and informed the desponding Padishah that he had discovered the author of the evil to be a huge elephant, who at sunset emerged from the woods into the plain, and recklessly trod down the roofs of the subterranean cities.

The Lord of the Long-tails trembled as he listened: but his Vezir affected to hold their new enemy cheaply, and reminded the Padishah that he had subjugated the mighty Lion—What, then, could he fear? Nay, for the first time since he had accepted office, he suggested that a new envoy should be chosen by the monarch from among his own nation; and so composedly did he talk on the subject, that the weak Mouse began to be once more puffed up with pride, and forgetful of his own insignificance; and in this frame of mind he pitched upon a young, sprightly, smart-whiskered Bey of the household, whom he furnished with the proper credentials, and deputed his Ambassador.

To the full as vain as his master, the mouseling of quality retreated to his hole, where he gave his whiskers a more diplomatic and important twist, smoothed his slender tail into more graceful glossiness, and adorned himself in the most approved manner, ere he departed on his embassy, which he did with a brisk run that promised a speedy return.

The reappearance of the unfortunate envoy took place, however, with even more dispatch than had been anticipated: for the Elephant, amused rather than indignant at the insolence of the spruce-looking little reptile, had only answered his summons by blowing him many yards on his homeward path, with the wind from his mighty trunk; and in sorry plight, as your Highness may well imagine, did the poor dapper diplomatist throw himself down before the carpet of majesty, and tell his tale of disgrace.

"Who can war against his fate, Light of the Earth!" he concluded, as the Padishah bent upon him an eye of disappointment and disgust: "Who can control the elements? What animal could have braved the whirlwind by which I was lifted from the earth, flung against the clouds, and swept along over an infinity of space? Ne bilirim—what can I say? The ashes of defeat are strown upon my head—the defilement of disgrace is on my beard—the anger of the Great One of the Earth, the Refuge of the World has clutched my heart, and stopped its pulsations."

But the Padishah was not to be appeased; the Fox was summoned to the conference, requested to become the executioner of the discomfited Ambassador, (whom he very submissively snapped up before the words were well out of the royal mouth,) and solicited to tender his opinion of the most desirable step to be next taken in this very unpleasant affair.

The wily Vezir asked for an hour to deliberate; although feeling convinced that his agency would be required, he had already matured his plans; and at the termination of that period, he demanded from the king a strong detachment of Mice, who were to act solely under his orders.

With this party he at once quitted the ruined city, and advanced to the deep bed of an exhausted river, traversed by a wooden bridge, which the Elephant was compelled to cross during his periodical visits to the plain. The channel of the stream closed suddenly to the right and left of this bridge, the rocks being high and jagged, and almost meeting overhead, not many feet above the level of the water; and in consequence of this circumstance, the bridge had been flung over a wider portion of the river, and rested only upon a deep chalky vein of soil, running far into the valley, and suddenly terminating in a hollow, not twenty

stadia distant from the capital of Mouseland.

On arriving at the bridge, the Fox at once commenced operations by instructing his troops to gnaw partially asunder the ropes and pins which united the wood-work, so as to render it insecure for any heavy weight; and the consequences of this step are evident. The next time the Elephant endeavored to pass, his enormous bulk proved an overfreight for the frail fabric, and he fell headlong into the bed of moist chalk, without power to move either to the right or left, where the rocky barrier fenced in the channel.

In this emergency, the sagacity, strength, and intelligence of the animal, availed him nothing. He was fairly in the toils; and was only another example among many, of a creature ruined by his own greatness, and destroyed by the very attributes on which he had been wont to pride himself.

Off ran the Fox when he saw the result of his stratagem; and the destruction of half Mouseland was forgotten in the triumph of such a capture. Many of the dead were still unburied; but their fate was overlooked in the general rejoicing that made the whole Empire one shrill squeak of proud delight.

These things are alike among men and mice, your Highness. Who heeds in the pageant and parade which celebrate a victory, the victims who have fallen to secure it?

The vain-gloriousness of the King of the Long-tails was at its height. He issued all sorts of contradictory orders—commanded and countermanded—and all in order to keep the different animals, who had become his vassals, on the run. Here flew a Rat; there rushed a Badger—a Squirrel sprang on one side, and a Chamois leapt on the other; the whole plain was in convulsions; and ever and anon the roar of the captured Elephant came booming along the valley like a thunder-peal.

All this was very delightful, but every pleasure must have a termination; and his Highness the Padishah was partially recalled to reason by a hint from the Fox, that although a captive, the mighty Elephant was not yet a vassal; and that his subjugation required instant attention.

Unable to controvert so cogent an argument, the monarch at once declared himself ready to be guided by the counsels of his Vêzir; though he could not avoid reminding him that this was no slight concession from a sovereign who was now lord of the whole brute creation, with the exception of the Elephant, who was then in his toils.

The Fox bowed low, and laughed—but the bow was to the Padishah, and the laugh to himself, and he consequently avoided giving any offence; while he assured the potentate with all due respect and reverence, that in the event of his inducing the Elephant to acknowledge his authority, he would undertake to release him from his present thrall.

The royal cortège was immediately in motion. First marched two fierce and shaggy Bears, wielding huge staffs, and growling forth the many and mighty titles of the Padishah. Then followed a band of female Monkeys, dancing fantastic measures to the music of a score of bare-backed Apes. These were succeeded by a company of Porcupines, who shot their quills right and left upon the crowd, which threatened to impede the line of march. Then came a couple of Asses, braying out with lungs of iron the near approach of the Refuge of the World, and Lord of the Earth; who followed, mounted upon the hump of the Camel, having on his right the merry Fox, to whom the pageant was food for unmeasured mirth; and on his left the crest-fallen and disgusted Lion, who stalked solemnly along, his heart burning with shame as he remembered how sorry a figure he should make in the eyes of his old acquaintance the Elephant.

We could always support our misfortunes themselves with philosophy; it is their effect on the minds, and their influence on the opinions of others, that unman us.

A guard of honor, composed of wild Goats, surrounded the mighty monarch: and immediately behind them came a tall Ourang-outang, carrying a palm-leaf, on which, shaded from the public gaze by fans formed of the beard of the bulrush, lay the three favorite wives of the Padishah; two more animals of the same description, but of less stately proportions, bore the slaves of the harem. The light troops were represented by a group of Chamois; while the heavy regiments were most appropriately composed of Buffaloes; and in this state and fashion did the King of the Mice journey towards the prison-place of the Elephant; of whom he no sooner caught sight than he exclaimed in a transport of very natural delight:

"Why, how is this, oh Vêzir of power and wisdom! Have you brought us here only to show us one of our own brethren? No resemblance can be more perfect; save that, indeed, nature has been unkind to our poor captive, in visiting him with such a mass of flesh, and such a length of nose; but these are deformities which, being ourselves happily exempt, we know how to pity in others; had not this misfortune attended his birth, we should have been as like as two drops of water. Speak, cousin!" he continued, addressing the enormous animal with a patronising gentleness which drew tears from his wives, and convulsed the Fox with merriment; "What would you of us?"

No answer was made, for in truth the Elephant did not either see or hear the Monarch, and was lost in wonder at what this meeting

ef so many divers animals in his immediate neighborhood might portend.

Meanwhile the Padishah moved forward, and transferring himself from the hump of the Camel to the capacious back of the Elephant, began to walk towards his head, examining him most minutely, and occasionally switching his tail with self-gratulation and importance; when, unfortunately chancing to pass over a spot where the huge beast was particularly susceptible to the touch, and deemed that some fly had alighted with the intent to sting him, he gave a flap with his long ear, and down fell his majesty into the wet clay!

The whole court was in commotion: the Lady-mice squeaked, and their slaves, as in duty bound, squeaked still louder; the Bears growled, the Asses brayed, the female Monkeys chattered, and the Apes grinned; the Porcupines rolled themselves up, the Lion roared, the Camel screamed, the Fox almost went into convulsions, the wild Goats shook their beards, the Chamois leapt from rock to rock, and the Buffaloes laid down, and began to chew the cud of distress. And in the mean time, the monarch, after a vast deal of scrambling and struggling, got safely out of the mire, and reappeared among his people, all chalk, mud, and misery!

But his was not a soul to be subdued by one downfall; and as soon as he could unfasten his jaws, which were cemented together most unpleasantly, and recover his breath, he vowed vengeance on the Elephant, and began to dry his whiskers.

The Fox took this opportunity of coming forward, and assuring his majesty that the crime of the animal had been involuntary; and of reminding him that the privilege of the powerful was to show mercy, coupled with an intimation that he craved the pardon of the offender in the name of the whole court and army.

Thus urged, the heart of the Padishah softened; and the Elephant, being very soon convinced by the representations of the Fox, that his only chance of deliverance lay in his swearing fealty to the Lord of the Long-tails, and consoled for his misfortune by the vassalage of the Lion, at length consented to the indignity; when having administered the oath, the Padishah, yet shivering from his immersion, and considerably shaken by his fall from so prodigious a height, withdrew with all his court in the same order as he had set out: while the Fox hastily collected together a numerous army of miners, composed of beavers, ferrets, rabbits, badgers, mungooshes, rats, mice, and moles, and set them immediately to work to undermine the chalk bank which intervened between the channel of the river and the hollow already mentioned.

As they were in immense numbers, labored heartily, and were considerably assisted by the Elephant himself, he was enabled by sunrise the next morning to force his way through the crumbling barrier, and to obey the summons of the Padishah: who sat enthroned on an ear of maize, surrounded by deputations from all the vassal-animals of the province.

When he had reached the presence, and made his obeisance, the Fox respectfully advanced to the throne, holding between his teeth a ripe sugar-cane, which he presented to his majesty as a delicious refection, and, moreover, an extraordinary curiosity, which he humbly invited him to inspect. The Padishah, who delighted in novelties, at once declared his intention to examine the gift of his esteemed minister and friend: and, having given permission to his wives, and the Prince Royal his only child, to accompany him, which they lost no time in doing, he disappeared into the hollow of the cane followed by his family.

Standing close beside the Fox was a long-armed Ape, his especial slave, who had long nursed a bitter spite against the whole Empire of Mouseland; and no sooner had the tip of the last Imperial tail vanished, than on receiving an encouraging wink from the Fox, he adroitly blocked up the orifice with clay, and secured all the royal family!

A low murmur was rising on every side, when the Fox, contemptuously kicking aside the throne of the Mouse, thus addressed the surrounding animals—

"Beasts of the chase, and of burthen: my most worthy friends and subjects; I have collected you together this day, through my slave the Mouse, to declare to you how I have earned for myself the sovereignty of the brute creation; and in order to prove to all animals, from the lordly Lion to the drudging Mole, that neither strength nor insignificance could secure their possessors from my rule, I made my tool of a sorry Mouse. To that weak, pigmy, miserable reptile, have ye all bowed your haughty heads, to save your forfeit lives. Friends and vassals! The Imperial Mouse has abdicated, the Imperial family is extinct! *I* am your Emperor; and I commence my reign by an apothegm.

"When courage has failed before craft; and the mighty in frame have been bowed beneath the mighty in intellect: the rings of obedience can never be rent from the ears of defeat: and the arrows of ambition will always rebound from the sun of royalty, upon the heads of those who bend the rebellious bow!"

As the self-elected monarch ceased speaking, he gazed around him with a look of proud defiance; placed his foot upon the sugar-cane in which the unhappy Mice were dying of suffocation, as upon a footstool; and seemed to dare a dissentient murmur. But none arose; for the assembled animals, humbled by the consciousness of their disgraceful vassalage to a wretched reptile, of whom the more

wily Fox had made first a tool and then a prey; and, startled into concession by the sudden and unlooked-for assumption of an animal, under whose guile and quick-wittedness they had all severally writhed, could not deny the superiority of their new master; a superiority which he could make them feel at any moment, and in any emergeney, when brute force could not avail: they therefore with one accord offered their obeisance, and acknowledged him as their ruler.

One able diplomatist can secure more triumphs than an army of lancers.

PART II.

CHAPTER LV.

"AJAIB—wonderful!" murmured the Tchorbadji as he flung another purse into the lap of the young Greek: "I could listen to her for ever; her voice is like the sighing of the wind through the light branches of the jasmin. Mashallah! she is a wonder! What is written, is written—I will purchase this fair slave, mother."

"May my lord's will be all-powerful!" gasped out the terrified Nevrestè, as she again prostrated herself to the earth; "had it been any almè of my troop save Mherpirwir and Sèïdika, would I not have given her to my lord for gold? But these two—"

"What of these two?" demanded the Tchorbadji with a lowering brow and a stern gaze; "Whose dog are you to thwart me in my humor? I will purchase the slave for seven purses."

"Let not my lord blacken the face of his servant;" persisted the old woman; "the slave is not mine. The Camalcan of Stamboul had heard of the talent of this young Massaldji from the Bynbashi of the troops of Damascus, and he has already paid a heavy price for her to her late master. She is even now on her way to Iskuidar,* where a slave waits to conduct her to the harem of her new lord. How then can I obey? Am I not as nothing in this matter?"

"Tarik—beware!" frowned the Tchorbadji; "that you deceive me not: there are no feet so swift in all Roum but that the cord is swifter. The slave pleases me, and I am ready to pay her price."

"Will my lord heap ashes upon the head of his servant?" added Nevrestè; "Can the figtree bear grapes, or the olive produce dhourra? How then can I give up a maiden who is not mine?"

"And what says the Massaldji herself?" asked the Tchorbadji, looking kindly on the disguised Greek; "Would she be content to inhabit my harem, and to weave the threads of eloquence into the web of fiction to please the ears which would be ever open to listen?"

"The Tchorbadji is lord;" said Maniolopolo, as calmly as his agitation would permit him to reply: "If the Camalcan of Stamboul be content to leave his slave unreclaimed, then are her poor services at his will. Let the Pasha (may his house prosper!) decide in this matter."

This suggestion at once recalled the worthy Janissary to his reason, and reminded him that he could not take the beard of the Minister in his hand, as though it were that of an odabashi* or a naib;† and determined therefore to rid himself of the affair at once, he said coldly:

"Min Allah! why should I trouble my lord the Pasha for this thing? Are there not many Massaldjis in the land? What is the spoil for which I should contend? Avret der—it is a woman—it is bosh—nothing."

For a moment there was silence; and Maniolopolo watched with considerable anxiety the countenance of the Tchorbadji, who continued to smoke with great energy, and a contraction of eye-brow by no means indicative of internal satisfaction; while the almè slowly rising from the floor, at the signal of Nevrestè, prepared to renew their dances. A wave of the host's hand, however, prevented their purpose; and muttering something of the lateness of the hour, he gravely descended from the sofa, and without again glancing towards the dancers, abruptly quitted the harem.

When he had fairly disappeared, all was once more hilarity; and the young beauty on the sofa smiled out her pretty scorn at the sudden whim of the Tchorbadji, who had poured forth his soul on first sight of an awali, whom she vowed, by the grave of her mother, had a light in her eyes which was nothing less than modest.

Nevrestè ventured to remonstrate, and to uphold the propriety of her handsome companion; greatly to the amusement of the lady, who called the dark-browed awali to the cushion at her feet, where she playfully toyed with the long tresses of raven hair that fell upon her shoulders, and bade her tell how many hearts she had broken since her bright black eyes had learned the art in which they were such adepts.

Maniolopolo, to whom his position was irksome in the extreme, despite the small white hand, and soft accents of the fair wife of the Tchorbadji, answered her by a timid glance, as he resumed his zebec; and having preluded for a moment in melancholy cadences, as though sad recollections had been awakened by the question, at length murmured out in a sub-

* Scutari.

* Corporal. † Cadi's Clerk.

dued voice his low and thrilling reply. The air which he selected was wild as the summer wind—it was a Sciote melody; and it brought with it a thousand memories of the past, which heightened its expression of energy and passion.

THE ALMÉ'S SONG.

Who loves the Almé? Oh mock me not now
With the light of that eye, and the calm of that brow;
For thee, such as thee, were those blessed hours made,
When the sunshine is looked, and when music is said;
But the Almé, though bright her young beauty may be,
Can ne'er know the bliss that is lavished on thee!

Who loves the Almé? Her step may be light,
Her form may be graceful, her eye may be bright,
Her ear may drink in the most eloquent words
That e'er swept like a spell o'er the young spirit's chords;
But the Almé's crushed heart to despondence is vow'd
When her brow is unveiled to the gaze of the crowd.

Then ask not the Almé, proud beauty, to tell
The tales of the past in her memory that dwell;
Rather bid her forget that on earth there can be
A being so loved and so lovely as thee;
Lest, wild with despair such a contrast to meet,
She fling off her garland, and die at thy feet.

A stifled sob met the ear of Maniolopolo as he laid aside the instrument; he involuntarily turned in the direction whence it came, and saw Mherpirwir slowly moving away; and his heart smote him that in order the better to sustain his disguise, he had suffered himself to be betrayed into any expressions calculated to wound the fair and gentle girl, who had so zealously embraced his cause, and risked her own safety to conduce to his happiness. Nevrestè had served him for gold, and had secured the wages of her concession: the other almè had simply and blindly fulfilled the pledge of obedience to which they were vowed; but there was something at the heart of the young Greek that told him of a deeper and a more anxious interest on the part of Mherpirwir. True, she was assisting him to look upon one whom he loved—but the experience of the fair dancing-girl had taught her no tale of constancy on the part of lovers. In the sky of her destiny she had seen ray after ray of the young heart's brightness clouded by the vapours of distrust and change; she had heard murmurs from the sweetest lips in the world, and seen tears in the loveliest eyes; and Mherpirwir was no logician. Maniolopolo was a Greek, a Giaour; a despised one like herself. He could worship the wife of the Moslem only as a bright shape limned on the summer cloud—a laughing light on the sunny wave—something unpalpable and transitory—while, could *she* win him!—But here the heart of the girl beat painfully, and a deep blush burned for an instant on her brow—No, no; she would think no more: she *dared* not.

Some portion of the truth had already intruded itself on Maniolopolo: he had known the almè only a few hours, but there was a softened light and a timid expression in her deep eye when it was turned on him, that revealed her secret.

His melancholy ballad had smitten the fair girl with a painful conviction which had never before so thoroughly forced itself upon her. Who was she that she thus had dared to hope that she might appropriate the heart of one like Maniolopolo? Was not the very name of an almè the by-word of scorn and contumely? Were not all the troop at the beck of every stranger who spread gold upon his palm, to divert his idleness, and to obey his behests? What had she to do with love, with tenderness, with passion? Alas! nothing—Maniolopolo had laid bare before her the desolation of her lot: she might weep away her spirit, and steep her heart in tears; there was no hand to wipe them away, no voice to soothe, no arm to uphold her; and for a moment as the dancing-girl moved from the side of the young Greek, a cold chill stole through her veins, and if she could at that instant be said to *feel*, it was the hard, cold, stern rigidity of the marble which bears the impress of beauty without its vitality. But the death-like paroxysm, the strong spasm of despair, endured not long: the victim was too young to be thus emancipated from suffering; the spirit thrall had more bitter pangs in store, and the awakening from this transient immobility was more crushing than years of murmured suffering.

The night was far advanced when Nevrestè gave the signal for departure; and the wife of the Tchorbadji dismissed her guests with courtesy and gifts far exceeding their expectations; nor did she invite their return, for the admiration of her lord had been too manifest towards the disguised Sëndika to render that personage a welcome guest: and the troop had already passed the threshold of the harem, and Maniolopolo was carefully guiding the footsteps of the trembling Mherpirwir along the rude pavement of the steep street which led to the Theriaki Teharchi, while the old woman followed closely behind them, when they were suddenly met by one of the chaoushes* of the Pasha, preceded by a seratch† bearing a paper lantern, who approaching Nevrestè exclaimed:

"Bè hey—What's this, mother? You are abroad at an unseemly hour with your flock of peris: I have been to the Teharchi, the devil's nest, in which you have housed yourself (and Wallah billah! 'tis no pleasant task to thread that quarter of the city after nightfall!) on a mission from his highness the Pasha (may his beard flourish!). He has heard strange tales of one of your almè, and he honors you by a summons to his harem to-morrow evening at sunset: so prepare your moon-faced beauties, and be careful not to fail at the appointed hour, but seize your good fortune with the grasp of security, and when the river in the west yonder runs gold,

* Officer of the household.
† Servant of the Bey.

see that you stand before the door of the Pasha's harem, or the grave of your father will be defiled, and the soles of your feet unfitted for speedy travel."

The old woman bowed her obedience, and murmured out a thousand assurances of her delight at the summons; and when the chaoush and his attendant had passed on, she moved to the side of Maniolopolo, and whispered: "Wallah! your star is in the ascendant, young sir; your kismet is propitious; but is your heart strong, and your pulse steady? Sen bilirsen —you know best. For my own part, I will trust you. I sell you my neck for two purses, and the present of the Pasha; take care that I do not make a bad bargain, and find it in the noose through any folly of your mad passion."

"Korkma — fear not, mother;" said the young Greek; "For my own sake, *and for her's*, I will look thrice at my words before I utter them. What is written, is written—my felech hath placed me in your hands, and opened the door of the Pacha's harem to my eager foot. What says the proverb? 'When you find water, drink it; when you find a bridge, pass over it.' I found the water of despair, and drained a deep draught; and now I find the bridge of hope, I am resolved, and ready to cross it."

"Sen ektiar—you are the master;" said Nevrestè: "and I am your slave. And now, here we are at the Teharchi, where you can deposit your disguise until to-morrow—Aghour ola—Heaven speed you in your purpose; for you have a bold spirit and a true heart, giaour though you be."

With this blessing Maniolopolo took leave of the old woman; and having silently pressed the slender fingers of Mherpirwir within his own, retired to the apartment where he had assumed his disguise; and having laid aside the veil and antery, and replaced them by the turban and beenish* in which he was accustomed to traverse the city at night, he hastened from the Theriaki Teharchi which was already loud with revelry and riot.

CHAPTER LVI.

It was a glorious noon! The sun rode high in heaven; the bees were busy among the bean-flowers; the butterflies flitted hither and thither, like blossoms loosened from their stems by the summer-wind to be the bright companions of his sport; the golden-armored fish leapt high above the silver-bosomed fountain, and fell back glittering with the light; the sky was a vault of torquoise; and the leaves sang a pleasant melody at the bidding of the breeze. Nor was this all; for the laughter of childhood and the low sweet voice of woman came softly to the ear, as Saïfula Pasha, with a slow step and a preoccupied spirit, silently paced to and fro the tree-shadowed terrace that stretched along beneath the windows of his harem. In one hand he held his amber-lipped chibouque of jasmin wood; the other was buried amid the folds of his girdle; his lips were slightly compressed; his head declined; and at times he drew a long breath like one whose spirit was overladen with thought.

His selictar-aga* and his chibouque-bashi† followed at a short distance, but did not even converse in whispers; so bewildered were they by the sudden restlessness of their master. At length the Satrap paused, and pointing to a spot where the shadows fell deep and cool, a slave obeyed the signal, and spread his carpet, upon which he seated himself, while his attendants with officious zeal arranged his cushions, prepared his pipe, and performed for him all the little offices of attentive zeal.

"Mazzouk," said the Pasha, when his selictar-aga alone stood beside him, all the other attendants having respectfully retired: "there is a weight upon my spirit; the labors of the divan have wearied me. I hate the contact to which I am subjected by the supineness of that dog the Cadi, who is not worth the pillauf he destroys—Mashallah! He is an ass, and the father of asses!"

The Satrap paused, and threw out a long thin thread of smoke from his chibouque, which curled for a moment about his bright and jetty beard; and the selictar-aga bowed his acquiescence in the opinion of his master with an unction which admitted no doubt of his sincerity.

"To see the divan," pursued the Pasha, "one would imagine that the city was one vast Timerhazè!‡ They are not men whom he brings before me for judgment: haivan der —they are animals—creatures from whom you may wring their heart's blood more easily than their piastres — Haif! haif!—shame, shame! I have sat there three hours this day in the name of the Prophet, and not a single purse has passed into the treasury."

"Mashallah! He is a dog, and deserves the cord," said the attendant coolly.

"Am I not the shadow of the Padishah?" continued the Pasha in a low tone of concentrated anger; "And shall he not have justice? Let him look to it if things do not change. Inshallah! I wrong no man."

A few moments of silence succeeded, and again the Satrap spoke: "And this Frank, this infidel dog, of whom he told me in full divan not a month back, who scattered his money in the city streets, and made an okkalé of his dwelling, where all who came were welcome; what has become of him? With whose

* Cloak.

* Sword-bearer. † Keeper of the pipe.
‡ Mad-house. § Tavern.

hattisheriffe* has he passed the gates? By Allah! there has been treason—and the Cadi has played the codgea-basha, and levied tribute for himself."

"Bashustun—on my head be it! My lord the Pasha has his foot on the neck of the ghorumsak:" said the selictar-aga, turning aside to spit out his contempt of the Cadi.

"Have you heard aught of this spendthrift Frank?" asked the Pasha; "if it be as the Cadi says, he must be well known in the city."

"Your slave has heard that the stranger is no Frank," was the reply; "but a rascally Greek from the Islands, who has been laughing at the beards of the True Believers, and calling himself a Gaul."

"Ha! is it so?" said the Satrap, a gleam of pleasure passing over his swarthy countenance; "Then by the soul of his mother, he shall pay dearly for his insolence. A Greek! Where is the karatch?† He shall pay it to the uttermost para; aye, to the uttermost. You shall talk with him, Mazzouk; and you know your duty."

The selictar-aga laid his hand upon his heart, and smiled.

"Shall we have our faces blackened by a raïah?" pursued the Satrap; "a vile slave who was born under the yoke? and whose cunning has taught him to take shelter in the name of a Frank Khawajir?‡ And a Gaul, too! Were there not Russians and English enough between Scanderia and Stamboul, but he must call himself a Gaul!"

"The slave is as keen as a makaisa:"§ said the selictar-aga, selecting a simile which was as professional as it was apt: "Had he written himself either Russ or Briton, we might have read the cheat, for these Giaours are all as like from Ramazan to Ramazan, as the pearls in my lord's turban: and they who have once known one of the unclean dogs, can tell him again even should they meet on the edge of the Great Desert; but the Gaul is as changeful as the shadows of the tempest on the waters of Boulac; and there is no swearing to his beard."

"And how know you this?" asked the Pasha, amazed at the erudition of his attendant; "Have you plunged your fingers into the same pillauf with the Unbelievers, that you can tell the signs of their uncleanness?"

"May the hand of your slave perish if it hath done this!" said the functionary solemnly; "Whose dog am I that I should defile my own grave? I learned the secret from a hadji who had travelled to the far east; and who told me that a mighty Schah, who knew little of the infidel nations of the west, and who sought to learn in what the Giaours of these lands of darkness differed the one from the other, employed a famous painter, who could cunningly spread the tints of the rainbow over the surface of the papyrus, and create bright shapes that wanted only breath and life to make them equal to the houris, to trace for him a Giaour of every land within the circle of El Caf, that so he might, should any of these restless barbarians travel to his court, be able at once to tell to what nation he belonged. But I weary my lord——"

"Go on," said the Pasha, "I listen."

"The painter obeyed the Imperial command:" pursued the selictar-aga with increased animation, encouraged by the unusual attention of his master: "and he soon laid upon the step of the throne so many tight-vested and whiskered effigies that the Schah had nearly expired with mirth; but at length he came to one where the Giaour stood unclothed, holding in his hand a web of silk: and he demanded from the painter in what land the men thus unblushingly dispensed with the garments which they possessed the means of fashioning. 'May my lord's shadow never decrease!' said the painter: 'In no country of the west where the Giaours have learned to weave the produce of the worm or the cotton-tree, do they thus deprive themselves of the fruits of their industry. I have therefore laid before the eyes of my lord the garb of every nation save one, for elsewhere the garment of to-day may be worn to-morrow; but with the Gaul it is not so; and had I made for him a dress to any given measure, though at sunrise he might have been distinguished by it from all the nations of the earth, at sunset it would have borne no more resemblance to his actual appearance than the lotus bears to the olive tree, or the stork to the blue dove. I have therefore given him the material unfashioned, in order that my lord the Schah may imagine for him, each time that he looks upon the picture, a new and distinct costume.' Thus then, Light of the Earth:" continued the selictar-aga, bowing low before his master; "I deem that the Greek slave has called himself a Gaul, dreading that your penetration and knowledge would have detected the imposture had he declared himself to be the subject of any other land."

"Ha, ha!—true, true:" said the Satrap with a grim smile; "but Alhemdulillah—praise be to Allah! he will not escape even thus. We are not to suffer the sand of the desert to be flung into our eyes by a wretched raïah. Frangi domous—the Franks are hogs, be they Russ or Gauls; and the Greeks are dogs, and the fathers of dogs. He shall pay the karatch either with his hands or feet."

"Bashustun—on my head be it," said the selictar-aga, and the Pasha smoked on with renewed vigor, satisfied that the worthy functionary would keep his word.

"Mazzouk," said the Pasha, after a long

* Firman. † Capitation tax levied on raïahs.
‡ Merchant. § Short-sword.

pause. "your face is whitened; you have charmed the ear of attention, and turned the sands of the hour-glass to gold. I knew that your arm was strong, but I have only learnt to-day that you can think as well as strike. I am weary of the tales told in my harem; they are over-ripe pomegranates, and pall me. Have you no legend of war and strife, such as may make me believe, while I lie here upon my cushions, that I see the roving Tartar with his tall cap and slender lance, the hardy Scythian with his huge bow grasped like a toy, the Arab with his unerring djerrid, or the false Greek with his long spear gleaming in the sunshine, as he flies before the Allah hu! of the conquering Moslem? I want a tale like the neighing of a war-horse, or the blast of a trumpet; I love the far-off rumbling of warfare, and had I not been a Satrap, by the soul of my father! I would have been a warrior!"

At the conclusion of this noble and safe burst of pugnacious oratory, the Pasha resumed his chibouque almost fiercely, while he twirled his moustache, and looked defiance at the selictar-aga, who, having respectfully pressed the hem of the great man's garment to his lips, stood for a moment buried in thought, and then, obeying the gracious gesture of the Pasha, seated himself on the edge of the carpet, and at once commenced his narrative.

CHAPTER LVII.

"I MUST transport my lord to the farthest East, that I may tell him that which he may not perchance have heard; for should I engage his ear with a tale of the wars of Roum, and of the glories of the conquering armies of the Padishah, the Descendant of the Prophet, and the Refuge of the World, should I not heap ashes upon my head, when my lord knows all things, and his servant is less than a dog before him?"

The Pasha drew in a long stream of the sweet-scented gebeli, and nodded his approbation; while the selictar-aga, encouraged by the gesture, thus proceeded.

"Half the world had bowed beneath the strong right arm of the wonderful Subuctagi and his warlike son, the bright-eyed Mahmoud, when his grandson Musaoud ascended the royal steps of the throne of Ghizni. It was a moment of trial, for the brave Azim Sehah Siljochi, the lord of the Toorkomans, had already subdued the kingdoms of Bokhara and Samarcand, reaping their harvest with the sword, and awakening their echoes with the clash of steel, and the thunder of prancing hoofs. He was born for battle; the storm and the tempest rocked him to rest in his infancy; he laughed as the red lightnings danced around him, and chased the thunder-bolt, when it fell ruin-laden into the valley. He breasted the waves when the wild sea was chafed into anger, and leaped the precipices in whose depths death lay coiled like a serpent.

"When his boyhood was spent, and that his upper lip was fringed with the beard of strength, he became only more bold and dauntless. The spear and the sword were dearer to him than the zebec or the hookah, and the trumpet-blast sweeter than the voices of the awalis. His ambition was as a fiery torch which spread devastation before it, and his name was the watchword of the warriors when they rushed upon the weapons of the foe.

"Masaoud had not yet girded on the scimitar of sovereignty, when the warlike Azim pressed onward, even within the limits of his empire; and he no sooner became the right hand of power than he resolved to stem the torrent of invasion ere it reached the footstep of his throne; and for this purpose he called to him the noble Altasash, the brave viceroy of Charism, who had long panted to cross swords with the victorious Prince of the Toorkomans.

"Ali Ghizni was convulsed with pride and admiration, when the eagle-browed Altasash galloped like a meteor towards the plain where his gallant army was assembled. His steel-clad warriors were counted by thousands, and one universal shout of welcome, which seemed to shake the astounded earth even to its centre, hailed him as he bounded forward with his son Kousruf by his side. He was the idol of the people, and there stood not one among that closely-serried host who would not have freely shed his blood for the brave and high-souled Altasash.

"Mothers blessed him as he passed, and held their infants high above their heads that they might look upon the hero; the aged wept that their strength was spent, and they could not follow him to battle; while they who had hitherto resisted the temptation, flung down their peaceful tools, or instruments of sport, and grasping a ruder weapon, rushed to the ranks of battle.

"Winter had already stretched his icy hand over the earth, but the gallant viceroy heeded not its pressure; the enemy strode on, and he disdained to yield before the perseverance of the conquering Azim. As the armed host swept forward, all was wretchedness before and about them; the trees stretched forth their leafless arms towards a murky and leaden sky; the winds howled through the valleys like savage monsters in search of prey; the torrents, swoln with rain, leaped and roared as they escaped from their channel, and bore on their turbid waves the wreck of many a stately tree torn from its roots, and hurled to ruin by the tempest; fragments of rock, wrenched away by the storm-gusts, fell clat-

tering into the defiles of the mountains; and, at length, amid all this desolation the gaunt fiend Famine stalked through the camp, and shook his bony hand above the host. But the heroes of Ghizni defied him to the last: the ardent Alfasash met him as the rock meets the tempest, and the troops, encouraged by his example, armed themselves with resolution, and cried shame upon the craven who dared to murmur! The mountain path——"

"Mashallah!" interrupted the Pasha, with a most unequivocal yawn; "I have mistaken my taste: I have already heard enough of this second Rustum:* let him rest in peace, whether he died of want or a keen steel, which is a fact that, thanks be to the Prophet, I know nothing about. The day is wearing, and the shadows are growing longer; we will hasten the evening meal, and leave your heavy warriors to their mountain-path."

The disconcerted sword-bearer did not venture to reply; but silently motioning to the attendants, who were lying half asleep upon the turf at a distance, to approach and do their duty, he slowly followed the Pasha to the palace, with a clouded brow, and a most unenviable feeling of mortified vanity.

As they passed beneath the windows of the harem, the sweet voice of Katinka came upon the wind, and the Satrap involuntarily stopped to listen. As the song proceeded, his eye lightened, and his lip quivered with pleasure; and, when it ceased, he moved on, and without delaying a moment in his own apartment, at once beckoned to him his Aga Baba, and entered the harem.

The pensive Carimfil, as she rose to welcome him, smiled faintly, and then relapsed into her usual gloom: but the young Greek girl turned on him a glance of fire that seemed to be reflected on his soul; and her ready hand arranged his cushions and her soft voice greeted him with a feeling not to be misunderstood.

Coffee was served, and the graceful Katinka was seated at the feet of her friend in respectful silence, when the Pasha, whose idleness required amusement, after graciously imparting to his fair listeners the recent failure of the seletar-aga, turned towards her smilingly, and bade her put the sword-bearer to shame by one of those tales which fell from her lips like wild honey from the trunk of the fig-tree.

The beautiful slave answered by meekly pressing her hands upon her bosom, and giving herself up to thought; and as the Pasha looked upon her, he swore by his beard that she was more lovely than a houri, but as he did not put the vow into words, none were aware save Katinka herself that she was the subject of his reverie.

* A celebrated eastern hero.

Slowly raising her head like a blossom that has been bent with rain, after the lapse of a few moments the Greek girl prepared to speak; and fixing her deep eyes on the Pasha, while she clasped one of the fair hands of his young wife within her own, she thus obeyed his bidding.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE PASHA'S DAUGHTER.

The Pasha Talât was the Satrap of a powerful province too far removed from the magnificent City of the Three Seas, the capital of the Lord of Life, to be frequently convulsed by the factions which must ever rend the metropolis of a great Empire. His chaoushes knew no other lord, save by the voice of rumor; they had never laid their foreheads in the dust before a greater than himself; and they served him with the blind obedience which was their duty.

Every karabash* and astrologer of the province had predicted for him a long life and a prosperous fortune. His spahis† were alert and brave, and threw the djerid with all the art of Arabs; his palace was the noblest in the city, and his kesr‡ the strongest in the mountains; his mir-akhor§ was justly proud of his unrivalled stud: his yuzbashis‖ were faithful, and the strange merchants who from time to time traded in the bazár, repaid with a willing and liberal hand the protection and justice which they ever found in the divan of Talât Pasha.

But the Satrap possessed one gem which outvalued the diamonds of his treasury and the revenue of his pashalik. His beard was already marbled with gray when the prayer of his heart was answered, and he became the father of a lovely girl. Pure as the blossoms of the Indian Agla, lovely as the bursting rose when it drinks in the dew-drop of the early dawn, and graceful as the fawn which sports by its mother's side beneath the forest boughs, Maitap** seemed to have come on earth to shew the world how fair the peris of Paradise may be. Her mother loved her as the bulbul loves the moonlight; her father clung to her as to the principle of his existence; and as years went by, and time only rendered here more faultless—the fame of her rare beauty was noised abroad, and many a poet rhymed the name of the Pasha's daughter to a thousand expletives of harmony and love.

Fathers sued for their sons, and mothers visited the harem of the Satrap to satisfy themselves that rumor had not outrun reality;

* Wise man. † Horse-soldiers. ‡ Castle.
§ Head-groom. ‖ Centurions.
** Moonlight.

but the proposals of the one, and the scrutiny of the other alike availed nothing; the Pasha loved his child too much to thwart her fancy; and the glorious pearl of the province only wept when they talked to her of quitting her father's roof.

Among the numerous suitors whom her loveliness drew around the carpet of the Pasha, was the dark-eyed Youssouf Bey, the only son of a wealthy Satrap whose province adjoined that of the father of Maïtap. The country rang with his praises: he had read the Korân thrice through; he had transcribed the poesies of Hafiz on the tablet of his memory; while yet a youth he had mortally wounded an Arab Schiek in a skirmish whence older and stronger warriors had fled; to the courage of a man he joined the softness of a woman; and when the proud Pasha asked for him the hand of the Satrap Talât's daughter, his heart was as free from any impression as the mysterious sea over which navies have passed without leaving a trace behind; but unlike the illimitable ocean, that heart had never yet been laid bare to any contact, and when the fair Maïtap was mentioned to him as his future bride, he listened in silence, and taught himself to love her in hearkening to the hyberbolical panegyrics of the strangers who visited the palace.

But his father's rank and his own merit availed him nothing. Presents both rare and costly were sent to the harem of Talât Pasha; his mother, anxious for his happiness, employed every wile in order to insure success; the father of the young beauty expatiated on the advantages of the connection, and every female tongue in the city was loud in his praise; yet he met no happier fate than his less worthy rivals. The young beauty listened, wept, and finally refused to allow the name of Youssouf Bey to be mentioned in her presence.

Opportunities had not been wanting when she might have satisfied herself of his rare personal advantages, but she had avoided them; nor did she approach the latticcs of her apartment until she ascertained that, hopeless of success, he had quitted the city.

The failure of the young and gallant Bey acted powerfully on the spirits of the other suitors of the lady; they felt that where he had gathered only ashes, they could secure no treasure; and one by one, slowly and reluctantly, they withdrew their claims.

Light was the heart of the fair Maïtap when the last hoof-stroke of the lover-band resounded through the court-yard, and the rider galloped away in search of a more willing bride; and as she hung upon the neck of her father, and buried her sweet face in his bosom, she murmured gentle words of tenderness and trust that drew tears from the eyes of the Pasha, and blessings from his lips.

Less happy was the son of the Satrap Sarim; no fear of failure had gone with him to the palace of Talât, and his rejection had fallen upon him like a stroke of destiny. From the hour that he lost hope, he felt to live without the beautiful Maïtap would be impossible; and as he sped homeward, he breathed an earnest and a solemn vow that he would win her or die.

But how?

Youssouf Bey was young and sanguine, full of life and love—rich, talented, and handsome. If ever hope brushed away a dark shadow from the tablet of despair with her sunny wing, it was for such as he!

Despite his love for his daughter, Talât Pasha could not conceal the feeling of disappointment with which he saw the young Bey depart. He could hope no brighter fortune for her than that which she had just rejected; and he was mortified also that the haughty suitor had not made a single effort to change the temper of the chilling beauty, but had bowed beneath her decision without a word of remonstrance.

Time, however, which softens all things, gradually diminished the regret of the Pasha and he forgot to sigh when the name of the Satrap Sarim was mentioned in his presence. Nor could he forbear rejoicing, when the labors of the divan were over, that the sweet smile of Maïtap still welcomed his arrival in the harem, and shed a ray of light over his existence; and, eventually, he almost learned to rejoice that his lovely child was either colder or more capricious than the rest of her sex.

The usual quiet monotony of the Satrap's palace was one morning disturbed by the intelligence that a strange merchant had arrived in the city, and established himself in the principal khan, with an assortment of stuffs such as had never before been beheld in the province. One of the household slaves had lingered to see many of the bales opened, and gave a most exciting description of their contents, as well as of the Khawaji himself; and the fair Maïtap, who had become wearied alike of her tusbee,* her birds, and her flowers amid the languor of a warm day of summer, was not sorry to find a new source of amusement in the hyperbolical details of the voluble Saidè.

"Mashallah!" pursued the slave, as she perceived that her beautiful young mistress was leaning forward upon her cushions to listen; "I never saw such silks, nor such eyes. One of them worked with gold, in the cypher of the Padishah on a ground of bright orange, and another of clear blue rayed with silver. And then such a beard! as black and glossy as a bird's wing: and the most delicate muslins for yashmaes!† you might see the very color of the lips they covered. Ah wallah billah! a voice that goes through a

* Chaplet. † Veil.

through you, as though it spoke to your soul rather than your ears. Ajaib—wonderful! why he has brought into the city the lading of nine camels—and he walks like a Vèzir."

The fair Maïtap could not restrain her mirth, and clasping her little hands, she gave way to a hearty burst of graceful laughter. "And how call you this wondrous trader, Saidè! And whence comes he? From the coral caves of the deep sea, or the fleecy vapors of the blue sky? For such eyes, and beard, and tones as these can surely not belong to a mere mortal."

"Ne bilirim—what can I say?" replied the slave; "He seemed to me to be mortal, aye, and to feel like a man, for when Giadilla, the Kadenhahia,* of the Cadi's daughter, who was looking on while he was arranging his goods, declared that she should fall sick if she could not persuade her mistress to purchase for her a calemquer,† which marvellously struck her fancy, the young Khawaji folded it in an instant and placed it in her hand, with a smile as bright as the colors in which it was painted, though the astonished Kadenhahia told him that she had not a para in the world."

"Your merchant-prince is indeed a marvel;" smiled the young Hanoum; "but I would learn his name."

"They call him the Khawaji Zadig, and he comes from Bassora. Mashallah! what an eye he has, and a forehead like a Padishah! Giadilla was in luck to-day; her kismet won a gift for her from the whitest and the softest hands in the world."

"Nay, you are mad, Saidè;" said the fair Maïtap, striving to call up a frown; "One would think that no strange merchant had ever before visited the city, or rewarded the insolence of an idle nurse with a head-dress; let me hear no more of this—it is unseemly."

The rebuked attendant bowed her head in silence, and shortly after quitted the apartment.

An unusual restlessness suddenly seized the Pasha's daughter; she rose from the sofa; thrust her delicate feet into her pearl-sprinkled slippers; tried all her instruments one after the other, and rejected each in turn; complained of an oppression in the air; discovered that the water in her goblet was heated and sickly, and that the musk-lemons which were scattered over the room affected her head, and finally quarrelled with the exquisite cachemire that was folded about her brow, and declared that, since she had looked into a mirror, she had never worn a color that became her.

The inference was simple; a new cachemire must be purchased; and she had already examined and rejected every shawl in the bazär of the city, save those of the strange merchant. She would dispatch a slave to bid the Khawaji send his choicest merchandise to the palace; and yet, no—how could he divine her tastes? He would probably retain the very thing she wanted, and she should be wearied by looking over a heap of uninteresting lumber. Truly, this was a dilemma. The bazär was at the other extremity of the city; the streets were hot and close; and the very wind seemed to have been fanning the sun, and to have carried away its warmth, for it fell on the brow like the pressure of a heated hand; but should she delay until the cool hours, the light would fail, and she could no longer distinguish the colors of the web—Besides, some Emir's wife might carry off the very cachemire that she coveted; and this reflection was so alarming, that the fair Maïtap at once clapped her hands, and desired the slave who obeyed the summons, to order her araba, to bring her feridjhe* and yashmac, and to prepare her two principal attendants to accompany her to the bazär.

Having made these arrangements, the gentle girl subsided once more into composure, resumed her tusbee, and passed its perfumed beads rapidly through her fingers, as she murmured out a love-ballad which by some extraordinary fatality just then recurred to her memory; and smiled once or twice as though some pleasant thought had grown with the melody. Her resolution was a holiday for the two favored slaves who were to attend her, for curiosity had grown very powerfully in the harem since Saidè had told the tale of the good-fortune of the Cadi's Kadenhahia with the new Khawaji; and while some of the fair slaves dreamt of painted calemquers and embroidered silks, others were indulging visions of dark eyes, ruby lips, and tones of music.

The araba was soon ready, for Zobeidah and Shereen, the chosen pair who were to profit by the sudden whim of the young beauty, had urged the Arabadjè† and the Serudjes‡ to their greatest speed; and Maïtap was still busily engaged in arranging, with more than her usual exactness, the transparent folds of the envious veil which was to shroud her loveliness, when the richly gilt and silken-curtained carriage rattled to the door. Four mounted negroes surrounded it, and ere long it was jolting along the rude pavement of the city streets.

* Nurse † Handkerchief worn on the head.

* Cloak. † Coachman. ‡ Grooms.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE PASHA'S DAUGHTER—CONTINUED.

THE Khan of Damascus, as the caravanserai was called, in which the Merchant had taken up his abode, was situated near the southern gate of the city, many stadia from the palace of the Pasha; and more than once during her drive the heart of Maïtap beat more quickly than usual, as she asked herself why she thus indulged a caprice, as extraordinary as it was unaccountable. Frequently was she tempted to change her purpose, and simply to visit the bazār; but a resistless impulse urged her to persevere in her original intention; and while this mental war was waging in her heart, the araba drove into the yard of the caravanserai.

In the centre of the court a handsome fountain poured forth its volume of bright sparkling water; and in one corner rose a small edifice dedicated to the sick birds brought by the hunters and peasants from the mountains. A pair of noble eagles, with their feathers ruffled by illness, crouched heavily upon the roof; a lame stork was visible through one of the casements; and a number of small birds, of different descriptions, were perched on the eaves of the building.

But Maïtap saw neither fountain nor infirmary; her eyes were fixed on a young man, who stood earnestly conversing with a saphi,* and whose extreme personal beauty exceeded any thing which she had previously imagined. As she lay back upon her cushions, with her feather-fan before her face, she could indulge her admiration without a fear of his observing her; and this feeling of security betrayed her into a reverie which was only terminated by the harsh voice of the Aga Baba, who reining up his splendid Arabian close to her side, inquired her further pleasure.

"Yavash, yavash—softly, softly;" she said, starting an into a full consciousness of the error into which she had been betrayed: "I have not yet quite decided whether I shall venture to encounter the fatigue of bargaining with the khawajis to-day; my head aches, and my eyes are heavy."

"We will then return at once to the palace," said the negro, and he had already gathered up his bridle, when the lady exclaimed peevishly,

"And yet when I have submitted to the tediousness of traversing the city, I may as well profit by the exertion, or I shall be compelled to repeat it. Inquire, therefore, for the store of the merchant Zadig."

The Aga Baba obeyed; and the araba slowly proceeded to the quarter indicated, Maïtap never once removing her eyes from the figure of the stranger, and marvelling much whom he could be. The slaves who sat at her feet detected the sudden preoccupation of their mistress with the intuitive penetration of the sex; and although they uttered no comment, they glanced expressively at each other, and then indulged themselves in gazing on the same object, with an interest and admiration only inferior to her own.

When the carriage stopped at the entrance of the store, great was the satisfaction of the Pasha's daughter on remarking that the handsome stranger hurriedly terminated his conversation with the soldier, and turned his steps in the same direction; and the cloud which had gathered upon her brow was dissipated in an instant, when with a low and respectful salutation, he followed her into the spacious warehouse, and stood silently with downcast eyes, awaiting her commands.

This then was the Merchant Zadig!

For the first time the proud beauty felt ill at ease; she had forgotten why she came there, and what she sought; and she remained earnestly gazing upon the khawaji, without making an effort to give even the semblance of accident to her visit.

The stranger was about five-and-twenty; his eyes were as black as ebony, and as bright as sunbeams; his port was haughty; and his brow well became the pride that sat on his finely-moulded lips. He wore a turban of which the cachemire was almost above price; his flowing robe was of crimson silk, rayed with orange; and in his rich and well-adjusted girdle he carried a handjar sparkling with one immense ruby, on which was graven the cypher of the Prophet.

The silence became embarrassing; and to dispel it, Shereen, the favorite attendant of the lady, took up a gorgeous shawl which was flung upon one of the bales, and began to utter "Mashallahs!" and "Pek Guzels!"* innumerable, as she examined its patterns and texture. The impulse was as successful as it was inartificial, for it withdrew the eyes of Maïtap from the Merchant, and broke the spell that had been suddenly cast over her. Annoyed and mortified at her own folly, the Pasha's daughter at once assumed a haughtiness foreign to her natural character; and glancing round her, she said coldly:

"Knosh buldûk—you are well found, khawaji; my slaves tell me that you have cachemires of price among your goods, which out value any in the bazārs of the city. I may perchance become a purchaser; let me, therefore at once see the most costly of your bales if I have heard the truth."

"Alhemdullilah!" murmured the merchant "your highness does my poor store too much honor; and I and all that I possess are at your command." After which courteous declara

* Cavalry soldier.

* Very pretty.

on, he clapped his hands, and a couple of Numidian slaves, clad in dark blue tunics, with scarlet turbans, instantly appeared from behind the screen which veiled an inner apartment. At a silent signal from their employer, each seized a corner of the tapestry curtain, and held it high above his head, while the Merchant in a low and respectful voice begged the lady to favor him by passing into the chamber where he had secured the most costly of his merchandise from the contact of casual purchasers.

Thralled, and governed by a curiosity which had now become uncontrollable, the stately Maïtap scarcely hesitated a moment; and followed by her two attendants, she crossed the threshold, and the screen fell behind her.

The apartment in which he stood was spacious, and lighted by three windows overlooking a court planted with maple and acacia trees; these windows the luxurious Merchant had veiled with curtains of pale pink silk that gave a sunset hue to every object in the chamber; but the surprise of the Pasha's daughter mounted to wonder, as the gorgeous Numidians, after glancing towards their master, spread over the handsome divan of crimson velvet, a covering of delicate white satin wrought with gold: and heaped upon it cushions of needle-work, such as even the loved and capricious Maïtap had never before beheld.

As the young beauty sank upon the glittering sofa, the Merchant still stood before her with bent head, as though he dared not meet the eyes which rested on him; then slowly retiring, he indicated to his slaves the bale which was to be opened for her inspection: while, in order to while away the time, he spread out before her several caskets filled with gems, which flashed in the soft and shaded light. Tusbees of pearls, each the size of a pea: bodkins of brilliants; rings of those diamonds, charms, and amulets, and gilded toys of every description, enough to turn the head of a score of Eastern women.

Amid all her admiration the fair daughter of the Pasha remarked, however, that there was one casket which the khawaji had not opened, and which, when he had once or twice accidentally taken it up, he had hastily laid aside. There needed no more to excite in her bosom a strong desire to examine the contents of the casket: and when the same circumstance again occurred, during a search which the Merchant was making for a case containing some valuable torquoises, she could not refrain from pointing towards the mysterious subject of her thoughts, and inquiring why that also had not been submitted to her inspection.

"Lady," said the khawaji, "all that I have are at the bidding of your highness, and even unworthy of your attention. Of what is mine I would hold back nothing. Your slave lives but to obey you, and his face is whitened by your approbation; but the contents of this casket are not mine; I hold them only in trust for one of my most honored customers; and I would not lay before you a jewel of which I cannot make you mistress."

"But I would see it nevertheless," urged the fair Maïtap, as she extended her hand towards the Merchant.

Zadig bowed submissively, and having loosened the clasps of the casket, he laid at the feet of his visiter a superb hand-mirror, of which the frame was of chased gold, profusely studded with brilliants. A cypher of small emeralds ornamented the back of the glass, and a heavy tassel of gold depended from the handle; and, altogether, the toy was of so costly a description that the Pasha's daughter could not restrain an exclamation of delight.

"Can you really not dispose of this pretty anali, Effendim?" she asked eagerly.

"Alas! I have told your highness only the truth. It was wrought in the bezenstein of Stamboul for a young and wealthy Bey, who is about to form his harem; and is destined to reflect the beauties of his fair bride. He has already urged its arrival more than once, and I dare not disappoint him."

"Y'Allah! it is a pretty toy, and the Bey has taste. How call you him, khawaji?"

"Youssouf Bey, the son of Sarim Pasha"—replied Zadig.

"By the soul of your father, you may then sell me the anali;" said Maïtap, with a proud toss of her pretty head; "for the bride will not put off her slippers in the harem of the Satrap's son before you have had time to make a dozen such."

"Astefer allah!" murmured the Merchant; "Your highness must have been misinformed. The young Bey made a journey to the province of your noble father, (may his years be many!) and abode, as I have been informed, some days in the Pasha's palace: and it was on his return thence that he learnt the happiness which was in store for him."

Maïtap blushed as she listened, until the roseate flush could be distinguished through the muslin of her yashmac; and she suffered the splendid anali to fall from her hand upon the cushions. It was reverently raised by the khawaji, and replaced in the casket without a word from the young beauty: for a grasp like iron was on her heart. Had her pride indeed won for her no greater triumph than this? Was she forgotten in a day? replaced in a month? remembered only with a smile?

The reverie would have lasted longer, but chancing to look up, and meeting the fine dark eyes of the Merchant, Maïtap suddenly resumed her self-possession, and gave full employment both to his patience and his taste, in examining one after another all the shawls in his warehouse.

It was a pretty scene. The lady reclined

upon her cushions of parti-colored satin, with one white arm fully revealed as she extended it to touch the different shawls which were spread out before her by the handsome trader; who, resting upon one knee on the edge of the carpet, took them from the hands of the Numidians who stood close behind him; while the attendants of the lovely girl, shrouded in their dark and ample mantles, were seated a little space apart. The soft and dreamy light mellowed the atmosphere about them; and the rainbow-like tints of the shawls which were scattered through the apartment, lent a gorgeous finish to the picture.

The sudden entrance of the Aga Baba gave a new feature to the aspect of affairs. The lady held in her hand a magnificent cachemire of exquisite texture, and as the screen was lifted, she said suddenly:

"It is is well, Effendim; tell me, therefore, the lowest price that you will take for this which I hold, and our bargain will soon be terminated."

"Sixteen purses:" replied Zadig coldly, and without raising his eyes; "and were it not that I am honored by the notice of your highness, I should demand twenty."

"And this—" and she pointed to another of inferior quality.

"Will not count beyond nine; though the wreath of nirgis* is woven by the hands of the peris."

"They are mine:" said Maïtap, as she rose to depart, and the Khawaji having folded them in two separate handkerchiefs of colored muslin, intended as a present to the attendants, placed them in the hands of the Aga Baba, as the murmured "Affiet ollah—much pleasure attend you," of his fair visiter fell on his ear

In another moment the araba rattled through the wide gate of the khan.

The Pasha's daughter never once spoke during her homeward drive, but as she stopped at the door of the harem, she unfolded the shawls from their coverings, and flinging the painted handkerchiefs into the laps of her attendants, left the peri-woven shawl which had been her last purchase, in the hands of the Aga Baba when he assisted her to alight.

The negro looked up; and while a broad smile displayed his large and glittering teeth, and his huge eyes were distended to their utmost size, he bent his head, and muttered something which passed for thanks.

* Narcissus.

CHAPTER LX.

THE PASHA'S DAUGHTER—CONTINUED.

From this day the nature of the beautiful Maïtap underwent a total change. She was restless, unhappy, and capricious. The very sun did not shine in the heavens for her as it had once done; her flowers had no fragrance, her birds no song. She drooped like a caged nightingale—she withered like a blighted rose. When her maidens strove to entertain and arouse her, it was no longer with light tales of love and laughter to which she had hitherto listened with a proud feeling of amused disdain, but with legends of fear, and sorrow, and despair; for then she wept sweet tears over the griefs of others until she soothed her own. Once only did she repeat her visit to the khan, and she found a void. The merchant Zadig had left the city; and there remained no trace of him in the caravanserai. Many were the tales told, however, of his liberality, his charity, his gracefulness of manner, and his warmth of heart; and by some extraordinary fatality not one of them failed to reach the ears of the pensive beauty.

For hours did she sit calling up before her mental vision every word, and look, and action of the young Khawaji; true, she had seen him but once, and yet, she felt that there was an expression in his deep eyes which had entered into her soul; and then she remembered how soon and how easily the haughty son of Sarim Pasha had forgotten her, and she wondered within herself whether she should fade as early from the memory of the Merchant.

One day, when she was as usual indulging these speculations, a slave entered her apartment, and presented to her a small packet which had been brought to the city by the Emir-hadji of a caravan that had proceeded on its way at daybreak. She opened it hastily and having torn away the numerous coverings in which it was enveloped, unclasped a crimson casket, and started with surprise on discovering the well-known anali of the merchant Zadig. Upon the mirror lay a strip of paper containing simply these words: "For the beautiful and honorable lady, her highness Maïtap Hanoum, from the most devoted of her slaves."

The Pasha's daughter blushed until brow and bosom burnt with the crimson tide that rushed tumultuously from her heart. Her first impulse was to conceal the paper from the prying eyes of her attendants; the next would probably have been dictated by her pride, and have compelled the restoration of the gorgeous gift; but she knew not where to find the donor, and as she gazed into the jewelled mirror, she thought that her face had never seemed so fair. Involuntarily she sighed, and glanced down upon the shawl which cinctured her

waist; she had long ceased to wear any other; it was that which she had purchased of the handsome stranger; it covered the heart in which his image was enshrined.

The proud beauty was subdued. As she held the sparkling anali in her hand, she felt that all those whom she had wounded by her coldness were revenged. She loved! And whom? Not a high-born Bey, in whose harem she would have moved a queen; whose rank would have satisfied the ambition of her father, and the hopes of all her family; but a Khawaji, a trader; whose soul was in his bales, and whose thoughts, instead of dwelling upon her, must be engrossed by the eager thirst of gain. And yet, the anali! Had he forgotten her, or had he valued his gold above her smiles, would he have thus sought to win them? But what availed the fact, pleasant though it was? Alas! they might never meet again; and as this startling contingency forced itself upon the reason of the pensive girl, a large tear sullied the surface of the mirror, and a sigh heaved the shawl that bound her slight and fairy form.

Several weary months sped by; new suitors presented themselves at the carpet of the Pasha: new instances were made to the drooping Maïtap; but all were alike unheeded; and the unhappy Satrap began to fear that Monker and Nakir* were hovering about his child, and that the golden lamp of her young existence would be extinguished.

Every specie of diversion permitted in the harem was lavishly essayed; dancing-girls performed their graceful feats, and singing-women pealed forth their love-ditties unheeded; the massaldjhis became distasteful, the guests wearisome; and, at length any further attempt to arouse the melancholy Maïtap from her languor was abandoned to despair, and she was left to dream and weep in peace.

Talât Pasha had an inordinate taste for jewels; many a place was obtained, many a favor granted, many a cause, no longer doubtful, decided in the divan through the magical agency of these costly treasures. It was therefore with no small interest that he learnt the arrival of an aged Diamond-merchant in the city, with jewels such as had never before been looked upon in the bazârs of the province. His selictar-aga talked to him of the emerald-hilted handjars, the golden-scabbarded scymitars inlaid with precious stones, and the sword-belts worked with pearls; his catejhi-basha of the zarfs,† lipped with rubies, and chased with cunning workmanship: and his principal chok-hadar‡ of a mantle of fine European cloth, whose collar was a perfect galaxy of jewelled light; his codgea-bashi had an audience to decide on the tax which should be levied on the sale of the goods; and his Saraf* to learn whether he should raise a new contribution in the villages on the produce of the coming harvest.

The curiosity of the Satrap was excited; and a summons was sent to the Merchant, who, with ready obedience, presented himself at the palace of the Pashalic on the going down of the sun, when the gates of the bazâr are closed, attended by a couple of slaves bearing the most rare and costly of his merchandise.

His venerable appearance interested every one in his favor, and the gifts which he lavishly distributed to the chaoushes of the household tended to deepen the feeling. He was apparently of great age; his eyebrows and beard were as white as the snows of Mount Ararat; his tall figure drooped in the shoulders, like that of one on whom the weight of years pressed heavily; but his step was firm though slow, and his dark eyes had a light in them, which told that the soul yielded not to the weakness of the body.

Many and profound were the prostrations with which he entered the apartment of the Pasha, who received him most graciously, and at once motioned him to display his treasures.

Rumor had not exaggerated their value or their beauty; and the audience was prolonged to an unusual length, without any appearance of weariness on either part. The Satrap inquired the route of the caravan with which the Merchant had travelled, the appearance of the cities that he had passed, the country that he had traversed, and the tribes whom he had encountered; while every interval was filled up in examining the jewels and weapons, and in commenting on their cost and workmanship.

The Pasha made several purchases, for the prices of the trader pleased him as much as his merchandise; and when, at length, he received permission to depart, and that he had laid aside his vases, and delivered them to the care of his attendants, a chaoush of the household conducted him with much courtesy to the door, a politeness which he was not called upon to perform gratuitously, and thus his "Oghour-ola—Heaven speed you," was very sincere, as the Khawaji stepped across the household.

The Pasha lost no time, when the Merchant had quitted him, in passing into the harem, in order to display to his daughter the jewelled toys of which he had just made the acquisition; and, as she languidly received those which were destined for herself and raised the hand of her fond father to her lips in acknowledgment of his indulgence, the Satrap anxious to amuse her melancholy, commented on the noble port, and liberal dealing of the

* Angels of Death.

† The stands in which the coffee-cups are placed.

‡ Cloak-bearer.

* Banker.

strange Merchant. For a time she listened listlessly, but at length she became interested in the description of the Khawaji and his merchandise; and she silently resolved to summon him on the morrow. She was weary of the monotony of the harem; and the examination of the glittering stores of the stranger promised at least an hour's amusement.

When the Satrap had retired, the fair girl dismissed her slaves, for the evening was spent; and flinging back the lattice of a casement which opened on the garden of the palace, she leant out to listen to the song of the night-bird, to inhale the perfume of the flowers, and to blend her sighs with the fall of the fountain, and the whispering of the wind among the leaves.

It was a glorious moonlight! The shadows lay long and dark, while the lines of silver that were traced upon the earth, looked like fairy-plans for some new and bright creation: fleecy-clouds at times floated over the graceful orb, and dimmed its beauty for a moment, as the gossamer veil of a young bride softens the loveliness which is but heightened by its partial eclipse. All around breathed tenderness and peace; and the tears that fell slowly on the cheek of Maïtap in that still hour, were devoid of bitterness. Her pride slept; she did not ask her heart to lay bare the mystery of its enthralment, but she yielded to the sweet sadness that stole over her—and again the spirits that she had stricken were revenged!

Daylight spread over the eastern heights, draping them in a mantle of sober gray, whose hem soon grew into a belt of sheeny gold; gradually the sky brightened, and the flowers raised their heads, and wept their perfumed dew-tears on the earth: the distant lowing of the cattle came on the wind; the twittering birds gave music to the woods; the basin of the palace-garden became a gilded mirror in which the purple lotus gazed till she became enamored of her own beauty; and then, like a discordant tone, jarring through the sweet harmony of nature, came the voice of man; and once more the world awoke; and life, with all its cares and fears, its jealousies and strife, renewed its struggle.

It was on a terrace, shaded by lime-trees, whose blossoms were vocal with bees, and gay with the graceful rose-laurel of Eurotas, that the Pasha's daughter received the Merchant. She was closely veiled, as were the slaves who attended her; and the venerable Khawaji was conducted to her presence by the watchful Aga Baba.

The gray beard and reverend appearance of the stranger were not however calculated to alarm the jealous guardians of the Pasha's harem; and accordingly the Aga Baba, who had already feasted his eyes on the glittering merchandise of the stranger, and received a backshish* which perfectly satisfied all his ideas of expediency, soon wandered away among the trees, leaving the interview to the inspection of two of his subordinates: who, in their turn, plunged deeper into the shade; and contenting themselves with remaining within sight of the fair group, soon bent their dark brows upon their breasts, and slept profoundly.

Jewel after jewel was looked upon, and laid aside; toy after toy was examined, commented on, and replaced in its casket; until at length the eye of the lady was attracted to a small case of crimson velvet embroidered in seed pearls; which with a singularity that at once reminded her of the young Merchant of Bokhan, he put aside as often as it met his hand.

"And that pretty casket which you have not yet opened;" she said gently; "what does it contain?"

"It was brought hither by mistake, Effendim;" replied the venerable khawaji; "it is not a jewel; it holds nothing which can interest your highness, or I should long ere this have laid it before you; it is not an article of merchandise—in short, it is bosh—nothing."

"The case, at least, is prettily imagined," said the spoiled beauty, who had never learned to brook opposition, "and somewhat costly for such poor contents. You will at least suffer me to examine the embroidery."

The Merchant looked embarrassed; he lifted the casket as if to present it to the lady, but he made no effort to obey her wishes; twice he appeared about to speak, and then checked himself, as though he feared to give utterance to his thought, and all this time the hand of the Pasha's haughty daughter was extended towards him.

"Ne bilirim—what can I say?" he faltered at length; "The casket is not mine; it has come here by the power of my unlucky feleck† I am responsible for its safe and secret delivery—and ——"

"And you take me for an Aga of the Janissaries, ready to see treason in a diamond; or for a codgea-bashi, eager to levy a tax on your merchandise, is it not so?" asked Maïtap, half amused and half annoyed at this unusual opposition.

The gray bearded Khawaji bent low and deprecatingly before her.

"Janum simindar—my soul is your's," he said humbly, "my life and all that I possess are at the bidding of your highness: but I have led a long life of probity and scorn of evil; and I have pledged myself to the owner of this casket that no eye——"

"Enough, sir, enough," interposed the lady haughtily, "I need no khodjhè‡ to read me lessons of propriety and honor. The time

* Present. † Constellation. ‡ Tutor.

passes, and the road hence to your khan is long and wearisome; I will not detain you here." And she waved her hand with the majesty of a Sultana who desires solitude.

"Dismiss me not thus, Effendim; not thus, by your soul!" exclaimed the merchant imploringly: "Whose dog am I that I should dare to call a cloud to your bright young brow, and to light your eye with anger. Rather let me be forsworn forever!" And as he spoke, he tendered the casket to the Pasha's daughter, with a fixed and earnest gaze that drove back the warm blood to her heart, she knew not wherefore.

For a moment she hesitated whether she should condescend to avail herself of the extorted permission of a mere trader to examine the mysterious casket: she felt that she ought to refrain, and to reject his tardy concession; but her curiosity was more powerful than her pride, and averting her eyes that she might not encounter those of the stranger, beneath which she was conscious that she quailed, she took the case from his hand, and without allowing herself to deliberate for a moment, pressed back the clasps.

As the lid flew open a faint cry escaped her; and she rivetted her gaze on the contents of the little casket with an eagerness that betrayed her emotions not only to her attendants, but to the Merchant also. Yet she cared not for this: she gave it no thought; she was unconscious that any eye was on her: she was under the influence of a sudden spell, and several moments passed ere with a deep blush, and a feeling at her heart which was strangely compounded of happiness and anguish, she roused herself sufficiently to ask in a tone which, while she intended that it should be cold, was only gentle:—

"It is a fair portrait: whose may it be? If indeed the daughter of Talât Pasha may be permitted such a question."

"Lady," said the Khawajî, "Merhamet eylè bendèn.è—have pity on me: I am withered by your frown. I will lay bare my heart before you that you may read it at your pleasure. The portrait which you hold in your hand is that of Youssouf Bey, the son of Sarim Pasha of the next province, and it resembles him as one——"

"Nay, nay, you strive uselessly to deceive me," exclaimed Maîtap sternly, "the turban is indeed that of a Bey, and the costume is rich and costly; but the features are those of a Shawl-merchant at whose store I chanced to alight a few months since. He was called Zadig."

"I dare not gainsay your highness," gravely replied the Khawajî; "it is possible that the face may resemble the man you mention, whose soul is brightened by your remembrance; but I have told only the truth when I assure you, lady, that the portrait is that of Youssouf Bey, painted by a cunning Frank, and destined for the young bride, whom the noble Pasha (may his prosperity increase!) has just chosen for his son."

"Now, by the grave of your father! you have a false tongue," exclaimed the maiden with a burst of sudden passion, "for that same Merchant when he visited the city many months back, told some of my slaves that this Bey was even then about to take a wife, for whom he had purchased some idle toys that had attracted their notice. How then may your tale be true when it is so tardy?"

"Neither the merchant Zadig nor myself have dared to profane your ear with falsehood, Effendim," calmly rejoined the Khawajî; "it is even as we have both stated. The Pasha has long been earnest that his high-born son should bring a bride into his harem: and—and——"

"And what?" urged Maîtap impatiently

"May your slave perish if he offend you," said the Merchant, "but it was rumored in the province, where I chanced then to be sojourning, that the young Bey had yielded a willing and eager assent to his noble father's wishes when they pointed towards——" And again the Khawajî paused.

"Speak!" murmured Maîtap with a slight accent of scorn.

"It was said," pursued the stranger, "that the Pasha's hopes had fixed themselves on the lovely daughter of the high-born Satrap Ta'al, the far-famed Maîtap Hanoum——"

"Who cared not to be bartered like a bale of coveted merchandise, against the pride and power of an unknown suitor," haughtily interposed the lady. "And what followed?"

"The Bey returned to his province," continued the Merchant, "silent, gloomy, and sad! He spent his time principally in riding over the country alone, with a rapidity and perseverance which exhausted his gallant Arab; or among the spahis of his father, who adored their young commander with a devotion for which I have no words, he avoided the harem of his mother and the divan of his father; he grew dreamy and misanthropical, and he seemed to endure existence rather than to enjoy it, when he was suddenly aroused from this unnatural stupor by a renewal of the subject of his marriage. He acquiesced, however, with an indifference which proved that his heart was not in the compact, and the bride was chosen, and the presents made, and the very day was named when she was to be conducted to his harem; but then the torpid heart of the Bey awakened itself, and he fled—fled like a criminal from the city to the mountains—and the young cheek of the maiden was wet with tears, and the lip of the mother trembled with reproach and wonder; but the wretched young man did not reappear for days, and he returned

only to deepen the regret of his betrothed, for the worm of sickness was feasting on his brow, and dimming the lustre of his eye; and it was vain to talk of love to one who seemed to have been stricken by Asraël."

"But the rose returned to his cheek, and the light to his eye, was it not so?" eagerly murmured Maïtap, with her gaze rivetted on the picture.

"Slowly, imperfectly." replied the Khawaji: "Lady, it is not for the eagle who has once soared towards the sun to live contented beneath a lesser light. He is once more in the palace of his father, once more in the harem of his mother, listening to their arguments, acceding to their entreaties, and prepared to fulfil the contract even at the expense of his happiness. He cannot give his heart to his young bride; he has laid it at the feet of one who has rejected the offering; and thus he searches the world for toys and trifles to fill the thoughts which might otherwise dwell upon his coldness."

"Toys and trifles," echoed the fair girl unconsciously, as she grasped the portrait more closely, and then arousing herself, she asked timidly, "And is this really the resemblance of Youssouf Bey?"

"As like as the shadow of the blue heaven on the surface of a lake," replied the Khawaji; "it wants but breath and words to be himself."

"And does he send her this when he loves her not?" asked the maiden, rather communing with herself than addressing her companion; "Alas! she will become as wretched as the golden gunechtchichey,* which follows the proud sun through the hours of day, regardless of its scorching beam, and unheeded by the object of her fond idolatry."

The Khawaji listened in silence! He felt that he was not required to comment on the soliloquy of the lady, and he was discreet enough to occupy himself most assiduously in the arrangement of his merchandise. It was well that he did so; for in a moment the proud beauty became conscious of her indiscretion, and hastily and haughtily turned her gaze upon the Merchant, as if to note the effect of her unguarded exclamation; and the feeling of relief was comparatively great with which she saw that he too had been preoccupied, and that her words had passed unheeded.

Again it was the Aga Baba who terminated the interview. His heavy step was heard upon the terrace path, and with nervous eagerness the lady selected a few jewels, and began to bargain with the Merchant. The affair was soon terminated, for the Pasha's daughter made but a faint show of resistance to the price demanded by the trader, and it was not until he had departed that she perceived that in the hurry and excitement of the last few moments, he had left the portrait of the young Bey in her possession, and had carried away the empty casket.

Her first impulse was to forward it to the khan by one of the negroes of the harem; but a reluctance to part from so striking a resemblance to the individual who had so long haunted her dreams, coupled with the interest flung over the picture itself by the romantic story of the suitor whom she had discarded, perhaps too hastily, tempted her to retain it for a few hours. The Merchant would doubtlessly discover his loss when he replaced his goods in the store at the caravanserai; or should he fail to do so, she could restore it early on the morrow; and while she mentally discussed the expediency of this arrangement, she slipped the picture into her girdle, and pillowed it against her heart.

* Sunflower.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE PASHA'S DAUGHTER—CONTINUED.

When the young beauty awoke on the following morning, after a bewildering dream, in which the son of Sarim Pasha had sold her a shawl that had the portrait of a grim and hideous negro hidden among its folds, and Zadig the Merchant had seated a fair girl upon her carpet, whom he told her was his bride she began to reproach herself for a weakness which it was no longer time to subdue; and the blush of pride dried the tears of reluctance with which she enveloped the portrait of Youssouf Bey in a painted handkerchief, and dispatched it to the khan of the Jewel-merchant by the hands of her favorite Shereer. But her resolution was formed too late, and her heart's best prayer was granted, when the confidential slave returned with the information that the strange Khawaji had left the city at daybreak, with a caravan which chanced to be passing.

There was no remedy, and the portrait of the handsome son of Sarim Pasha remained in the possession of the Satrap's daughter. For a while the fair Maïtap appeared to have drank at the fountain of a new existence; her voice once more awoke the echoes of the harem into music, and her graceful laugh pealed through the gilded chambers; her step again became as the step of the chamois, and her eye as the beam of the young day when it breaks over the world.

But this spirit-joy endured not long; and only a few weeks had passed when the Pasha's daughter fell into a deeper and more hopeless melancholy than any beneath which she had yet bent. Nothing aroused her save an al

sion to the Satrap Sarim or his family; and though she never uttered the name of Youssouf Bey, her fair cheek flushed, and her dull eye lighted up as her maidens discussed in whispers the subject of his long-protracted marriage.

Eagerly did she welcome the wandering pilgrims, dervishes, and other holy men who passed through the city; her purse was ever open to their necessities; and thus the palace of Talât Pasha was besieged by all the idle hadjis who visited the holy tomb of the Prophet, either in expiation of their own sins, or of those of their wealthy employers; but vainly did the fair girl receive and assist these pious and needy wayfarers, for not one of them brought tidings of the Merchant Zadig.

Despairing, and fading slowly away, like a sun-struck blossom, the melancholy Maïtap at length resigned herself to the solitary and unhappy fate which had been brought upon her by her own pride, and only prayed to die: and in this frame of mind she sent to ask an interview with a celebrated Dervish, who for the last few weeks had established himself in a ruined tomb beyond the walls of the city.

Her request was refused, her summons was unheeded; the holy man had taken up his abode in that place of death because he had done with the world, and the world with him; the enjoyments and vanities of life were alike obnoxious to his love of solitude and peace; and the refusal was even stern with which he answered the entreaty of the sinking girl.

This unexpected difficulty augmented the desire of the maiden to converse with the ascetic recluse; and when a second invitation had met with a like repulse to the first, she told the tale of her disappointment to the Pasha with many and bitter tears; and early on the morrow the unyielding Dervish was commanded to present himself at the palace of the Satrap.

As the day broke a couple of chaoushes passed the gate of the city, and bent their steps towards the ruined tomb in order to compel the attendance of the Dervish, should he still refuse obedience; but the caution was unnecessary, for as they approached the building, the tall figure of the recluse, looking dark and solemn in the cold gray light, appeared at the portal of his inhospitable dwelling, and slowly moved towards them.

A courteous "Khosh buldûk—You are well found:" from the functionaries of the Pasha, was answered by the cold "Khosh geldin—You are welcome," of the stranger, who talked along in the direction of the city without turning a second glance on his attendants.

The Dervish was a man of middle age, whose dark piercing eyes were overshadowed by thick and hanging brows, and whose upper lip was hidden by a mass of coal-black hair which covered his chin, and fell in long and wavy curls below his girdle. His khirkheh* was of coarse and heavy cloth, and his headdress drawn deep upon his forehead; his step was firm and lofty, like that of one who had declined all further struggle with the world, rather from disdain than fear; and there was an air of self-centered haughtiness in his whole manner and appearance which won for him an involuntary respect to which his lack of years did not entitle him.

He was received by the Pasha with indignant coldness, for all the father had been aroused within him by the uncompromising fanaticism of the devotee; and yet the noble bearing of the Dervish asserted its power even over the chafed temper of the Satrap, and he soon found himself, he knew not how, rather seeking to conciliate than to reproach. There was a spell also in his rich deep voice, which, even in the few words that he reluctantly uttered, had a strange effect upon the Pasha—It was like a note of long-forgotten music—it awoke pleasant but untangible memories, and bewildered the spirit while it charmed the ear.

After a brief interview with his host, the Dervish was conducted by the Aga Baba to a garden pavilion, whence the languid eye of the fair Maïtap loved to wander over the fairy wonders of the blossom-laden parterres; and where her pale brow was fanned by the perfumed breeze, which came to it freighted with the spoils of the orange-flower and the jasmin. She had been prepared for his visit, and had cast over her head a long veil of delicate white muslin, which fell like a cloud about her, and made her beauty almost spectral; about her neck hung a string of precious pearls, from which was suspended a treasure to her still more precious, the portrait of Youssouf Bey; or, as to her it ever seemed, of the young merchant Zadig, which was hidden beneath the folds of her robe, whose tint was of the softest blue that ever spread its azure over the vault of heaven.

As the recluse reached the threshold of the pavilion, he stumbled, and would have fallen, had not the ready hand of the Aga Bal a grasped his arm; but recovering himself in an instant, he bent before the lady with silent and deep respect; and then tardily, and as it seemed, reluctantly, obeyed her bidding, and advanced to the centre of the floor

"Holy Dervish," commenced the Pasha's daughter in a low faint murmur, "forgive me if I have disturbed your solitude: I am unworthy to intrude upon your thoughts, or to intreat your prayers—and yet, if to solace a breaking heart, and to gladden the poor remnant of a life which is fast ebbing away, be a work fitted to your piety, you will not grudge me the few hours of communion which I have

* Large dark cloak.

been eager to insure. Allah buyûk der—the angels of death are hovering over me, and the light of my lamp is well nigh extinguished! Will you not speak peace to my soul ere it is called to the giddy bridge of Al Sirat? Will you not——"

"What my poor prayers may effect shall be freely given, lady," slowly replied the Dervish, "even now I will ask peace for you." And waving his hand, as if to deprecate all further parley, he turned his face towards Mecca, and sunk upon his knees.

The maiden looked on him as he knelt with a feeling of deep and solemn interest; the slaves withdrew to a small inner apartment at a signal from their mistress; and the Aga Baba, to whom the scene afforded no amusement, and whose cupidity was not awakened by the poverty of a poor Dervish, while his vigilance appeared to be to the full as unnecessary as his attendance, quietly walked away to terminate an unfinished party of tric trac* with one of the chaoushes, on which depended a case of sweetmeats presented to the attendants of the Pasha by a departing guest.

The prayer of the Dervish was probably fervent, but it was short; for the deep stillness, amid which he could distinctly hear the painful breathing of the maiden, had not endured many instants, when he rose from his humble posture only to assume one equally reverential at the feet of the gentle girl, the edge of whose veil he pressed to his lips with all the devotion of a hadji at the Prophet's shrine.

"You are too young to die, lady," he whispered, in a tone as low and gentle as her own; "The bright world, with all its buds and blossoms, its sunshine, and its bliss, was made for such as you. The grave is for the gray head and the worn spirit—despair is for the wretched and the desolate—you should be the child of laughter and of hope. Life has yet much to charm one so fair as you are."

"Bir chey yok—there is nothing;" replied the maiden sadly, "I ask only for peace—for forgetfulness; and I shall find them in the grave."

"Forgetfulness!" echoed the Dervish; "And what thought can have been traced upon the lily-leaves of a mind so bright and beautiful as yours, so dark as to make memory a blot? Y'Allah! we e every mortal spirit but as pure, the wezn of the Prophet had been an idle toy."

Maïtap listened in wonder! The austere devotee instead of threatenings was shedding sunshine over her soul; and she would not interrupt him by a word.

"Had such been possible," pursued the Dervish, in one of those deep whispers which are the very voice of passionate tenderness from the lips that are dear to us, but which are merely music when murmured by a stranger to whom no chord of our heart responds: "Had such been possible I should have said that your sickness was of the spirit; that the sosun* had a canker hidden beneath its leaves; but this cannot be—the beautiful daughter of a powerful Pasha can never sigh away her youth in disappointment"—and he paused, and looked so earnestly upon her, that the crimson flush which spread over her brow and bosom was visible through her veil. "It cannot be—or, alas! I should have deemed that your malady was the same as that of one who is dear to me as a brother, the unhappy Youssouf Bey, who loved you, lady, as he loved the bright heaven above him—as something hallowed—something holy—who would have poured out his best blood before you, if so he could have won one smile—one word from your sweet lips—who would do so still, even for a lighter boon."

The maiden gasped for breath; "He must not—he dare not—he would break the heart of his young bride, who has loved him, and trusted in him."

"No bride will ever tread his harem-floor, if she come not from beneath the roof of Talât Pasha," said the Dervish, hastily and earnestly; "He has sworn by the soul of his father, and by the grave of his mother, that he will win no other."

"Oh, say not so!" exclaimed Maïtap, passionately pressing her clasped hands upon her heart, as she remembered the Merchant Zadig "Oh, say not so! He is vowed to a gentle girl who would wither beneath his coldness and her misery would be *my* work. Bid him wed her, love her, cling to her through every change of fortune, and make for himself a happiness which I shall never know on earth." And as she uttered the last words in a low murmur that could scarcely be heard at the extremity of the apartment, her head sank on her breast, and a large drop stole unbidden from her eye.

"You love another then!" said the Dervish; "and Youssouf Bey is sacrificed! Yet pause, lady, ere you reject a heart that lives in you——or—answer me"—he pursued in a clear whisper, as again he gazed fixedly on the astonished girl: "tell me as you value your hope of paradise, do you remember Zadig the Shawl-merchant whom you once visited in the Khan of Damascus? Deceive me not, for your fate is bound up in your reply—Ha! it is so——" And he averted his eyes as the fair girl covered her burning face with her hands, and burst into tears; while a strange expression of wild delight flashed over his features.

"Who are you?" gasped out the bewilder

* Backgammon.

* Lily.

Maïtap · "You, who have dared to call up a vision before me which I have almost sacrificed my life to banish? Speak!" she repeated passionately, as she half rose from the sofa, and prepared to recall her attendants.

"One moment, lady, and but one:" urged the Dervish, as he grasped her arm; "before you call down ruin upon me. A less violent revenge is in your power, where you may yourself immolate the victim—the weapon of a hireling would be useless, absence will kill sooner than steel. I perilled my life to look on you once more, but I perilled it cheerfully; for—I am Zadig the Shawl-merchant ——"

"Zadig!" echoed the maiden as she bent forward, and gazed with all her soul's deep tenderness in her eyes upon the disguised Khawaji; "Zadig—do I not dream?"

"'Tis even I, sweet lady—then drive me not from your presence only to expire with anguish—have pity on my love, on my devotion—let me dedicate to you a life that would be worthless without the hope of your affection—tell me only that my boldness is forgiven. Let it not be deemed a crime that I have sought to save myself from wretchedness, when even force was used to compel me to a step against which my reason and my respect alike revolted."

"Have you forgotten, Effendim," asked the Pasha's daughter, in as cold and stern a tone as her struggling affection would permit her to assume; "Have you forgotten that the step is a long one from the khan to the palace? Inshallah! I am no prize for the first pilgrim-merchant who chances to deem himself a fitting match for the Satrap's only child."

"I am rebuked, lady," said the young man sadly: "and I will intrude my memory no more upon you, I go only to die; and if I did not before expire beneath the lustre of your eyes, it was because I thought I read a light in them that bade me live. But in my blind presumption I have deceived myself; and the penalty of my folly shall be paid."

"Hold, madman!" almost shrieked the maiden, grasping his heavy cloak as he rose slowly from his knee; "I have much to ask of you, and something to thank you for. And first—how come you in this garb? And why did you disappear so suddenly from the city, only to return thus?"

"Most gracious lady," murmured the deep rich voice: "the unhappy Zadig spread out his jewels before you, and left in your hands the portrait of the Pasha Sarim's son only a few months back; and he hoped in his infatuated passion, that even despite his gray beard and his bent figure you might have recognized him: but his presumption was keenly punished; he only drank in a deadlier poison by gazing on you for a moment, and increased his despair until he sank beneath it. What then remained to him? Nothing, save the khirkheh of a Dervish, and the hope of looking on you from a distance as you passed along the city streets—it was little for one who loved like Zadig, but it was all for which he cared to live—and, lady, I am here."

"And you were then the Jewel-merchant—and you know all my weakness!" exclaimed the maiden with a fresh burst of tears; "but words are idle, Zadig—the Pasha may break his daughter's heart, but he will never give her to a Khawaji."

"Yet will I not complain, Light of the World!" whispered the young man, as he rose to his knee, and possessed himself of the hand of the bewildered girl; "even although I am not the Zadig whom your pure spirit had enshrined in its calm depths, and who has called forth those precious drops of tenderness. I am indeed he whom you visited at the Khan—he who dared to forward to you a toy which was intended to recall his memory—he who cheated you with a gray head and a faultering tongue into looking upon his likeness—he, in short, who kneels before you in the garb of holiness and self-denial—and whom you once rejected as unworthy of your love—I am Youssouf, the son of Sarim Pasha."

A faint shriek escaped the lips of the maiden, and she hastily drew the portait from her bosom, and glanced from the ivory to her suitor, and from him back upon the picture; and as, despite his disguise, she indeed recognized its original in the kneeling figure beside her, she suffered the portrait to fall from her hand, which was instantly pressed to the lips and brow of the young Bey.

"It is enough," he whispered: "and I am forgiven. The past is nothing, the present is your presence, the future is the hope of your affection. Light has again broke upon the soul of one whose spirit had long been dark. One word, houri of my heart's paradise! but one, and I am your slave for ever!"

"Ne bilirim—what can I say?" murmured the fair Maïtap, as her head drooped upon the shoulder of her lover: "All shall be even as my lord wills. I am the gunech-tchichey* and he is the sun—where he moves I follow—he is my life and my light—my eyes and my soul are but his shadows."

The Dervish shortly afterwards quitted the harem of Talât Pasha; and with him fled all the gloom and tears of the gentle Maïtap: nor did many weeks elapse ere Youssouf Bey again appeared in the city as the suitor of the Satrap's daughter, and this time he did not woo in vain: while none save he and his fair bride, (from whom I had the tale) ever dreamt that the presence of the pious Dervish in the garden-pavilion had any share in influencing a marriage which spread joy and hilarity throughout two provinces.

* Sunflower.

PART III.

CHAPTER LXII.

Deovletin isl.at—May you increase in prosperity!" said the Pasha, as the Greek girl concluded her tale; "Your Maïtap is well worthy of attention; though W'Allah! it was unseemly in a Satrap's daughter to bend her thoughts on a mere Khawaji."

"Oh, say not so!" tenderly exclaimed the lovely slave: "Who can control the heart? The ocean-waves are not bound even by bands of iron: the sands of the desert cannot be steadied when the simoon is abroad, even by the foundations of a city; how then can the affections be controlled or guided? The wild steed upon the mountain spurns the bit, and the free spirit brooks no control." And without waiting a reply, she burst at once into a gush of song whose melody swept through the chamber.

Oh! the heart is a free and a fetterless thing,
A wave of the ocean! a bird on the wing!
A riderless steed o'er the desert-plain bounding,
A peal of the storm o'er the valley resounding:
It spurns at all bonds, and it mocks the decree
Of the world and its proud ones, and dares to be free!

Oh! the heart may be tamed by a smile or a tone
From the lip and the eye of a beautiful one;
But the frown and the force with its impulse contending,
Ever find it as adamant, cold and unbending;
It may break, it may burst, but its tyrants will see
That even in ruin it dares to be free!

"Nevertheless," persisted the Pasha; "no woman has a right to say, 'mail oldum,'* and to pine away without the permission of her father. With a man it is otherwise; he is the lord of himself, and accountable to no one; but a woman's beauty is her best dowry, and obedience her first duty."

The fair Carimfil sighed, and the Greek girl smiled: one mourned the thrall of her own spirit, and the other scoffed at the idle self-sufficiency of the pampered Pasha.

"Shekier Allah!" continued the Satrap, "our women seldom think for themselves; and thus when they venture to do so, they become the subject of a tale. But what is written, is written; and we will talk no more of this self-willed young houri. At sunset the almè will be here; and my friend the Tchorbadji tells me that they are as fair as the daughters of Peristan. You will love to look on them, janum—my soul; he said, in a softer tone, turning towards the languid Carimfil, while he glanced at the dark-eyed Katinka; "and I am assured that they have among them a massaldjhe who is a world's wonder. Bakalum—we shall see—I doubt much whether she will excel our own sprightly Greek."

"No, no," said the beautiful Circassian; "there is no tongue which makes music like that of my beloved Katinka; she is the bulbul of the harem, the rose of the garden, the diamond of the mine—she is my eyes and my life."

"And I?"—asked the Satrap, with a slight tone of asperity.

"What shall I say?" answered Carimfil, as she bowed her fair head upon her bosom; "you are my lord, and my master. I think of you as the hadji thinks of the holy caba;* you are the Korân of my faith, but she is the poetry of my existence."

"Chok tatlecin—you are very gracious; smiled Katinka; "I ask only to be the sister of your soul." And she looked expressively at the Satrap's bride, whose cheek and brow flushed with conscious crimson; but these almè—dread them; they will rob me of your smiles; and should they be indeed as fair as they are painted, perhaps of your love also." And her glance wandered from the lady to the Satrap.

"W'Allah! there is little danger," said the Pasha, returning the gaze with interest. "The almè! what are they? Ey vah—are they not bush — nothing; wandering from house to house, with light smiles and uncovered faces?—Haivan der—they are animals and though they may be as fair as houris, they have eaten too much dirt to be remembered when they have received their backshish, and passed out of the harem."

"Alheimdullilah!" murmured Katinka, a low tone, which reached only the ear for which it was intended, that of the sententious Satrap; "Let them come then, for the echoes of the harem have not of late been awakened by the sounds of mirth. I am often sad myself;" and she passed her hand across her brow with a pretty affectation of languor which well became the expression of her noble features; "though perchance I should chide my own heart for its weakness."

"Hai, hai—true, true, you should be gay," said the Pasha, nodding his head significantly; "You are surrounded by flowers, and fountains, and music, and you should be gay."

The Greek girl seized her zebec, and swept her hand across it, as though smitten by a sudden pang: the chords vibrated for an instant from the violence of the contact, and then trembled into silence, as the sweet voice of the musician fell softly and sadly upon the ears of her listeners.

Bright and blue is the summer sky;
And 'tis sweet 'neath the clustering boughs to lie
And to watch the light vapors as they glance
Like fairy dreams o'er the pure expanse;
But oh! in those hours of calm delight,
When the world and its cares are forgotten quite,
That the charm may be a perfect one,
We must not watch alone!

Wild and stern is the tempest hour,
When the storm-god rides in his car of power,

* I have fallen in love.

* The Temple of Mecca.

When the winds make vocal the ocean caves,
And death rides throned on the crested waves;
And oh! if we would defy the shock
Of the billowy sea on the caverned rock;
And yield to our fate without a groan,
We must not die alone!

Calm is the sunset's golden spell,
As it steeps in splendor each wood and fell,
Flinging wreaths of gems over leaves and flowers,
And painting the starry jasmine bowers;
But vainly its glory floods the sky,
If only one turn an upraised eye
To mark the bright vision ere 'tis flown;—
For life's loveliest things
Droop their fainting wings,
When we look on them alone!

The song of Katinka saddened the Pasha's wife; but the Pasha himself, for whom it was especially intended, was quite unconscious of its sentiment; and merely remarking that the air was dull and monotonous, and that sometimes solitude was preferable to society, he intimated his intention to return to the salemlick,* to make his evening meal, and to enjoy his evening slumber before the arrival of the almè: a resolution which he shortly afterwards carried into effect, to the great satisfaction of the fair inmates of the harem.

CHAPTER LXIII.

At the set of sun Nevrestè and her fair band stood on the threshold of the Pasha's palace. Maniolopolo and the graceful Mherpirwir walked side by side, and both were absorbed in thought. The dancing-girl neither wept nor sighed, though she knew that the roof beneath which she stood covered the idol of a heart that she would have died to secure; but she gazed despairingly on the young Greek through her veil, as though in that long look she would have concentrated her whole existence. The emotion of Maniolopolo was of a more mixed and less devoted character; his pulses bounded indeed, as he remembered that he should ere long behold his gentle Carimfil: the first dream of his manhood, the brightest vision of his spirit: but blent with love for her, came fears for his own safety—fears which made his lip quiver, and his brain burn.

It was perhaps fortunate for him that his reflections tended to subdue his passionate impatience; for the Aga Baba, who detested every incursion on his master's harem as piously as any jealous Moslem could desire, turned a searching, and by no means loving eye, upon each of the almè as they passed him; and assuredly the uncertain and timid step of the young Greek subjected him to no suspicion.

A tedious hour was passed by the band in an anti-room, through which the negroes of the household came and went on their different missions, while a few idlers grouped themselves about the strangers, admiring their dresses, and asking a thousand questions, which were answered by Nevrestè with a tact that would not have disgraced a diplomatist.

But at length the expected summons arrived, and the dancing-girls were conducted through a long gallery to the inner door of the harem; where, prostrating themselves to the earth, they awaited the order of the lady to advance into the apartment. They were a lovely group; with their flowing veils, long tresses, and picturesque costumes; their white arms gleaming like sea-foam, and their dark eyes flashing out like meteors; and for the first moment the Pasha's wife was silent with admiration; but the transitory surprise once over, she received them gently and graciously, and bade them approach without fear.

As Nevrestè led them on in obedience to the command of the fair Circassian, Maniolopolo ventured for the first time to glance in the direction of the sweet and well-known voice. Carimfil Hanoum was seated on the edge of a gorgeous sofa, glittering with gold fringe, and gay with embroidery; and at her feet reclined his beautiful sister pillowed upon a pile of cushions. The Pasha was enthroned on the gorgeous divan; his chibouque between his lips, his jewelled hand loosely grasping its slender tube, and his half-closed eyes giving assurance of the tranquillity or apathy of his spirit. Behind him stood two negroes, richly clad, with turbans and girdles of cachemire of the richest dyes; while the female slaves of the harem were clustered together at the extremity of the apartment, which was brightly lighted up by a number of tapers, arranged on small tables of inlaid wood in different parts of the saloon.

The centre of the floor was vacant; and there the dancing-girls at once took their stand, and grouped themselves in the most graceful and picturesque attitudes. Three of the number knelt upon the carpet with their six-stringed zebecs on their knees; the remainder stood around them, some with their chapletted heads flung back, and their white arms raised high in the air, while the silver bells of their tambourines rang out like fairy-chimes; others bending lightly forward, with one foot barely touching the floor, in the attitude of listening, like the nymphs of Diana on the doubtful track of some light-limbed fawn, and others again, languidly supposing each other in a sweet repose such as the houris enjoy in the rose-blooming bowers of Paradise.

'Mashallah!' murmured the Pasha beneath his breath; 'tis a vision of Cashem!* They are like the stars of a summer night, the one lovelier than the other, and altogether enough to light up a world. Allah-illallah, Mahomet was a great prophet!'

* Men's apartments.

* Paradise.

This reverie was interrupted by the sudden pealing out of the voices and instruments of the dancing-girls, as a dozen of the band, led by the beautiful Mherpirwir, commenced their intricate and graceful evolutions. The dance told a tale of love: there was the swift pursuit, the reluctant flight, the earnest supplication, the timid dissent, the impassioned eagerness, the yielding affection; and as the last twirl of the tambourines made the air vocal, all the band were kneeling at the feet of their high priestess, the gentle Mherpirwir, holding towards her the lotus-wreaths with which they had been crowned.

"Aferin, aferin—well done, well done!" exclaimed the Satrap, startled out of his apathy by the enchanting spectacle: "Abdool, fill them each a feljanet* of sherbet; for, by the soul of my father! they are peris—I have said it."

The negro obeyed; and as each fair girl bent her head to the Satrap, and touched the crystal goblet with her lips, the eyes of Maniolopolo and his sister met in a long gaze which revealed their secret. For a moment Katinka trembled, but her's was not a soul to shake at shadows; and she recovered herself before the flush had faded from her brow, sufficiently to remark that her brother looked gloriously handsome in his disguise, and that the attention of the unsuspecting and less observant Carimfil might be safely drawn to him without a risk of his discovery; a circumstance which would enable him to arouse in their subsequent conversations a thousand tender memories that would blend most happily with the vision of the dark-browed awali of the almè.

Her resolution formed, she looked up towards her beautiful friend, who bent over her to catch the words which she felt were hovering on her lips, and softly whispered: "Look at the girl in the centre of the group—she with the willow waist, and gazelle eyes—by the instrument in her hand she must be an awali—saw you ever such a face? The rest of the band are as faded lilies beside her!"

The Pasha's wife glanced towards the disguised Sëïdika as she had been desired; and by a strange coincidence, at that very moment, so did the Pasha also. The wife looked long and earnestly, for there was an expression in the dark wild eyes of the singing-girl which strangely moved her, though she could not account for the emotion that they excited: and the husband did so likewise, from a feeling of admiration as intense as it was involuntary.

Maniolopolo was attired in a robe of deep crimson, over which floated a light veil of the most delicate azure; clusters of sweet-scented flowers, among which the tube-rose and the hyacinth were conspicuous, hung loosely in his hair, and rested upon his cheeks. His ample schalvar (or trowsers) of tissue, concealed his feet; and on his knees he supported the gaily-inlaid instrument with which he was accustomed to accompany his ballads. Beside him lay a tambourine, and in his girdle he carried a tusbee of orange-wood, and an embroidered handkerchief.

The difficulty of his position rendered him cautious; and thus his bent head and downcast eyes were as gentle and feminine as his costume.

The Pasha was by no means an amateur of music, and he had lately learnt to love it only from the lips of Katinka; he listened, therefore, rather from courtesy than inclination to the love-ditty, which, at the bidding of Nevrestè, the disguised Sëïdika murmured out in a low and tender tone, that called tears to the eyes of the women; and when the song ceased, it was matter of indifference to the fair Carimfil how the exhibition proceeded, for her spirit was in tumult, and she knew that her lover was before her.

As he first prepared to obey his task-mistress, Maniolopolo, bending low over his zebec, trifled for a moment among its strings; and softly commenced:—

> "I've heard of isles beyond the sea,
> Where summer neither fails nor fades—"

then suddenly shaking his head mournfully, like one who dares not recall a long-forgotten strain, he struck at once into a Persian love-song which diverted the attention of his listeners, and enabled the trembling Circassian to recover her self-possession.

"Pek ahi, Pek ahi—very well, very well," said Saïfula Pasha, as the song ceased; "It is not bad; but we have a bulbul in our own harem, who has a sweeter note. Take the zebec, Bèyaz," he added, glancing down upon the Greek girl, "and we will show this pensive awali the music of our distant province."

Katinka took up her instrument with affected reluctance; and measured the dancing girls with her proud eye, as if to imply that she felt degraded by being compelled to exhibit her talent in their company; and then, meekly bowing her obedience to the Satrap, she turned a long look upon her adventurous brother, and commenced her song.

> Where is my loved one? Oh, whisper me where—
> At the end of the earth? I will seek for her there—
> Is she throned on a gem in some jewel-lit cave?
> Does she ride on the foam of some snow-crested wave—
> Does she float like a cloud through the regions of air?
> My soul and my spirit will follow her there!
>
> Oh! the globe is too narrow to hide what we love—
> And the billow below, and the vapor above;
> For the heart is a guide that ne'er faints on the way,
> That cares not to slumber, and asks not to stay—
> Let the worshipped one dwell in earth, ocean, or air,
> The spirit that loves her will follow her there!

* Cup.

"Chok chay," smiled the Pasha, as the fair slave boldly looked towards him for applause: "that is much—and well enough to sing to a zebec in an hour of idleness; but Alhemdullilah! it is mere poetry and madness. Now, tell me, mother," he continued, addressing Nevrestè, "have you not a Massaldji in your troop? The Tchorbadji Effendi talked to me of a maiden whose subtle tongue could enchain the ear of attention, and charm the mind into forgetfulness. Let her speak—but, Bashustun! I will have no more mawkish sentiment—let there be some kief* in the tale, or it will set me to sleep."

"Wallah billah, your highness shall be obeyed," said the old woman; "Speak, Sèïdika—my lord listens."

"Shall I talk to the noble Satrap of love, when he cares not to hear it named?" said Maniolopolo gravely: "Asteferallah—heaven forbid! It is a threadbare subject which may well be cast away like a tattered garment; every one has worn it once, but it seldom sits comfortably; and thus it gets flung from one to the other until it is known to all, and little cared for by any—some think, indeed, that they wear it, when they have folded themselves in a tunic of quite another fashion; but as they seldom discover the cheat which they have put upon their own shoulders, they walk the bazārs as erect in their motley, as though it were true cloth of gold. I will, however, since my lord sees fit, at once change the subject, and relate to him the Adventures of the Barber of Bassora."

"Inshallah! at last we shall hear something worth listening to," said the Satrap: "I like the title of the tale vastly: it smacks of every-day life; tchapouk, tchapouk, quick, quick—let the calam of memory move rapidly, and you shall have no reason to regret your visit to the harem of Saïfula Pasha."

"Heaven fulfil the promise of your Highness!" said Maniolopolo significantly, and, amid the most perfect stillness, with the beautiful and agitated Carimfil immediately before him, and the sad and gentle Mherpirwir at his side, he thus began his narration.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE ADVENTURES OF THE BARBER OF BASSORA.

In the famous city of Bassora, about a hundred years ago, lived a worthy khamal,* named Husref, who was remarkable, first for his immense strength of muscle, which enabled him to carry upon his back the loads of two men; and some, indeed, went so far as to say, the lading of an ass: and for the fact of never having become the father of a child which had not some natural defect.

There was Medjid the one-eyed, Riffat the one-sided; Chiamil the three-fingered; Mezvir the bow-legged; Elfi the hare-lipped; and Moetaleb the left-handed. These were his sons; and though his wife Mine,* who was the only child of a sign-painter, had been one of the prettiest girls in the somewhat obscure street in which she resided, he was not one whit more fortunate with his daughters. Djamilè was hump-backed: Hafizè was red-haired; Libabè was celebrated for a limp, and Zeinip was stone deaf. In short, it could not be denied that they were a remarkable family.

With ten children, and about as many paras a day, a man cannot be considered to be perfectly independent; and poor Husref accordingly sometimes ate his olives without bread, and generally his bread without caviare, but, somehow or other, all the children contrived to live on, being occasionally permitted to plunge their hands into the pilaut of a neighbor, when they never failed to avail themselves freely of the privilege. Minè grumbled a good deal, it is true, and seldom failed to remind her husband when he returned home after his day's labor, that, had she married the oda-bashi† of the Pasha's guard, who was killed in an encounter with a predatory tribe of Arabs, and whose widow had been pensioned by the Satrap, instead of a beggarly khamal, who dared not wag his beard before the meanest functionary of the city, she should have been as great a person as Habitoullah, the wife of Marsouk the melon-merchant, whose ferdjhè‡ had been twice new-lined since her marriage, while her own was dropping into such holes that she should not long be able to walk the bazār for very shame. She had many other little complaints also, as unpleasant as they were useless, with which she diurnally regaled his ears; but the philosophic Husref heeded them not; the heart of Minè was relieved by these outpourings of her discontent; and her voice generally set the weary khamal to sleep, despite the noise of the ten children, who were all as spoilt, as happy, as dirty, and as ragged, as any domestic colony in that remote quarters of the city.

Thus the family of Husref the khamal, might altogether be said to prosper: for when people continue for years to scold, to sleep, and to treat fortune like the sorry jade that she is, they cannot be considered as quite wretched; and, in this way, constantly scrambling up the sandhill of life, sometimes buried up to his neck, and sometimes obtaining a momentary footing, the husband of Minè the regretful, continued to toil, and bear, and forbear, until his ten children began to grow into men and women about him.

* Cheerfulness. † Street porter.

* Enamel. † Corporal. ‡ Woman's cloak. § Indian corn.

Matters now became furious. What was to be done with them? Husref uttered many an "Inshallah!" but faith alone would not supply them with employment; and the deep respirations of the anxious khamal, as he bent under his load, were now frequently lengthened into sighs.

About this time a Sherbetjhe. whose mother was the friend and gossip of Minè, demanded his daughter Hafizè in marriage, and he gave her as freely as he would have given a draught of water to a thirsty hadji. Good fortune is better than gold; and a week or two after the marriage of the red-haired maiden, a Serudjhe of the neighborhood offered to engage his son Mezvir in his stables, when the bow-legged youth at once found himself provided with food, labor, and a good bed of dhourra-leaves.* Riffat the one-sided, established himself as the keeper of a khan in the neighborhood of his father's house, by doing all the duty of a bent and crippled old man, who looked as though he were coeval with its walls, until the day of his death, when he bequeathed his keys, his wardrobe, his besom, his flagged shed, and his ten paras a day, to the young volunteer, who at once declared himself independent, and commenced pilfering the travellers who frequented the caravanserai, and cleaning the court, on his own account.

All this was truly gratifying to the paternal pride of the khamal; and he congratulated himself in the contentment of his heart, that his sons were in a fair way to rise in the world, and to become men of mark. In the exuberance of his satisfaction he frequently forgot that there was still eight of his progeny at home; but the fact was soon forced upon his memory as he passed his narrow portal, and bent his head that he might not strike it against the door-sill, by the upbraidings of his wife, and the uproar and tumult of his growing family.

Things were in this state when one day, as Husref was leaning against the trunk of an acacia tree which overshadowed the wooden terrace of a coffee-shop near the meat-market, enjoying the fumes of a luxury which he did not at that moment possess a para to procure, a stranger descended from a jaded mule, not twenty paces from him, and throwing the bridle to a serudjhe who attended him, bade him take back the beast, and await him at the house of the person he had named on their arrival in the city; while at the same time, he beckoned to Husref to relieve the man of a moderately sized cypress-wood box, which rested on the neck of his own beast.

The khamal obeyed with alacrity; and having possessed himself of the chest, carefully deposited it on the ground to await the further commands of his new employer.

"Wallah! you have a strong arm, Khamal," said the stranger, whom, from his garb, Husref supposed to be a Persian; "you are the very man I want. Here are ten piastres;" and as he spoke he placed them in the hand of the astonished porter, who had not been master of such a sum for years; "Bid the cafeje here give you a cup of coffee, that your heart may be as light as your arm is steady; and then away with you to the southern side of the Great Mosque, and there await me, taking care not to lose sight of the box."

"The delighted khamal lost not a moment in obeying this command. He swallowed the coffee, saluted the stranger with a fervent "Allah es marladek—" shouldered the chest, and started off at a light trot for the Great Mosque of the city.

"Ten piastres for traversing a stadia length of the street," he murmured joyously as he moved along; "and with a mere featherweight on my shoulder; why I must surely have fallen in with Kāroon himself! Y'Allah! my felech is bright to-day. What shall I say to Minè? If I tell her that I have earned ten piastres, they will melt like snow before the sun, for she will fancy herself a Khamal-bashi's wife; No, no—I will say two—and with two piastres we shall sup well."

Having made this prudent resolution, the contented Husref jogged along, communing with his own thoughts, until he reached the principal mosque; when taking up the position which had been indicated to him by the stranger, he placed the chest on the ground, and squatting himself beside it, removed his turban from his head, and concealed among its ragged folds the eight piastres which were to be the commencement of a hoard, amassed from the produce of as many such profitable adventures as the present, as it might please Allah to provide for him.

An hour passed away; an hour of luxury to the toil-worn Husref, who had never once changed his position save to pick up a coin which was flung to him by a Frank traveller, who seeing him seated there, covered with rags, and deep in thought, threw him a piece of money as a matter of course and passed on.

"The Infidel dog is subjected by my felech:"* murmured Husref, as he possessed himself of the coin; "This is to be a white day. And what shall I do with this piastre? shall I tell Minè that I bring her three? or shall I conceal this also in my turban? or shall I——" and he glanced across the narrow street; "shall I fill my bag with gebeli, and smoke a comfortable pipe or two of the strong-savored Latakia? Chok chay—that is much it shall be so." And having first glanced in every direction to ascertain that no person was passing to carry off his trust, he shuffled along

* Indian corn.

* Constellation.

at his best speed to a shop in the neighborhood, where he purchased a modest quantity of the coveted luxury, and then returned and re-established himself beside the chest.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE ADVENTURES OF THE BARBER OF BASSORA —CONTINUED.

THE chibouque was soon lighted; and as the heavy fumes of the strong and coarse tobacco curled over his beard, the happy Husref, with a joyous feeling of secret prosperity, began to muse on his family affairs.

"Two sons and a daughter respectably established—eight piastres among the folds of my turban, with fifteen paras of change from the gebeli in my girdle — Shekiur Allah! Husref the khamal will yet rise in the world. But my dear son Moctaleb—my favorite son. —by the beard of the Prophet! his fortune is as left-handed as himself, or his fine eyes would ere this have filled his girdle with jebkhargi.*—Something must be done for Moctaleb; he desires to be a barber, and nothing could be better; but the shop, the soap, the razors, the towels, and the basins, must be paid for; and where is the money?"

This was an uncomfortable question, for it was one to which the anxious father could not satisfactorily reply, and he therefore did the best thing which could be done under such circumstances; he determined to leave the matter to Providence, and to think of something else.

The next subject of contemplation that he selected could not have been a very entertaining one, for he was just dropping off to sleep, when an acquaintance who chanced to be passing with a large basin in his hand, roused him once more into consciousness by offering to share with him a copious draught of boza† which had just been given to him in payment of some service that he had rendered to a cafèjhe.

The khamal did not hesitate to accept the offer: and his friend, having first secured his own share, handed the basin to Husref, who emptied it at a draught; and the man having passed on, he resumed his reverie, which, blending with the intoxicating fumes of the boza, soon completely overpowered him. His head sank on the chest, his limbs became relaxed, his breathing heavy, and in five seconds he was dead asleep.

How long he had been in the land of dreams he knew not, when he was suddenly aroused by the fearful cry of "Yan guen var!"‡ and the harsh stroke of the iron-tipped staff of the fire-guard on the rude pavement of the street. He instinctively started from the earth, and rubbed his eyes as he perceived that he was surrounded by a pitchy darkness, through which he glanced about him to discover the direction of the fire; a fact which he had no sooner ascertained, than in the confusion of the moment, totally forgetting the chest, and almost his own identity, he rushed forward to the scene of ruin, and was soon busily employed in rendering assistance to the sufferers.

When, after the lapse of an hour, he remembered the box, and hurriedly returned to the spot where he had left it, it was too late—the chest was gone!

Husref dashed his turban upon the earth, and almost yelled in the agony of his spirit. How should he face his employer? he, who had betrayed his trust. How should he take his stand on the accustomed spot. He who was no longer worthy of confidence—who had blackened his own face through his intemperate folly—and scattered dirt in his beard?

While he thus bitterly reproached himself, he heard a step rapidly approaching; he looked despairingly in the direction whence it sounded, and beheld the stranger within half-a-dozen paces of him, in the gray light of the dawn.

"Haidè—come along, khamal;" said the well-remembered voice; "I have made you keep a long vigil, but it shall not be an unprofitable one. But what is this!" he exclaimed, hurriedly glancing round: "Where is the chest."

The affrighted Husref sank upon his knees, and with quivering lips related the whole history of his misfortune. The stranger listened anxiously, and at the conclusion of the story he broke into a low and bitter laugh, as he murmured beneath his breath; "Ajaib!—the krsz* is welcome to his prize—he knew not his own errand, and has saved us some labor. Korkma,—fear not, my friend, you are forgiven; but look well to yourself in future, and when you have a treasure in charge, beware of boza. Will you promise me this?"

"Bashustun—on my head be it!" said Husref emphatically: "I am the slave of my lord for ever. I am less than a dog before him—and here," and as he spoke he took off his ragged turban whence he drew the hidden piastres, to which he added those which he carried in his no less ragged girdle, "here are the wages that I have forfeited by my mad folly. The value of the chest I cannot replace, for I am poor, and I have a wife and eight children under my squalid roof, who look to me for bread, while I possess but fifteen paras in the world. Have mercy on me, Effendim, for those fifteen paras are my all!"

* Pocket-money.

* A strong beverage, composed of rakı, pimento and mint.

‡ There is a fire.

* Thief.

"Put up your money," said the stranger, turning aside his hand; "Do you take me for as great a brigand as the pezevenk who has run off with our chest of cypress-wood? But your eight children—we must talk of this—I will accompany you to your house——"

"House!" echoed the dismayed khamal; "it is a hovel—my lord cannot pass under such a roof."

"Gel, gel—come, come, no more of this," smiled the stranger; "I have taken a liking to you, in spite of the strong boza and the stolen box. I must see these eight children, and I have already fasted many hours—here is gold—let your wife prepare for me a pillauf of chicken well spiced, and purchase a rug for me to lie down upon, and a prayer-carpet to enable me to perform my devotions, until I establish myself elsewhere. I wish to avoid the public khans."

"My lord's will is mine," said Husref, bewildered by the extraordinary nature of the proposal, and the contemplation of a chicken-pillauf prepared at his own mangal;* "but I have a son, a youth of discretion and honesty, who is keeper of a khan not fifty paces from my poor dwelling, who would lay his forehead in the dust before the saviour of his father; and it is so long a time since Minè has tried her skill in the cooking of a chicken——"

"That this morning she will prepare two for us, that the task may be more easy," interrupted the stranger; "and now, let us away at once, for the sun is rising above the city walls, and we have both passed a busy night."

And so saying, he gathered his cloak about him and turned in the direction indicated by the astonished Husref.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE ADVENTURES OF THE BARBER OF BASSORA.—CONTINUED.

THE Khamal and his companion proceeded slowly along the narrow and gloomy streets of the city, until they reached the quarter in which stood the squalid habitation of the bewildered Husref. As they made their way the stranger asked a thousand questions relating to the family of the porter, the number of his children married and unmarried, the age and temper of his wife, and the personal appearance of his daughters; and he could not conceal his amusement when the confiding Husref, warmed into good fellowship by the condescension of his stately employer, imparted to him the singular ill luck which had attended all his progeny, and the seal that had been set upon each at its birth.

"Mashallah! 'tis like an Arab tale," smiled the stranger; "they brought a name into the world with them, and you might have saved yourself the trouble of giving them a second. However, something must be done, and I at once adopt Moctaleb as my own child, for he has the same defect as myself; and as I have never found that it affected my fortunes, neither ought it to mar those of your favorite son."

"Allah buyûk der!" apostrophised the delighted khamal; "what am I that my lord should repay my transgression of the past night by a benefit of which I am too blind to see the limit?—But, yavash, Effendimou—here is a kibaub-shop, where I shall do well to turn a portion of your gold into food. I will make my bargain and be with you in a moment; but I must go alone, or the bash pezevenk* will make me pay with my eyes for all his dainties."

The stranger nodded acquiescence, and the happy Husref, assuming a consequential air, consequent on the contact of the coin which he held closely pressed against his horny palm, stept gravely across the swoln and unsavory kennel that intersected the street, to the tempting counter of the kibaub-merchant.

Here he gazed for awhile in luxurious indecision, coveting every thing, and purchasing nothing, until he was aroused by the remonstrance of the dealer, who demanded angrily why he did not pursue his path instead of gloating over his edibles, and, perhaps, for aught he knew to the contrary, infecting his food by the influence of the Evil Eye at the very opening of the shutters.

"Ne istersinez—what do you want?" answered the khamal impatiently, "I come here as a customer—Give me a basin of tchorba,† a dish of dolmas,‡ a lump of keftas,§ half a dozen quails for the pillauf, as many kibaub skewers, half an okè of tchalva,‖ a dozen fetyrs,** and a chicken."

"Ajaib ust—it is wonderful!" said the merchant, stroking down his well-trimmed and bushy beard; "a khamal boldly orders there repast of a Pasha; but the piastres—where are they?"

The customer replied by slowly opening his fingers and displaying the piece of gold.

"Chok chay—that is much," said the kibaub-merchant; "now we will to business." And without further delay he began to pack the required dainties into a small basket.

When the articles were safely arranged, the bargaining commenced, and the asseveration of the dealer, who swore lustily by his beard

* A brazier containing heated charcoal.

* Great rogue.
† Soup.
‡ Balls made of rice and chopped meat.
§ Force meat.
‖ A composition of flour, honey and oil.
** Thin cakes eaten warm, with honey or sugar.

that he was almost giving away his property, had not the slightest effect upon the khamal; who, when he found that the kibaub-merchant was determined to hold out until the last moment, gravely remarked that there were other shops in the city whose owners had the fear of the Prophet before their eyes, and turned towards the door. His departure was, however, by no means to be permitted; and, accordingly, after a little more wrangling, the gold coin of the stranger was changed, the basket shouldered by the khamal, and himself sturdily on his way to rejoin his employer.

In a short time after the purchase was made, Husref stopped at the threshold of his dwelling. It was the remnant of what had once been a substantial and spacious house, but time and fire had left it little more than a tottering and blackened wreck. Portions of wall, of a thickness which might apparently have defied destruction, were still visible; but the principal part of the structure had been composed of wood, and all that now remained, save the rude and solid blocks of masonry already alluded to, were irregularly shaped and smoky-looking spaces, cumbered with rubbish and creeping plants, and grim with ruin. Niched among these uninviting relics of bygone comfort, and leaning against one of the remaining fragments of wall, rose the wooden tenement of Husref the khamal, like the abode of the presiding genius of destruction; and through the ill-hung door of this squalid dwelling did he lead the stranger; who however he might have prepared himself for the sight of poverty and discomfort, found that the reality far outran his anticipations.

The hovel consisted of one immense roughly-paved apartment, a portion being screened off for the harem by a time-worn curtain of baize, attached to the ceiling and walls, by huge skewers of tough wood. Not an effort at ornament or even comfort was visible; all was bleak, cheerless, uncompromising poverty. The wretched divan which occupied one side of the outer apartment was covered with blue and white checked cotton, patched with pieces of stuff of all colors and qualities; and the only object that relieved the eye was the branch of a wild fig-tree which had rooted itself among the rubbish of the ruin, and now flaunted its rich large leaves through the rude unglazed opening that served as a window, and could only be secured from the weather by a wooden shutter.

But, as the stranger stepped across the threshold, he saw nothing of all this, for his gaze was riveted on a group in the centre of the floor. Kneeling upon the stones, her head bent over a chest, and her face uncovered, he beheld the wife of the khamal, while beside her stood three youths, one of whom was tall and handsome; and close behind her a younger female, who had a tattered shawl flung about her head.

A word from Husref, as he followed close behind his employer, sent the woman shrieking behind the screen; and revealed fully to the stranger a fact which he had already suspected—It was indeed his own lost chest which stood in the centre of the khamal's floor.

As for the astonished Husref, he darted forward, and flung himself upon the box in an extacy of delight—called it his eyes, and his soul—and committed a thousand extravagancies, which, in so grave a man, were like the gambols of a donkey; while the three youths looked on in astonishment, and glanced from their excited father to his silent companion in undisguised amaze.

"Na to ne, na to ne—there it is, there it is!" at length exclaimed the happy Husref: "the very chest which my lord gave into my keeping! Allah buyūk der—He is great; and my face is whitened. Wallah billah! I may once more lift up my head in the bazār, for my feleck has washed away my shame—Speak, Effendimou—my master, is not this indeed the stolen box"

"It is indeed:" said the stranger with a bitter laugh; and all that it contains is my property."

A faint shriek was heard from behind the screen, followed by an angry whisper; and the stranger started and turned suddenly toward the tallest of the youths, as he demanded sternly: "Has the lid of that chest been lifted? And how came it here"

"Let not my lord nurse displeasure against his slave," answered the young man deprecatingly; "My father left his home yesterday at dawn to ply his trade in the city, and for many hours we heeded not an absence which was frequently of long occurrence; but when the night fell, our mother became restless and unhappy. Some evil had perchance overtaken her husband—we all fasted, for we had no provision in the house; and as the darkness became more dense, and our alarm increased, I set off to search for my father in the city streets. For hours I wandered hither and thither, having no clue to direct my steps; the night advanced, and there were few persons stirring save the guard, who, as they patrolled the town, frequently obliged me to crouch down, to avoid them, lest they should make me prisoner; and it was when thus endeavoring to escape their notice in the neighborhood of the Great Mosque, that, as I skulked into a corner, I struck my head against a hard substance, which I at once discovered to be a chest. Astonished at such a circumstance,—for, as the soldiers passed on, I ascertained that no living soul was in the street, I at once understood that this must be an immediate interposition of my feleck; and I resolved to possess myself of the box until the return of my father, who would be able to decide on the steps necessary to be taken with my prize.

Having come to this decision, I slowly left the Mosque, and with the chest on my shoulder, turned in the direction of our abode; but the reappearance of the city-guard compelled me to diverge from the direct path, and to take one much more circuitous; for I well knew that whatever might be the contents of the box, my appearance, and the incoherent account which I should give, both of it and myself, could not fail to create suspicion which might entail upon me danger, if not absolute destruction. While I was thus engaged, a cry of 'Fire!' came on the wind, and I hastily looked about for a secure hiding-place for my treasure, that I might hurry to the assistance of the unfortunates whom Allah had visited in his wrath.

"I readily found one; for, not a hundred paces from the spot where I stood, I remembered to have often remarked a small enclosure containing a tomb which must have been that of some one of note; for the iron grating that enclosed it had been richly wrought and gilt, and there were traces of the chisel on the solid masonry of the monument. But its glory had long been gone by: the iron balustrade had rusted and given way; and a rank crop of nettles grew about the stonework of the tomb. Among these weeds I concealed the chest, and then echoing the thrilling cry of 'Yan gúen var?' I sprang forward in the direction of the flames, which were already draping the solemn heavens with crimson, and putting out the stars.

"For a while I forgot the chest; for as the burning rafters gave way, and in their fall flung showers of golden stars against the sky, I heard a faint cry of anguish; it was the voice of a woman; and I remember only that in the next moment I was surrounded by fire, bright, scorching fire, which seemed to dry the marrow in my bones; and that I was busy tearing from the head and face of a young female a blazing veil of muslin which she clutched with convulsive power—Then I was once more in the free air, with the wind of heaven playing upon my brow; and the young beauty whom I had saved was in the arms of an aged Emir, who was covering her with the shawl from his own waist, and calling upon her by every tender name that parental fondness ever lavished upon the object of its idolatry, to look up and tell her anxious father that she lived. But the faded lily spoke not—and at length—"

"You remembered the chest, and returned to seek it—was it not so, my son?" asked the khamal.

"I did," replied Moctaleb; "and the dawn was breaking as I reached the burial place, and once more took possession of my prize. I now dreaded no encounter, and walked boldly forward with my burthen, until I reached the threshold of my home; when endeavoring to rest the chest against a block of masonry while I pushed back the door, it slipped from my hold and burst open with the fall."

"And you saw the contents?" asked the stranger.

"Even so," replied the youth; "and having done so, I determined at once to carry the box to some obscure spot, and there leave it to be found by any passer-by; but as I prepared to do so, I recognized the cord that was about it to be that of my father: and I instantly changed my resolution, and having closed the lid, I brought the mysterious chest into the house."

"Mysterious indeed!" murmured the stranger as if unconsciously: but instantly recovering himself, he said blandly: "Enough of this for to-day, good-youth; we are all weary; let us eat and drink, and then endeavor to sleep. Close the door, and shut out the growing light; lend me a beenish to wrap about me, or a rug to lie down upon, when we have finished our repast; and as I have brought terror under your roof by the contents of that unlucky box, I will to-night make you acquainted with their history. We all require rest; and while I am your guest, you shall have a respite from labor. So now, khamal to our repast."

After some delay the meal was served; but first the three-fingered Chiamil had to seek coals to heat the mangal, and the one-sided Riffat butter to stew the pillauf: while the hump-backed Djamilè, with a shred of well mended muslin folded about her face, spread the tray, and filled the delf cups with water. Minè was all activity; she hurried the execrations of the limping Libabè, restrained the volubility of the hump-backed Djamilè, and shook her clenched hand at the mischievous Zeinip, whose deafness rendered her inaccessible to wordy menace.

Thanks to these feminine exertions, all was at length ready, and the stranger having assisted that Husref and his sons should share his meal, they were soon squatted round the tray, feasting heartily upon such fare as they had never before tasted save in their dreams: while the women, carefully veiled, waited on them, most assiduously, and dexterously changed the dishes in time to secure for themselves a sufficient portion of their contents.

The meal over, Husref and his guest lighted their chibouques, and established themselves on the hard, straw-stuffed divan; while the young men retired to the lower end of the apartment, to converse in whispers on the extraordinary events of the night, and the women huddled together behind the screen, rapidly demolished the reliques of the feast.

In another hour all slept under the roof of the khamal; and the muezzin had proclaimed the mid-day prayer from the minaret of every mosque in the city ere the weary family were

again astir. Another hearty meal commenced the business of the day; and although to avoid the observation of the neighbors, Husref and his sons bent their way to the bazār and mingled with the crowd, they only purchased provisions, and returned home as evening set in, to listen to the promised narrative of the stranger.

The appointed hour arrived, and the owner of the chest having directed Moctaleb to lift it into the centre of the floor, seated himself upon a beenish beside it, and leaning his elbow upon the lid, as the khamal and his family squatted themselves beside him, he calmly desired the young man to explain the nature of its contents.

Moctaleb turned pale, and involuntarily glanced towards his father.

"You are an ass, and the father of asses!" said Husref impatiently, "there can be neither an afrit nor a ghoul shut into the chest—Why then do you not speak?"

"It contains," replied the young man in a low voice, "a human eye, a human ear, a foot, a heart, a hand, and a dagger——"

"True, as though the Ibn Shallah* himself had counted them," said the imperturbable stranger; and then regardless of the horror which was depicted on every countenance around him, he slowly laid his spread palm on the lid of the chest, and began his story.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE ADVENTURES OF THE BARBER OF BASSORA —CONTINUED.

"My name is Hussein, and I was born in this good city of Bassora just four-and-forty years ago, during the feast of the Bairam, amid festivities and rejoicings which were considered to be of good omen both to mother and child. How far they fulfilled the prophecy will appear hereafter.

"My father had been an Emir Hadj,† a man of good repute, and tolerable fortune: who had more than once conducted a caravan of Franks across the Desert, and been generously paid by the Infidels for his guidance and protection. Some evil tongues had indeed insinuated more than once that, in the occasional and apparently not altogether accidental encounters of his caravans with the predatory Arabs, traces of a good understanding might be discerned between him and his enemies, which considerably militated against his integrity, while they increased the contents of his joppa ‡ but the world is so censorious that it is only prudent to shut the ears of conviction against the voice of reproach.

"My mother, Gumush,* was the daughter of a lapidary who had more science than piastres, and whose fortune was to the full as hard as the gems he fashioned. I never knew her save as a widow; for my father expired of plague in the Desert before I was a year old; caught as we were told, by his having rifled the pockets of a dying hadji who had joined the caravan about an hour before, with the poison in his veins. My eldest brother took charge of the caravan, and conducted it safely to its destination: but we suddenly lost sight of him, and it was not until many years afterwards, when my mother was no more, and I was established in my native city, that we again heard of him as an eminent Emir Hadji, trading to and from Bagdad.

"As for me, my mother having married again, and her husband, a handsome young sekeljhi,† being to the full as enamored of her piastres as of her person, and finding me determined against following his surfeiting trade under his very unpromising auspices, provision was soon made for me in the shop of an Armenian barber, whose skill in bleeding and shaving was notorious through the whole city.

"The bustle and gossipry of the public room delighted me. Not an occurrence could take place in Bassora but it was whispered in the house of my master; not an event was prognosticated but the prophecy might be traced to one of his customers. In short, it was the news-room and scandal-factory of the city. Many a worthy Moslem lost his beard on the very spot where his wife had lost her character not an hour before; and not unfrequently the cause of the one assisted at the disappearance of the other.

"Excited and amused by the conversation of the customers, I soon became an adept in the business, and at twelve years old, standing upon a stool, I have even shaved the chin of many of the least profitable frequenters of the establishment. But this pleasant state of things could not last for ever.

"As I grew older I began to twist my turban into richer folds, and to give an extra turn to my girdle, for as I walked through the bazār to operate upon some of my wealthier employers at their own houses, I not unfrequently caught the low murmur of admiration which stole from beneath the yashmaks of the women as I passed them; and I learned to understand that my personal advantages far outran my fortunes. At first I smiled at this conviction forced itself upon me, for my vanity was satisfied, and I did not look beyond its indulgence, but gradually I began to measure myself injured, and to compare myself with every individual who frequented the bazār, until I became convinced that I indeed deserved the name which was frequently applied to me of

* Son of prayer. † A conductor of pilgrims. ‡ Purse.

* Silver. † Pyrotechnist.

' the handsome Barbar of Bassora ;' and to encourage a horde of romantic and foolish visions that well nigh turned my brain.

" The few spare piastres which I had formerly spent in tchalva and mahalibè, I now hoarded until they would purchase for me some articles of finery ; and I listened with avidity to the tales of the massaldjis when they told the love of the great lady of a princely harem for some lowly one of the land.

" My beard and mustachios were as black and bright as the wing of the raven ; and I never failed when I was about to apply the perfumed oil to the shaven head of a customer, to pass my open palm over them as if by accident ; by which means they became thick and glossy, and were the envy of many a proud young Bey, who would have paid every hair with a piastre, could he have called them his own.

" You may imagine what ensued ; and you will not be surprised to hear that I soon listened in trembling to many a tale of scandal, of which I previously knew all the details. Many comments were made upon my dress, which had gradually become more and more expensive ; and suspicions of the truth were sometimes hinted to me by the gay young Beyzadehs who passed occasionally under my hand ; but as my discretion was even more powerful than my vanity, I affected never to understand their inferences, and they at length grew weary of criticising alike my garments and my humor.

" I led this life for years ; during which my master died, and left me sole heir to his business, with a trifling sum in money, which I gave in secret to my mother, whose young husband had long ago forgotten that he owed to her his present prosperity, and who felt the sting of poverty coupled with the bitterness of neglect. The will of Allah, however, was soon accomplished ; for the tears of regret at her past folly, which she continually shed, brought her to the brink of the grave, and she sank gently into it, with a blessing upon her lips, which was all for me !

" I resigned to no one my place at the head of her coffin, and I stood and saw the earth flung upon the remains of my misguided but gentle parent ; and when I turned away, I remembered that my brother's abode was unknown to me, and that I was alone in the world.

" But this feeling of sadness did not last long ; the path of life was strown with flowers for me, and the death of my mother was a dark cloud which soon passed away from the sky of my existence. I divided my time between the duties of my profession, which I lightened by piquant anecdotes drawn from secret and authentic sources, which bewildered and delighted my listeners ; and by the labors of the toilette, where I worshipped with all the ardor of vanity.

" Years passed over me, and a new race of beauties afforded me new opportunities of conquest ; I was courted for my personal beauty, and trusted for my discretion ; and I should probably have lived and died happily, had not my evil stars led me one day at noon under the windows of the harem of a wealthy Bey, who was absent on an expedition in a distant province.

" To amuse the solitude of his young wife, the Bey had invited to his palace his only sister, who was betrothed to the Pasha of Damascus ; and this fair dame, who by no means relished the retirement in which the wife of her brother thought proper to spend the months of his absence, had already decided on departing from Bassora ; when on the day in question, as she sat playing with her tusbee on the divan under the casement, gazing through the lattices, and wishing herself far from the dull palace of her kinsman, she chanced to see me pass along the street.

" ' Tchapouk, tchapouk—quick, quick, Selhäi,' she exclaimed to a slave who was passing through the apartment ; ' for the first time I see a handsome man in Bassora—kim der—who is it ?"

" ' Effendim,' replied the maiden, as she glanced through the jalousie ; ' the sun shines on our street to-day ; that is Hussein the Barber.'

" ' Barber !' echoed the young beauty incredulously ; ' Mashallah ! if the barbers of Bassora carry such brows as that, your Beyzadeh must touch the clouds !'

" ' Nevertheless, madam, that is in truth Hussein the barber ; and if the zamparalik* of the city may be depended on, you are not the first young beauty whom his bright eyes have thralled.'

" ' Ey vah !' replied the lady, ' you are too quick-witted, Selhäi ; but your barber may well turn the heads of half the city beauties. Does he vend perfumes and essences ?"

" ' Both, and of the best,' answered the slave ; when, receiving no further intimation that her presence was required, she proceeded on her errand, and the Bey's sister was left alone.

I shall not weary you with words. For long the lady repented her request to quit the city, and the very name of the Pasha of Damascus became distasteful to her : but she was nevertheless compelled to abide by an arrangement which she had herself made ; and you will not be surprised to hear that ere she took leave of her brother's wife, I had already disposed of my business, settled all my affairs, and was on my way to the ancient city of Damascus.

" I had taken care to provide myself with sufficient raiment of goodly fashion and ma-

* Scandal.

rial, to obliterate every trace of the barber from my appearance; and as the Pasha had sent a party of his own people to escort the lady and some of the slaves of his own harem to attend her, there was little danger of detection when I boldly presented myself at the palace af the Pashalic, and announced myself as the younger son of a noble house, anxious to serve under the Satrap of Damascus.

"The Yuzbashi of the palace-guard was won by my appearance, and when, as we stopped to take coffee together in the bazár, I presented to him an amber mouth-piece which he chanced to admire as we filled our chibouques from my own tobacco-purse, he vowed an eternal friendship with his new and liberal ally. He was a brave young man and much beloved by the Pasha; and he might have alarmed my vanity, had he not been disfigured by a scymitar wound which had distorted his features, and given a grim expression to his countenance.

"With such an advocate, I soon found myself a member of the Satrap's household; and as my heart was light, and my humor joyous, I speedily became a favorite in the palace; but the harem was a sealed book: and despite all my endeavors, I could not even succeed in addressing one of the slaves.

"As I had not abandoned my liberty at Bassora to lead the life of a dependent at Damascus, I soon began to repent my precipitation, and to meditate a return to my native city, when one evening as I was slowly crossing the court-yard to visit the guards, an aged woman, evidently belonging to the Pasha's harem, passed close beside me, and muttering "Ekhi kateti—there is something," in an under tone, and with an air of mystery, dropped a small embroidered handkerchief at my feet as if by accident, and then shuffled hastily away.

"I did not immediately stoop to secure the prize: but stopping suddenly as if by an impulse of thought, I stood for a minute or two motionless; and then letting fall my own handkerchief upon that which lay on the ground, lest I might be watched from the palace-windows, I picked up both together, and thrust them into my girdle.

"When I had retired to my chamber I lost no time in examining the mysterious handkerchief, and, as I had expected, I found amid its folds a small roll of paper, on which were written these words—

"'Hussein—you know the pavilion of crimson silk which the Pasha has erected in the garden of the harem—I will be there at midnight. Be silent and cautious. The Rose to the Bulbul.

"I read the scroll thrice over before I could believe that my eyes had not deceived me; and as the conviction slowly forced itself upon my mind that it was indeed no delusion, of the fancy, but that I was really summoned to the presence of the Pasha's bride, my heart became divided between joy and terror. True, I loved the lady; but the love of a vain young man who has been taught the value of his own attractions, is never sufficiently divested of selfishness to impel him to extremity in the indulgence of his affections. As I felt towards the Pasha's wife, so had I already felt towards several other beauties, the sole tie which she possessed upon my heart that was new to its experience, was the pride of a nobler conquest than any it had yet made.

"With this divided and calm spirit of calculation, the idea of the crimson tent of the harem-garden brought with it a heavy feeling of probable danger. The walls were high; the night clear and moonlight; the palace-guard zealous and alert; and I was but too conscious that if I were surprised by the negroes of the Pasha they would extend little mercy to my crime.

"I flung myself upon my divan in a tumult of thought. The very hope of such an adventure had brought me to Damascus, and yet now that it presented itself a foreboding of evil grew upon me which would not be shaken off. There was, nevertheless, no alternative; my position in the Pasha's household was worse than precarious should I offend his last and favorite wife; and in our interviews at Bassora, I had had many opportunities of ascertaining that the fair Habe was as uncompromising in her hate as in her love, and that she would probably not hesitate to sacrifice even me, should she believe me capable of slighting her affection.

"Thus then I resolved to trust to my felech,* and to obey her summons: with a firm determination to represent to her during the interview, all the perils which beset us both; and to implore her for her own sake to bid me farewell for ever. During my residence in the palace, I had heard frightful tales of the Pasha's jealousy, and its effects and as he was passionately attached to the lovely Habe, I could but apprehend the worst should he discover that she did not return his attachment.

"With this resolution, I remained quietly in my chamber until the dark clouds of night, powdered with silver drops, draped the pale moon in her robe of midnight; when stealthily passing the palace gates I crouched along under the wall of the garden until amid the trees, I saw the golden crescent of the pavilion glittering in the moonlight. Here I paused, and as I glanced cautiously around, I traced a dark shadow on the wall which extended from the summit to within a few feet of the ground. I stealthily approached it, and discovered that it was a shawl which I recognised as belonging to the lady Habe, and I at once understood

* Constellation.

that it was intended to facilitate my entrance into the garden.

"For a moment a dread of treachery glanced through my mind, but I dismissed the suspicion as it rose; and having ascertained that the shawl was well secured on the other side, I at once swung myself to the top of the wall, and sprang into the inclosure. My feet had scarcely touched the earth, when my hand was softly grasped, and I was rapidly led on through the darkness of a laurel plantation in the direction of the pavilion.

"I did not attempt to utter a syllable, for I was convinced that the clasp was that of Habè, but I deceived myself; for as my guide lifted the crimson curtain of the tent, I discovered that I had been conducted thither by a young and beautiful slave, who, pointing towards a portion of the pavilion which was flooded with moonlight, silently withdrew to a distance.

"To fling myself at the feet of the lady Habè, and to lift her fair hand to my lips and brow, was the work of a moment; and as I gazed upon her in the soft crimson light flung over her by the rich curtains of the pavilion, I thought that I had never before beheld anything so lovely. I forgot my wise resolutions of the evening—I forgot my peril and my perfidy; and I was pouring out before her all the passionate tenderness of my spirit, when a faint shriek from the young attendant aroused us from our dream of love, as a hideous negro raised the screen of the tent, and glared full upon us with his flashing eyes!

"'Fly, Hussein, fly! and fear not for me;' hastily whispered the lady: 'Geosumin nurissin—you are the light of my eyes; and your death would destroy me—Fly! and ere long you shall be convinced that you have nothing to fear!'

"As she spoke, I sprang to my feet, and would have seized the intruder, but she held me back.

"'Delhibashi—Prince of madmen! away with you!' she exclaimed, as the negro rushed through the garden in the direction of the palace: 'and leave the rest to me.'

"With the disappearance of the negro, my reason returned; and waiting no further bidding, I soon cleared the wall of the Pasha's grounds, and as I fled I heard the shrieks of the lady and her attendant ringing upon the air. The sound added wings to my speed; and availing myself of my knowledge of every avenue of the palace, I was one of the first to present myself in the great hall to inquire the cause of the outcry; having moreover taken the precaution to snatch up another turban as I passed through my apartment, and to gird on my scymitar. I calculated on the reëntrance of the negro through the harem, of which he must possess the key, a secure, but circuitous way: and I was aware that this circumstance would enable me, if I exerted my best speed, at least to reach the salemliek at the same instant as himself.

"My good star was in the ascendant, for the eyes of the Pasha fell on me as he hastily left his chamber to ascertain the nature of the disturbance.

"'La illaha illallah—there is but one Allah!' he said in a tone of alarm: 'tell me, my good Toussun?' (for such was the name that I bore at Damascus) 'tell me, what is all this?'

"'May my lord's prosperity increase;' I replied as calmly as I could; 'I understand nothing of this tumult, save that I hear the voices of women, shrieking out in terror, as though their souls were escaping through their lips.'

"Further colloquy was prevented by the entrance of a negro, who, trembling with rage, and breathless with haste, flung himself at the feet of the Satrap, exclaiming:

"'Justice and vengeance, my lord the Pasha! Justice and vengeance! Your privacy has been invaded, and your harem polluted by an officer of your own household, by a slave of your own mercy——'

"'How say you, wretch?' thundered out the Satrap, drawing his handjar; 'name the miscreant, that I may stab him with my own hand.'

"'It is Toussun the Yûzbashi,' gasped out the negro; but before he had time to utter another syllable, I sprang beyond the reach of the Pasha's weapon, and boldly confronted my kneeling accuser.

"'Liar and traitor!' I yelled out with all the impetuosity which a sense of my danger was calculated to inspire, and conscious that my fate hung upon the events of the next few moments: 'Whose dog are you that would poison the ears of his Highness with such filth as this? Look at me, miscreant; and dare to say that I have stirred from my post this night——'

"The negro instantly obeyed; and as he turned his eyes upon me, he was evidently struck by a change in my appearance which he could not explain to himself: and this momentary hesitation saved me.

"'Vile slave!' shouted the Pasha; 'Could you find no one on whom to fasten a lie save my faithful Toussun? the first of my chaous all whom I met on entering the hall? What is this mystery? But it shall be unravelled at once.' And so saying, he beckoned to three or four of the negro guard; and desiring them to keep strict watch over the trembling wretch whose zeal had brought him nothing but disturbance, he passed into the harem, whence the cries of the women could still be distinctly heard; for this scene, such as I have described it, had scarcely occupied a moment.

"Directly the Satrap disappeared, I gave orders to a couple of my palikars to secure the arms of the crest-fallen guardian of the

harem, who wasted his strength in revilings on me, on the women, on fate, and on his own folly; and, meanwhile, the Pasha was busily investigating the cause of an uproar so unusual in his quiet and orderly household.

"The result did not transpire until the following morning. The quailing cause of the riot was claimed at my hands by the four negroes who had accompanied the Satrap to the women's apartments, and carried away no one inquired whither. The Pasha did not appear again; and all remained silent and tranquil. But I stood on the crater of a volcano; for at an early hour, another negro, undeterred by the disgrace of his companion, or probably convinced of the truth of his statement, and determined to revenge him, passed into the garden of the harem, and visited the pavilion with the keen glance of curiosity. Leaving the tent, where he found nothing to gratify his hope, he wandered along beneath the wall, and chancing to raise his eyes, he discovered the shawl, which in the alarm and hurry of the previous night had been forgotten.

"Fortunately for me, the negro had a tongue which outran his wit, and sufficient of his errand transpired before he was admitted to the presence of the Pasha, to impress upon my mind the necessity of an immediate retreat; and I at once passed into my chamber to secure upon my person the jewels and money which I had secreted when I had entered the service of the Satrap. As I was about to leave the room, I accidentally turned a last glance towards the divan, where I was surprised to see a small parcel folded in a dark handkerchief which was familiar to me. Without waiting to ascertain the nature of its contents, I concealed it beneath my robe, and mounting my horse, which was of the true Arab breed, I made my way to the clothes-bazár, and purchased the costume of an Arab Sehiek, which I adjusted in a neglected mosque; and then without another instant's delay, I hastened to the gate of the city, and passed it at foot's pace, as if careless of time: but once upon the free plain, I buried the edge of my sharp stirrups in the flanks of my generous Arabian, and away we flew like the wind: danger and death were behind us; and liberty and life before: the choice was easy: and I never drew bit until I felt the willing horse quiver under me as I urged him forward.

"A few mouthfuls of fresh grass, and a deep draught at a cool stream that rippled through the dense herbage, soon restored the generous animal; while I refreshed myself by laving my limbs in the clear water, and swallowing some wild figs which I found in the vicinity of the rivulet.

"As I had purposely avoided all traces of a frequented path, I deemed myself tolerably secure, many hours having elapsed since I left the city; and picqueting my docile Arabian amid the tall grass, I laid myself down close beside him, and soon fell asleep. When I awoke the gray dawn was just breaking over the hills, and I felt the necessity of immediately pursuing my journey. I accordingly roused my horse, who was lying supine upon the earth in all the luxury of repose, and springing again into the saddle, incited him to his best speed. Again my constellation favored me, for, after a couple of hours of hard riding, I fell in with a caravan that was crossing the Desert, which I immediately joined, greatly to the relief of my exhausted horse, and the furtherance of my own safety.

"At the next town we reached, I once more changed my dress, and assumed that which I now wear; and then for the first time, I examined the contents of the handkerchief that I had found in my chamber. You, Mocaleb, have seen them in this chest. I know not with what tale the wily Habé amused the ear of the Pasha, but it is certain that his rage was craftily turned on the negro—and that he lent too ready an ear to the accusations of his beautiful young wife.

"There was a scroll folded about the disgusting fragments of mortality, that partially explained the truth—thus it ran:—

"'I told you to trust to me, and I here give you proof that you did not trust in vain. A husband whose head is covered with a napkin—and whose eyes are dim, has revenged his wife upon her enemy, and you on your betrayer. I send you the eye that ventured to watch you—the ear that dared to listen to your words—the foot that followed you—the hand that drew aside the screen—the heart that ventured to betray—and the dagger that was meant for another breast. I would not accept peace until these trophies were laid upon my carpet—and I send them to you as earnest of my love.'

"I crushed the paper convulsively as I finished reading it. Could I indeed have loved this woman-fiend? I took the handkerchief in my hand, with the intention of hurling its contents into the air; but a sudden impulse restrained me, and plugging them into the chest whence I had withdrawn my garments, I determined to carry them with me to Hassora, and thence, making some horrible addition to the hoard, to forward them by the next caravan to my tiger-hearted mistress. In order to effect this savage purpose, I prepared them with salt and spices after the Egyptian fashion, by which means they have been preserved. But I have already almost repented my intention; for the distance which now separates us has left only the memory of her beauty and her love upon the tablet of my soul, while all the horrors of our final meeting appear but as a dark vapour, shedding its gloom over a scene of brightness."

The stranger paused for a moment amid a deep silence; after which he resumed in an altered tone.

"Other memories and feelings have also grown upon me since I entered my native city. I have recognized, even amid the disfigurment of poverty, my long lost pilgrim-brother—and I have become conscious that life has better and nobler joys than vengeance."

As he spoke, the tearful Hussein extended his arms to the Khamal, who flung himself into them, exclaiming: "I learnt the truth from the very beginning of your story, my lord and brother; but I would not darken the sky of your prosperity by telling you that the wretched Husref was the once-happy Emir Hadji—Alas! alas! I have also much to tell, but not to night."

"Alhemdullilah—be it even as you will;" replied Hussein, kissing his lips and forehead: "I knew you from the first moment when you lifted the chest from the mule in the public street; and it was to test your probity that I left it in your charge during so many hours. The will of Allah is accomplished! We have met again, and we will part no more; one roof shall in future cover the Hadji-Khamal and the Barber of Bassora."

PART IV.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"Mashallah!" said the Pasha, as the story ended; "I do not understand why all the massaldjis, let them commence a tale as they will, always finish with love and intrigue. One would think that no other wheel set the world in motion. I had scarcely began to relish the adventures of the Khamal and his employer, when out of a fair beginning grew another history of a woman's folly! Haif, haif,—shame, shame! And such a tissue of improbabilities! One Pasha is as good as another; and Inshallah! there is no fear that any dog of a haramzadeh would venture to enter *my* harem. Why then do the fable-mongers spin their brains into silken threads, to invent fictions which bear no likeness to the realities of life?"

"Life, your Highness," replied the disguised Greek, reassured by the obtuse self-sufficiency of his host, "is a mere every-day affair, which, without the drapery of imagination, would be too crude and bare to be looked upon with pleasure; and thus the massaldji is compelled to select the ornaments that appear the most likely to embellish it. Where can they be found more readily than in the love and beauty of woman? Are not her smiles the promised light of Paradise, and her care its contemplated recompense? Her weakness is her triumph; her tenderness, the bond that links her to those by whom she is beloved, and on whom she pours out all the treasures of her soul. It is not that the daring foot of either moslem or giaour would indeed venture to profane the harem of a True Believer, (though some assert that such things really have been:) but the fable gives so many opportunities to the narrator of weaving sweet thoughts and fancies into his web of fiction, that he turns as trustingly to the conceit as the pilgrim to the holy caba."

"You talk like a woman:" said the Pasha, with an expression of contempt which was only tempered by his admiration of the sententious awali; "and it is not for me to contend with you. Inshallah! What is written, is written. The Osmanli do not put their beards into the hands of their wives; they know better. The Frank women, as I have heard, wander up and down with bold brows and steady steps, and the Prophet only can tell the disorder which must reign in their harems, where there are neither bolts, locks, nor negroes: but, Mashallah! the Moslems are not dogs! nor their women hadjis, wandering from land to land, and cramming their brains with a thousand idle and unseemly fancies! Bashustun! had I lived in those infidel countries, I should have——"

"Korkma, Effendimou—fear not:" said Carimfil Hanoum: "no one will dare to suspect Saïfula Pasha of permitting the dust of disgrace to be scattered upon his head; and thus the tales of an idle fable-monger should not chafe his humor. The massaldji has done her duty, for she has whiled away two weary hours: but I prefer her zebeck to her story, and could almost regret that I cannot, like her, awaken sweet sounds such as those to which we have listened from her rapid fingers."

"Alhemdullilah! when you need music, it can always be purchased;" interposed the Satrap abruptly; "but the massaldji must not go unrewarded, since you have found amusement in her talent. Remember," he added, turning to the Aga Baba, "when the almé leave the harem, to let this maiden have a purse."

"And for myself," said the fair Circassian, drawing a handsome ring from her finger, "that the awali may not forget her visit to my lord's harem, I shall reward her with this jewel. Approach, Sëïdika, and receive it from my own hand."

Maniolopolo obeyed with a joy which gave to his movements as he traversed the floor, an impetuosity almost calculated to betray him but a warning glance from his sister recalled his caution, and when he bent his knee before the lady, and pressed her hand to his lips in token of his acknowledgment, although he held it longer than perfect good-breeding and respect altogether warranted when their relative situ-

ations were considered, this slight deviation from the rules of etiquette was only attributed by the lookers-on to an excess of gratitude.

The mention of remuneration implied the speedy departure of the almè; and shortly afterwards the Pasha, remarking on the lateness of the hour, descended from the sofa; and having taken leave of his young wife and her friend, left the apartment, followed by the negroes.

The screen had scarcely fallen behind them when Maniolopolo once more flung himself at the feet of the Circassian. "My life! my soul! my sultana!" he murmured, as she hid her tearful eyes upon his shoulder; "do we indeed meet again, after years of miserable absence? Can it be your brow which rests upon my bosom? your hand that I clasp in mine? Am I still dear to you as when we parted?

"Maniolopolo," whispered the agitated Carimfil, "though it be sin to tell you so, you are to me more than life or light—janum sin-indir—my soul is yours—not a day but I have thought of you—not a night but you have been in my dreams—not an hour but I have loved you. The present has been nothing to me—the past full of your memory, and the future one wild hope of looking upon you once again. The hope is accomplished—you are here, and you love me still, and now I ask only to die."

"Talk not of death, katoun—my loved one," answered Maniolopolo: "the grave is not for such as thee; or even there happiness might come. Sèverim séni—I love you; you have been torn from me; and I have suffered hopeless misery for years. When I remember that your youth has been blighted by the passion of a despot, my brain burns, and my pulses quiver—Derdinden oldum beihoud—my torment makes me mad! And can you let me continue thus to suffer? Do you condemn me to another banishment which can end only in despair? You know how I have loved you, how I love you still: and you are silent—cruel Carimfil! but the blow is less bitter from your hand than from that of another; unless that other strike me at your feet, that I may expire with your image before my eyes."

"Alas!" said the trembling beauty. "Y'Allah—in the name of Heaven, what would you ask of me?"

"If your own heart whisper not my meaning," replied the Greek, "no words of mine could make it welcome. My life and death are in your hands, and you must deal with me as you deem fitting."

"Maniolopolo," sobbed the Pasha's wife, "you break my heart. Have you not been the one dream of my blighted existence? and do you now speak coldly to me that I may learn to fear as well as love you"

"Astaferallah—Heaven forbid!" said the young Greek; "but think you that I can calmly see my bulbul caged and prisoned, without seeking to burst the bars of its captivity, and to lead it back once more to the wild wood and the free valley of its happiness? We cannot deceive ourselves, Carimfil, we must live for each other, or perish. To save ourselves we must fly together—why do you tremble thus, guzum, my eyes? Do you leave behind you one memory of joy? Oh, no—nor will I think so meanly of you as to believe that your chains have been less heavy, because they are of gold. I thank you for that indignant blush, and that firm pressure of my hand—I knew it—the proud Pasha and his gilded harem will be remembered only with horror, while the green plains and woody mountains of our beloved Circassia will be welcomed as never yet they have been by mortal."

"Would that we were indeed there!" sighed out the timid beauty; "but we are beset by difficulties, surrounded with dangers, watched by jealous eyes—How then can we escape?"

"Carimfil, janum—my soul," steadily replied the Greek; "all is possible to those who love——"

"And your sister?"

"Think not of me," said Katinka, as she approached the divan, after having carefully dispersed the attendants of the lady in every direction, and diverted the attention of the almè, who were whispering among themselves gay comments on the prolonged conference of the lovers; "Think not of me—I should but impede your flight, which I would rather strive to secure. But now you must consent to separate, if you will not ruin all by your own imprudence; you, Maniolopolo, we can find whenever we may require your council; and you will do well to set about your projects without delay, if your brain be sufficiently free from the cobwebs of passion to enable you to act rationally; and you, Katoun, have need of repose, lest your strength fail in the hour of trial. Nevreste and your sister almè await you, fair Sendka," she added laughingly; "and should the Aga Baba chance to find you here on his return, his questions may be difficult to answer Away, then, while you are unsuspected, and still retain your reason"

The remonstrance of Katinka, unpalatable as it was, could not be neglected; for even Maniolopolo himself was compelled to admit its propriety, and after another embrace, and another murmured assurance of eternal constancy, he tore himself from the feet of the beautiful Carimfil, and left the palace with the almè.

On arriving at the Theriarki Tcharshi he hastily flung off his disguise, and bidding a hurried farewell to Nevreste, in whose hand he placed the purse which had been bestowed on him by the Pasha, he was about to quit the building, when he remembered that he had

not seen Mherpirwir since he left the harem. The devotion of the gentle girl had touched his heart; and, even occupied as it was by the image of Carimfil, he could not refuse at least the affection of a brother to the timid maiden who had bruised her own spirit to contribute to his happiness.

When he returned to seek her, the almè had already left the outer room, and had retired to the inner apartments, where they deposited the most costly of their ornaments; and he was about to turn away disappointed, when by the faint light of the solitary and untrimmed lamp, which stood in a niche of the discolored wall, he discovered Mherpirwir, crouched down in one corner of the saloon, with her arms crossed upon her knees, and her head bent over them. Her lotus crown lay on the ground beside her; but the fever of her brain had withered the flowers, and they were flaceid and faded. Her zebec had a broken string; and her veil was flung beside it, as though in the wretchedness of the moment she had been reckless and impatient.

Maniolopolo softly advanced: he murmured her name, and at the sound of his voice the dancing-girl sprung up and cast herself at his feet:—"It is in vain to contend with destiny!" she whispered hoarsely; "I know all that you would tell me; I am an almè—my passion is a jest—my love a mockery—I know it—I knew it from the first—and I strove against it until the nerves of my heart quivered with agony! You love another—I know that also; and she is fair and gentle; and the world has never yet breathed with its foul fetid breath upon her name, and poisoned her existence. She is worthy of your affection—and yet, in nursing it she becomes even as I am—a banned and blighted thing! Oh, think of this—it is a frightful truth: and you close your eyes against it, because you have not courage to look upon it calmly. Nay, withdraw not thus your hand. I am wild with anguish, and I know not what I say; yet *you* should pardon me. You, whom I have loved from the first moment that I looked upon you. I have been the by-word of my companions because my heart was shut against the inroads of passion; now I shall be their scorn, that I have bowed beneath it where it was worse than hopeless."

"Mherpirwir, be calm, be comforted," said the Greek soothingly: "it is but a passing fancy; you are young and beautiful, and——"

"Do *you* tell me this?" asked the girl almost sternly; "you, who have left your home and dared the very bitterness of death to look upon one whom you loved in your early years? But you are right, Effendim, you are right: I am young; and, they tell me, beautiful; and I must learn to suffer patiently, for the heart does not break at once, and I may have to nurse its anguish for long and bitter years. True, the lip-deep vows of many an idler may tear the wound asunder, and the blood-drops may fall one by one like molten lead, but I shall learn to bear it. So, leave me, Effendim, leave me; and forget me, unless the poor and despised dancing-girl may hope to be remembered kindly."

"Listen to me, Mherpirwir," said Maniolopolo, as he raised her from the floor, and threw his arm round her trembling form: "you know all my story—I have concealed nothing from you, and I love you as a brother; your gentle and ready services have lightened my task, and cheered my spirit; and I would not have you think of me as an ingrate. But my heart and my hope are yonder"—and he pointed towards the Pasha's palace: "My own safety, even my life, are at stake: and I peril all on that one venture. How, then, could I be worthy of your love, when every thought, every care, every anxiety, would be lavished on another?"

"You are right," murmured the maiden, calmly withdrawing herself from his clasp; "we can be nothing to each other: and mine indeed has been an idle and a bitter dream. Farewell, Effendim, I love you; I shall love you to the end of my existence. Do you remember your ballad at the Tchorbadji's? You can now judge of its truth; you read my fate, and I am prepared to meet it."

"We cannot part thus—" said Maniolopolo, deeply moved by her emotion.

"Ne apalum—what can we do?" asked Mherpirwir sadly: "Have you not convinced me that we can be nothing to each other? She to whom you have given your heart loves you even as I do—and for yourself—I feel that you return her tenderness, and to me it will be easier to die than to be despised."

"That were impossible!" earnestly exclaimed the Greek.

"I thank you for the assurance, but I shall not dare the trial. Seek not to see me again. My good Nevrestè will bear with my grief, and it will work its own cure. Farewell, Effendim—merhamet eylè bendènè—have pity on me, and linger no longer. Allah esmarledek—may He take you into his holy keeping; and believe that one heart will beat for you even in the death-hour—the bruised heart of the poor dancing-girl who dared to love you!"

Maniolopolo would have replied with more soothing words, but the almè waited not to hear them. Like a young fawn startled by a distant sound, she bounded from the side of the Greek, and lifting the screen which veiled the entrance of the inner apartment disappeared in an instant from his sight. He called her in his gentlest tone "Mherpirwir, guzum! only a moment—only a word—Y'Allah, in the name of the Prophet! only a moment. Mherpirwir, will you not reply?"

The echoes of the apartment were the sole answer.

"Nay, then, I will follow you!" said the excited young man; and he had laid his daring hand upon the screen, when it suddenly raised, and Nevrestè stood before him.

"Ne var—what is this?" she asked sternly; "Have we put our necks into the noose of danger for your sake, young sir, only that your's should be the hand to strain the cord? What means this violence? Sen chok adam! 'tis a bold deed to frighten half a score of women."

"Hear me, mother," said the agitated Maniolopolo; "on my soul you wrong me! Mherpirwir loves me, and I——"

"Bak—see!" exclaimed Nevrestè in angry scorn: "an almeè no sooner serves a stranger, than he believes that she is his, heart and spirit. Fye on you, young sir! Mherpirwir has been wooed by Beys and nobles, and she has slighted all their vows and protestations. Aye, even with the blind scorn of the world poured out upon her fair young head—a world which judges only through its own short-sightedness, and which dreams not that the despised and hired dancing-girl has sacrificed her pride and self-dignity to support an aged mother, and a beggared family;—even with this foul scorn preying upon her heart, she has been just to herself; and would you—you, whom she has served, be among her enemies? Leave us in peace: we cannot now avail you, and to-morrow we depart."

"Mother," said Maniolopolo, deeply affected by the honest energy of the old woman: "I cannot suffer you to bid me farewell with such words as these. Without your timely and generous assistance, I should now have been wretched and hopeless, if not reckless and suspected. How, then, can you attribute to me a falseheartedness for which I should deserve to suffer death?"

"Effendim," replied Nevrestè calmly: "I do not seek to wrong you, but—you are a Greek. We have served you, and you have liberally rewarded our exertions: there can be no further tie between us. We are never likely to meet again; but should we indeed do so—remember—that for your own sake, and for that of Mherpirwir, we meet as strangers. Oghour ola—Heaven speed you. Our conference is ended."

As she ceased speaking, the old woman made a step backward, and when the screen again fell, Maniolopolo was once more alone.

CHAPTER LXIX.

After this very unsatisfactory parting from the almè, Maniolopolo bent his steps to the ienduk where he lodged; and as he swiftly and cautiously threaded the streets, he revolved a thousand wild and impracticable schemes for the escape of his beloved Carimfil. But his good star forsook him: he could imagine no plausible method of affecting his purpose; and he at length resolved to endeavor to obtain some rest, and to leave to the morrow the decision at which he found it impossible to arrive in his present excited state.

In the morning he was awoke by the entrance of his servant, who presented to him a small roll of papyrus, with a seal attached to it by a long lock of silky hair. He raised himself hastily on his cushions, and opened the scroll; the character was that of his sister.

"I have arranged all;" thus was it worded; "Your weeping and trembling beauty has at last consented. You will see me no more, but I do not ask you to let this conviction cast a single cloud over your fortune. At our last night's meeting you forgot the poor Katinka in a dearer and more absorbing interest; continue to do still; our fates cannot now be blent: our views and hopes are different. I shall not tell you wherefore, for I will not occupy your mind with thoughts of me, and my future life. Make all your arrangements for sudden flight. Remember the skill of Carimfil in guiding her fiery steed over the plains of Circassia—then it was mere sport which urged her on—now she will peril her happiness upon her speed, and it will not fail. Provide for her the costume of a Mameluke; her motions will thus be free, and her sex unguessed at.

"To-morrow at day-dawn she will await you at the western gate of the city, near the cemetery; place the dress which you design for her in the tomb of Hadji Hafiz in the valley; and receive the last greeting of

"Your sister."

"By the Saint Panagia!"* said Maniolopolo to himself, as he refolded the missive; "Katinka has gained no small share of philosophy by her residence among the Osmanli! She throws me off as a sultana casts away her slipper: but she does not fail me in my need, and her plans are clear and speedy. Yet, can I confide in their sufficiency?—in their prudence!—I must, for doubt is madness, unless I can suggest a mode of action more sure and safe. Why how now, Stancho!" he continued aloud, to a Greek adventurer whom he had taken into his service on his arrival in the city; "You have a brow as measly as a pajas who has been mulcted of his second trout on a day of fast. What news have you?"

"Orste, Tchelebi!"—"What is your pleasure, sir!" asked Constantine, turning suddenly towards his master.

* Virgin.

"Nay, no delay;" said Maniolopolo; "I am in no mood to brook it; for I must be up and in the bazār within an hour."

"You will do well to reflect ere you walk the city streets again;" was the reply of the domestic; "for the Selictar-Aga of the Pasha has visited the fendûk this morning, and has asked a few questions, having you for their object, which are scarcely palatable."

"How say you?" exclaimed Maniopolo, turning ashy pale. "The Selictar-Aga? Did you see him yourself? Are you sure that it was not the Aga-Baba?"

"The Tchelebis knows best what business the chief negro of the Pasha's harem may have to discuss with him;" said Stancho, drily; "but the worthy functionary of this morning was none other than the Sword-bearer. The Aga-Baba may perhaps follow."

"Silence, fool!" thundered out the young man; "have you no wit save that which exists in deepening difficulty? Speak out—what have you to say?"

"The Tchelebis reminds me;" said the unabashed Stancho; "of the fancy of one of our old authors in the good days when Greece was a great republic, and all her sons were heroes: if I remember rightly, it was that of a man who heated and cooled his pillauf with the same breath; and by St. Nicholas! the Tchelebis first tells me to be silent, and then to speak; and doubtlessly expects to be obeyed in both cases."

"Do not urge me further;" said Maniolopolo; "What did you hear?"

"That the Pasha desired to know the name and nation of every stranger in the city, and that he had learnt the abode of one in this fendûk, about whom he was most solicitous—and, in short, sir," added the man, suddenly dropping his flippant tone, and exhibiting some feeling; "you have been kind and generous to me since I entered your service, and even at some personal risk I have deemed it my duty to apprise you that you are in danger, either in your purse or person—and, for you know best where you have spent the many hours during which I have neither seen nor heard of you—perhaps, in both."

"You are an honest fellow after all, Stancho," said his master warmly; "but your zeal has outrun your reason: my personal safety cannot be endangered, for I have done nothing——."

Maniolopolo paused suddenly, for his conscience smote him; and he profited by his pause to spring from his cushions, and prepare himself for the business of the day.

"Tchelebis;" said the domestic gravely; "as you seem to persist in your purpose of leaving the house, I must speak, and you will then act as you deem best. I have reason to know that you are a marked person, and I forewarn you that some evil will happen if you are not cautious. Before you arrived in this city I had suffered poverty and hardship: I was a Greek; and twice I have undergone the bastinado as a criminal, in order that the Turkish delinquent might escape: in my wretchedness I complained to the Cadi, and he recompensed my faith in his justice with fresh blows and fresh invectives. I laid my head in the dust at the feet of the Pasha, and I was reviled as a raïah and a rascal, and put forth with hooting and contempt. You are my countryman, and since you have taken me into your service I have been secured alike from want and from persecution: but you have become yourself a mark for extortion, or it may be violence. Confide then in me: let me follow your fortunes; and there is no risk I will not run for you; the rope is already about my neck, and it can but be tightened an hour or two sooner or later."

"Are you true or a traitor, Constantine?" asked Maniolopolo in very excusable doubt.

The man replied by flinging himself upon his knees, pressing his two forefingers and his thumb closely together, and making the sign of the cross seven times with extraordinary rapidity: as he called upon the name of the Panagia and half the saints in the calendar to testify to his truth.

"Stancho," said his master after the hesitation of a few moments; "I will trust you, for I have no alternative. If I can escape this day from the tyranny of these rascally Turks (who will all be d—d in the next world, which is some consolation!) I shall be beyond the city walls early to-morrow morning, and may laugh at their beards. And now, my good Stancho, what do you advise for to-day?"

"That you follow me to the terrace," replied the quick-witted Greek; "and remain there for a few moments until I prepare the family of Aneste, whose court it overlooks, to conceal you until the dusk. They are needy and avaricious; old Dorcas, the mother, would sell you the few teeth which still remain in her head for a handful of paras; and her husband Alexis has been beaten and kicked until he has learnt to believe that he came into the world for no other purpose. The Virgin help them! they have another misfortune to contend with in the shape of a pretty daughter, who entertains all the idle papas* of the parish with sweet words and winning smiles: and the papas, while they look at her, drink the old man's rakè, and eat the old woman's kibaubs, which makes things worse; therefore I can answer for it that the prospect of gaining a few piastres will at once induce them to conceal you until you think fit to leave the city. The little Estafania will prepare your food with her own hands; and I will take care to procure for you any disguise that you may think it proper and expedient to adopt."

* Greek priests.

"Tell me, Constantine," said Maniolopolo, fixing his keen eye steadily on his attendant: "how felt you when you were spurned from the gate of the proud Pasha's palace, and cast forth like an infected animal?"

"Do you ask *how* I felt?" demanded Stancho in reply, as he ground his teeth, and instinctively raised his clenched hand to his breast, and grappled idly for a second for the dagger, which had it not been forbidden to a raïah, he would have worn there: "Was I not a Greek? and had I not been insulted, stricken, and reviled? I swore an oath——," he paused a moment, while a fierce expression of vindictiveness swept like a storm-cloud across his features: "a deep and wordless oath, that should the hour ever come when the haughty despot might be smitten by my hand, I would drive the dagger home—home—until its poisoned blade had drained his heart!"

"There are wounds deeper than any that a dagger can inflict, my good Stancho;" said Maniolopolo, as he grasped the arm of his excited attendant; "would'st thou assist in smiting the soul of the Satrap, when his person is beyond thy reach?"

"Steadily—unshrinkingly—to have a full and sharp revenge I would peril alike soul and body."

"Then from this hour we are brothers;" said Maniolopolo: "and now listen, and that attentively: for on the next four-and-twenty hours depend our fate"

The attendant seated himself on a low stool near the divan; and with his gaze rivetted on his master, and a bitter smile upon his lips, drank in the whole history of Maniolopolo's love, despair, and renewed hope. The tale was a long one, but it was told with the voluble eloquence of a Greek lover, and it seemed to the delighted Stancho to have scarcely occupied an hour.

"And you have really trod the harem floor, and looked upon the pride of the despot's heart—the hidden pearl of his casket! May St. Constantine watch over your death-bed! Oh, that it were my happy fate to tell him this—to watch the flushing of his brow, the grinding of his teeth, the trembling of his limbs—to catch the gasping curse that would fall back upon his heart for want of breath to utter it—to yell into his ears that he had been duped and fooled by a Greek—a raïah—and an infidel! But I stay your utterance, Telelebis; my joy has maddened me—and now what remains to be done?"

The emotion of Constantine was too great to be feigned: and Maniolopolo, Greek though he was, and consequently prepared for guile and falsehood in his countryman, at once perceived that he might safely confide in the bitter hate which Stancho nursed against the Pasha, and which would be satisfied by the injury of which he would become an instrument, more securely than by any sentiment of a less revolting nature. He did not hesitate, therefore, to explain to him the whole project of the lady Carimfil's escape; and when the man left him, it was to provide disguises for the whole party, so soon as he had secured a temporary asylum for his master in the house of Alexis Aneste.

CHAPTER LXX.

When he was left to himself, Maniolopolo did not suffer his thoughts to stray into the future: the hurried retrospect by which he had imparted to Constantine the incidents of his past life, had brought before him, in all their first freshness and beauty, every little detail connected with his early love which had rendered it the charm and solace of his existence. He recalled every scene amid which he and his beloved Carimfil had wandered together—the river-bank, green with short crisp herbage, and sprinkled with flowers—the forest path overhung with a dense foliage that cast the sunshine aside, or made it fall flickering through the leaves, painting golden arabesques upon the earth—the rocky height where, beneath a canopy of jagged stone, with a torrent rushing and boiling not a hundred paces from them, and falling like thunder into the valley, they had sat together, with a peace of heart and a blessedness of spirit forming a beautiful contrast from the wild and savage scene around them. He remembered, too, how they had been parted: and the months of anguish and despair that had ensued, until the letter of his sister had once more awakened a bright hope within him, and sent him forth a wanderer again over the earth.

And the pilgrim had reached his Mecca—the worshipper had knelt before the shrine of his fondest faith—and his heart beat high as he felt the exciting consciousness of his metempsychosis.

But his sister? Here all was mystery—She might have fled with them; her bolder temper would have sustained the drooping spirits of the more timid Circassian, but she had talked of an eternal separation, and had bidden him forget her, or remember her only with cheerfulness, as one over whose fate his own could no longer exercise an influence.

Maniolopolo was still musing on this mysterious renunciation of his once passionate relative, his once fondly attached sister, when Constantine stole into the room, and bade him follow silently and immediately to the terrace, as he had heard the voice of the Selictar Aga in the court-yard of the inn, and had seen a couple of the Pasha's guard lounging in the street, like men waiting for a summons.

The young man needed no second warning—

the detention, even of an hour, let it terminate as it might, would be ruinous to him at the present juncture; and he had, during the absence of Stancho, secured all his most valuable property upon his person. That active emissary had also profited by the past hour to warm the hearts of old Dorcas and her spirit-bowed helpmate, by the most ready and efficient means, towards his master: and consequently on their arrival on the terrace beneath which stood the hovel of the sordid couple, they found that every facility had been afforded for their descent.

Having seen his employer safely on his legs, and drawn up and replaced the shawl of his turban which had assisted in his escape, Stancho left the terrace: and on his return to the chamber of Maniolopolo, found that he had only preceded by five minutes the Selictar-Aga of the Pasha, who entered and inquired with great courtesy after the health and well-being of his master. The wily attendant replied with a politeness even more exaggerated than that of the Satrap's functionary: and in reply to the next question of his visiter, answered readily that the Effendi was at the hammām,* where he had just left him to seek for a bottle of essence which he had forgotten.

"I was told," said the Selictar-Aga, with considerable emphasis, "that he yet slept."

"It must have been that lying Israel the Tchibout,† who keeps the door, that so misled your highness:" replied Stancho, calmly; "the dog is for ever blundering in the simplest matters, and overturning the pillauf of his neighbors." And as he spoke, he busied himself in preparing a chibouque for his unwelcome guest, who took possession of the divan with a gravity which showed that he had no intention of immediately vacating his position.

Coffee followed the pipe, which was prepared at a mangal just without the door of the chamber; and as the fumes of the tobacco curled from the nostrils of the doughty Sword-bearer, he saw fit to pit his talents at diplomacy against those of the quick-witted and wily Greek. It was the combat of the fox and the buffalo.

"I have forgotten the name of your master;" he said with affected unconcern; "nor am I quite certain that I remember whence he comes."

"Your highness may well suffer the first to escape you:" smiled Stancho, as he stood with his arms folded upon his breast, in obsequious attendance upon the man of office; "for it has so strange and unnatural a sound that I at once abandoned all hope of——"

"But you are yourself a Greek—your tongue betrays you:" interrupted the Selictar-Aga, with what he considered to be a consummate stroke of policy.

"May the ears of my lord never fail him;" replied the imperturbable Stancho; devoutly wishing them nailed fast to the wall, beside those of one of his ancient employers, a certain Greek baker who was affixed to his own door for supplying bread in more minute quantities to his customers than was desirable; "but I cannot speak any Frank dialect."

"And is the stranger whom you serve really a Frank;" demanded the envoy.

"As truly as that your slave is a Christian;" replied Stancho, who had some private doubts of the fact when he remembered that he had twice worn the turban; and had made a pilgrimage to Mecca, with the produce of which pious journey he had fled to this distant province, and lived comfortably among his countrymen until he had lavished his ill-gotten gains; "as truly as that your slave is a Christian."

"La illaha illallah—there is but one Allah! and you are an Infidel, and less than a dog before the eyes of the blessed Prophet;" said the Sword-bearer, as he gravely smoothed down his beard, and the Greek bowed meekly beneath the taunt; "I had heard that the traveller was your countryman."

Stancho replied by a second negative.

"I am weary of the quiet of this tranquil city:" pursued the Selictar-Aga condescendingly; "and I love to talk with strangers of the lands through which they have passed; of the Rustems* of their own countries, and of the wonders that they have seen. When will the Effendi your master return from the hammām? I would converse with him."

"He bade me hasten with the essence;" replied Stancho: "and prepare his horse for two hours hence. These Franks, your highness, ever ride like Tartars when they return from the bath, instead of quietly smoking or sleeping like good Moslems."

"Mashallah! they do well:" said the Sword-bearer sententiously; "they can smoke and sleep on their divans in their own countries, where men run about at mid-day with paper-lanterns, or grope their way in partial darkness. Shekiur Allah—to His name be all praise! they come here to see the sun, and they do well to take their fill of it while they can—I have said it."

"Janum sinindir—my soul is your's:" said the Greek, in affected admiration of the erudition of his companion; "What are they but dogs, and the fathers of dogs—And what wills my lord that I should say to the Effendi?"

The Selictar-Aga hesitated for a moment, and then exclaimed; "Wallah billah—by the Prophet! I must know this Frank: he is surely a hakeem,† and I would ask his counsel; but enough for to-day. Tell him that I will dip my fingers into his pillauf to-morrow

* Public bath. † Vile Jew.

* Heroes. † Doctor.

at the evening meal: to-day I have other projects: but let him await my coming, as I have said, for I shall be here without fail; and perchance I may turn upon him the light of the Pasha's countenance."

"Allah esmarladek;" murmured the Greek submissively: "he will surely be on the threshold at the appointed hour."

"It will be well for both of you that it should be so," said the Selictar-Aga, as he descended from the sofa, and thrust his feet into his slippers to depart; and there was something sinister in his manner of uttering the remark which would have satisfied Sancho, had he ever entertained a doubt of the fact, that the intentions of the Sword-bearer and his master were anything but friendly to Maniolopolo.

"The sapient Turk is as slow-witted as a tortoise," he muttered to himself as the portly functionary slowly descended the stair, and mounted his over-fed horse, which was held by a couple of fine-looking serudjes* in the court of the fendûk: "we shall be galloping over sand before he descends to the city! Saint Nicholas, what a race to govern a land like this, and to bow the neck of the Christian—but the day will come—the day will come ——" and with this vague, though apparently consolatory ejaculation, he bowed low as the grave Osmanli rode slowly away without deigning to acknowledge his salutation.

CHAPTER LXXI.

"KARA!" shouted the Aga Baba of Saïfula Pasha to one of the negro guard of the harem, about an hour before dawn the following morning, as they both lay upon their cushions in an ante-room off the great gallery, with their unsheathed scymitars beside them: "Kara—ne var—what is that?—I heard a noise"

"The wind in the cedar-trees outside the casement; perhaps; or that accursed cat that spoiled Greek woman chooses to fondle, because she knows that I loathe the beast," was the sulky answer: "Aye. I knew it," he continued, as a second rustling in the gallery caused the Aga Baba to raise himself on his elbow to listen; "there it goes over the balustrade of the gallery, leaping into the moonlight; Allah bela versin—may misfortune overtake it! To be awakened from a dream of home and liberty by an accursed cat—Amân, 'tis too much!" And with a deep sigh, the negro turned his face from the door, and prepared to sleep again; an example which his superior, after listening for another moment and suffering no further interruption, very judiciously followed.

* Grooms.

The momentary disturbance had, however, acted so powerfully on the nerves of the zealous Aga Baba, that he slept only to dream that all the women of the harem were escaping over the galleries, and dancing sarabands in the moonlight, where a hundred profane eyes were looking on them; and when at last his master's fair and favorite wife appeared before him, led into the very circle of the mazy figure by the stately Greek slave, the dreamer awoke with a groan that in an instant startled him into a perfect consciousness of the cause of this terrific vision; and dreading lest it might not indeed have been the cat which roused him from his first slumber, he determined to satisfy himself that all was quiet in the harem; and accordingly he made the tour of the apartments, tried the doors, and startled more than one of the fair inmates, who were not slow in applying to him sundry epithets by no means flattering to his personal vanity.

Reassured by the result of his survey, the Aga Baba once more resigned himself to sleep; but he might more safely have trusted to his first suspicion, for the favorite cat of Katinka had slumbered peacefully on a cushion throughout the whole night; and nevertheless the sounds upon the gallery had been no illusion of a half-awakened fancy.

When the ladies of the harem came forth one by one from their chambers, each asked the other to account for the non-appearance of the beautiful Circassian and her friend; and a long hour went by before the small hand of Katinka was seen drawing aside the screen that veiled the apartment which she shared with Carimfil. Jests and questions welcomed her, but she did not return the pleasantries of her companions as she was accustomed to do; and pressing her finger on her lip, she besought quiet for her friend, who was indisposed and required rest.

On an instant all was anxiety and solicitude, a thousand maladies were enumerated, and as many remedies suggested, but Katinka put all proffers of service steadily aside, and only enjoining quiet, returned, as she affirmed, to watch beside the invalid.

The day wore on: the shadows grew shorter and shorter—it was noon: again they fell upon the earth, and stretched slowly to greater length, like the limbs of a slumbering giant. The fair inmates of the harem had left the bath; and had slept through the hot hours upon their flower-sprinkled cushions, and were wandering through the palace-gardens, it was verging towards sunset, and still the Greek girl remained in the closed apartment, whence no sound issued save that of her light foot as she occasionally moved across the floor.

Twice the Aga Baba beat upon the door, and declared his intention to enter; but each time he was deterred by a prolonged "H-u-s-h!" from the subdued voice of Katinka. He grew

restless and unquiet, and walked through the harem, murmuring a few words to himself in a low tone, of which "hakeem" and "Pasha" were alone audible. Occasionally he bent his ear, and listened, as he stopped before the embroidered screen which veiled the door of the apartment: but all was still; and at length his restlessness grew into suspicion, and without any preliminary warning, he softly drew back one of the battants, and entered.

On a pile of satin cushions, immediately beneath one of the windows, lay a lovely form, but the face was hidden from the officious intruder by a profusion of long glossy hair, and by an arm of dazzling whiteness which was thrown across the face. The couch of the Greek girl had not been occupied, for the silver-fringed sheet was smoothly laid back as it had been left by the attendant slaves on the preceding evening; and when the Aga Baba looked round to inquire from the fair Katinka the cause of this unnecessary vigil, he found that, save the sleeping beauty on the cushions, he was alone. In an instant the truth flashed upon him. He had been duped! Mischief had been at work in the harem, and his vigilance had slumbered! He sprang towards the low couch: he grasped the rounded arm: he gazed into the eyes that met his with an expression half mockery and half apprehension; and his breath failed and his knees smote together as he beheld—Katinka!

"And the lady Carimfil—the sosun of the Pasha—the wife of his highness"—he gasped out; where is she?"

"Ne bilirim—what do I know?" asked the wily Greek in reply: "I have slept; and I dreamed that she had escaped—and—"

"Wallah billah—by the Prophet! I believe that you are laughing at my beard:" muttered the negro from between his clenched teeth: "but have a care, proud slave, have a care—there are deep waves, strong cords, and sharp blades within reach of a ready arm. Beware, lest——"

"Slave in your teeth, vile tool of a dishonored master!" exclaimed the Greek girl, springing to her feet, and extending her clenched hand in haughty menace, her long hair streaming over her shoulders and falling far below her waist, and her slight frame trembling with passion: "Slave in your teeth, foul miscreant! who pressed the pillow of selfish indulgence when you should have looked to the interests of your too indulgent master! Where were you, and your still more abject followers, when the giaour stole upon the privacy of the harem, and wiled the dove from her nest! Where were you when the eagle swooped, that you heard not his scream, that you marked not the shadow of his wings? Off, to your injured lord, and tell him how doughtily you have done your duty."

"Lahnet be Sheitan—curse on the devil, and on thee, his hand-maiden!" exclaimed the Aga Baba, undaunted by this display of feminine energy; "listen to me, woman! do you know the price of this night's work!" and he drew closer to her, and hissed out in a voice that was unearthly in its shrillness, "can you estimate the penalty of your treachery. I was her guardian, and my arm and my weapon were vowed to her security—you were her companion, you were beside her sleeping and waking—our peril is equal—our peril is equal—one of us two must die."

"Malumumdr—I know it," was the calm and unshrinking answer; "and I can tell thee even more than this; the contest may seem to be an unequal one—a woman is pitted against an Aga Baba—and yet"—and she laughed a low and bitter laugh; "the case is not so desperate, when the woman is young, beautiful, and a Greek. This neck," and as she spoke, she grasped it with her slender fingers, "was never meant for the bowstring."

"Bakalum—we shall see!" growled the enraged negro.

"And we waste time," added the fearless Katinka; "the Pasha is judge between us; I have no words to lavish on a slave like thee." And the astonished functionary found himself urged to the very measure with which he hoped to have brought the trembling Greek girl quailing at his feet.

"Allah kerim," he muttered as he turned away trembling with dissembled rage; "this tigress must be crushed, or I am a lost man!"

But it was far more easy for the spirit-stricken Aga Baba to quit the presence of the Medusa-like beauty, than to present himself in that of the Pasha. What account could he give of his own blindness? As he asked himself the question, he remembered the episode of the sleepy negro, who had amused him with the conceit of the cat leaping into the moonlight; and being bewildered as to the next step which it was necessary for him to take in order to secure his own safety, he determined to calm his brain, and to collect his ideas by applying the bastinado to the unlucky subordinate, whose indolence had conduced in so eminent a degree to the catastrophe of the night.

"Ana sena, sena baba—I will destroy his father and mother," he muttered, as he ground his teeth until his jaws ached with the violence of their contact; "when the bow-string comes to my neck, if come it must, I shall at least know that he has not quite escaped—but that woman—that devil—why did I shrink before her gaze when it will soon be turned on me in supplication? Why did I quail beneath her voice, which will so soon expire in a smothered shriek? Inshallah! I felt as though I withered beneath the influence of the Evil Eye."

A few more moments elapsed, and then a

stifled groan was heard, and a wailing cry; a few heavy blows, a fall, and the dragging of painful footsteps, which seemed as though the agony of a lifetime pressed them into the earth.

The Aga Baba was soothed for the moment by this seasonable exercise of his authority; but only for a moment, for as the maimed negro crawled away, the recollection of his ill-starred position returned upon him with startling distinctness, and he felt as though his head was already rolling at the feet of the incensed and injured Pasha.

What was to be done? His errand, though death fraught, must be executed at once.—True, he was to contend only against a woman; but he could not conceal from himself that there was about her an energy which would struggle even to the death, and that she was conscious of her advantage.

The brute force was on his side; but the subtlety of spirit, the power of thought, the majesty of mind were all in arms for her. The peace-loving and luxurious Pasha, who had been accustomed to her presence, and by no means insensible to her excelling beauty, bereft as he was of his fair wife, and threatened by an isolation of heart from which he would naturally shrink with a very pardonable selfishness in the first moment of his bereavement, would probably yield to the spell of her impassioned eloquence—and where would he then seek the victim?

The head of the Aga Baba sank upon his breast, and his heart heaved. He could not put the answer prompted by his own reason into words.

With these reflections was he accompanied through the gallery of the harem, to the Selemlick; and no brighter hope had suggested itself even when he stood before the veiled door of the Satrap's private apartment. How he wished at that moment that he had been a less privileged intruder, that thus a few more instants of delay might have been his, while the ceremonies of his introduction to the presence of the Pasha were performed; but, alas! the wish was idle; and with the eye of every loiterer in the ante-room upon him he was compelled at once to lift the screen, to pass the portal and to stand before his master.

CHAPTER LXXII.

"How now, Asref," said the Pasha, as the trembling Aga Baba bowed down before him? "ne istersiniz—what brings you here?—Nay, by my father's beard! you tremble—you avoid my eye—speak, wretch—what of my wife? What of my harem?"

In the energy of the moment, the Satrap had risen from the sofa; and as he uttered the last eager question, he stood within a few paces of the shrinking slave!

"May he live to see the beard of his grandson white with years!" gasped out the Aga Baba; "a wolf has stolen into the fold, or a lamb has strayed; is not the world free for my lord, the Pasha? Are not all the beauties of the earth at his disposal? Can he not—"

"Enough of this," said the Satrap, with a frightful calmness which was more appalling than the fiercest burst of passion; "say your errand without metaphor or preface: words are idle; and I am in no humor to be fooled."

The negro sank upon his knees; "Amân, amân—mercy, mercy—the lady Carimfil has fled—"

Words have no power to paint the transport of the Pasha; the strength of half a dozen men seemed to have passed into his arm; he lifted the unresisting negro from the floor, and then hurled him back with a fury that threatened the dislocation of every trembling limb; he spurned him as he grovelled in the dust; and his fingers clutched the haft of his handjar, as though his vengeance almost overcame his prudence, and that he thirsted to destroy him with the remainder of his secret still unsaid. But the first moment of phrenzied anguish over, he mastered the overwhelming passion—he was sure of his victim; and he had yet much to learn. A flood of mingled memories pressed upon his brain; and when he again spoke, his voice was hollow and husky, like that of one whose lips have long been sealed.

The tale was soon told; nor did the Satrap interrupt it by a word or gesture, until the wily Ashref, in order to divert his vengeance into another channel, expatiated on the treachery of Katinka, who had not only favored the flight of the lost beauty, but cunningly concealed it until pursuit was hopeless.

"And she knew it! The false Greek knew that she was to fly from me!" he then burst forth: "May all her dastard nation be withered for her sake! Was it for this that I suffered her dark shadow to rest beside the light of my eyes, and her cunning words to conjure me into temporary forgetfulness of my own soul—But it is not yet too late for vengeance! Follow me, false slave! You shall not die alone if Saifulla Pasha lives to cross once more the threshold of his harem."

As he spoke, the Satrap strode haughtily through the chamber, and passed out without casting a backward glance upon the fainting wretch who passively followed with death already in his heart.

When the Satrap reached the great hall whence the apartments of the women opened right and left, he found it deserted. The affrighted slaves, anxious to escape the first outbreak of his vengeance, had hastily concealed themselves on his approach; but when he

stood upon the threshold of the chamber, where he had last beheld his lost Carimfil, he met the proud and unshrinking eye of the Greek girl who was standing in the centre of the floor.

A bitter and threatful malediction rose to the lips of the Pasha; but the calm, assured, and thrilling gaze of those deep wild eyes arrested it in the utterance; and he had advanced a pace or two into the room in silence, when the low sweet voice of the maiden broke the spell.

"Saïfula Pasha, the lord of a powerful province, is come to seek from the captured Katinka tidings of his wife," she said, in as undisturbed a tone as though she knew not that the soul of her listener shook with anguish, and that his heart bled from a fresh and gaping wound; "Let him rather ask the pampered slave who crouches close behind him, and to whom he had confided the safety of his harem, and his own honor! The eye slumbered that should have watched—the ear was sealed that should have listened—the hand was nerveless for whose clasp the naked scymitar had been prepared—and while that traitor lives, the name of Saïfula Pasha will be a mark for scorn. What has the coward whispered to his master? That the Greek girl, who was purchased by his gold, cherished by his care, consoled in her bondage by his gentleness, had leagued with a false and unloving wife to stab him as he slept—Nay, speak not, wretch!" she exclaimed haughtily, as the Aga Baba was about to make another desperate effort at self-preservation, while the Pasha remained thralled and overawed by an energy such as he had never before beheld: "speak not, lest thy false tongue be torn from between thy lying lips, and flung to the dogs who would turn away revolted by such foul garbage!"—and then, as though the interruption had failed to break the chain of her ideas, she continued—"But did the dastard murmur to his lord that the exiled maiden who had eaten of his bread and rested beneath his roof, spurned at the efforts that were made to lead her also to abandon her princely master? Did he tell how she withstood the prayers and tears of the fugitive, and how she mocked at the assurance that she would be the victim of another's crime, and become the sacrifice of her own devotion? If he told this also, let him stand forth, and bear witness that his eye, his ear, and his arm were employed in the service of his lord; but if he knew nothing of the struggle between the lost one and her early friend, then let him pay the price of his supineness."

"Mashallah!" murmured the bewildered Pasha, quivering with mingled rage, anguish, and admiration; "he is a false slave, and he shall die the death——"

"Away with him at once!" continued the Greek girl; "his breath pollutes the chamber, and his vile soul cumbers the earth." And without waiting the acquiescence of the Satrap, she clapped her hands, and two negroes instantly obeyed the summons.

A few brief words from the Pasha, who was startled into instant compliance with the unyielding will of the maiden; and whose weak nature was overwhelmed by the lava-flood of passion that poured from her quivering lips, decided the fate of the wretched Aga Baba, who was borne from the apartment shrieking out his despair with all the shrill terror of a woman.

As the screen fell behind the executioner and their victim, Katinka flung herself wildly upon her knees before the Pasha; every trace of haughtiness had vanished from her brow—her eyes had lost their light, and trembled through a sea of tears; her head was bowed upon her heaving bosom, and she was all the woman.

"Look on me, my lord;" she murmured, as she clasped the hem of his robe with her small fair hands; "look on me, and listen to me, ere you condemn me—I do not mean to death—care not for it—I do not fear it—but to the hopeless anguish of your displeasure. Am I to blame that the lost one loved you not?—that she had poured the sherbet of affection over the flowers of paradise before she entered your harem? and that she nursed the memory of her first love until it grew into dishonor?—am I to blame?" she continued, in a yet fainter murmur, as the Pasha was about to interrupt her: "am I to blame that my heart clung where her's had failed to find a resting place—that, yielding to a passion I had no longer the power to control, I entered madly into a plot which was to ensure the absence of her who hid from me the sun of my existence? I have done—sen ektiar der—you are the master: I ask for no mercy save that which your heart may offer, by paying back the tenderness of mine."

The astonished Pasha hesitated for a moment, during which he looked down upon the fair young creature before him: she was very beautiful, and Carimfil was gone: she lov him—for it never occurred to him to doubt the fact; and there is a charm in novelty which deepens loveliness a hundred fold: but Saïfula Pasha was a rigid Moslem, and the maiden was a Greek; and with a characteristic stolidity, he replied to her passionate appeal by a stammer-allusion to her apostacy.

The lip of the girl curled in scorn, but only for an instant; the stake on which she had perilled her life was not to be lightly lost; and rising from her knees, her dark eyes flashed once more with the intense light that seemed to burn into the soul, she exclaimed reproachfully: "And has Saïfula Pasha yet to learn that all is easy to those who love? Shall I

his faith be mine? his will be my law? and his greatness be my glory?"

"Inshallah!" said the Satrap, overcome by the energetic eloquence of his companion; "I shall offer one soul to the Prophet—one convert to the true faith. Bèyaz, I will forget the falsehood of which I have been the victim—severim sèni—I love you—but—you must cease to be a Giaour."

"Allah il Allah. Mahomet resoul Allah!" said Katinka in a firm voice, and without the hesitation of a second; "when the Imâum claims me, I am ready."

"St. Estafania be my witness;" murmured the girl to herself, as the Pasha left the harem: "I will hang the chains that have so long pressed down my own spirit upon the soul of that coward-hearted despot, or the blood that was spilt at Scio shall be on my head! Love! 'tis a madman's dream—but power, wealth, and a proud name are the tripod on which true happiness is based—I have toiled for it—humbled my haughty spirit to obtain it—bent my neck to the oppressive yoke, and my lip to the ready lie—and these are my wages—" and she laughed bitterly as she flung back the lid of an inlaid casket in which were contained the costly jewels that the Circassian had abandoned in her flight. "These—and the selfish passion of the Moslem."

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